

DES MOINES MUTUAL AID STATEMENT ON CRIMINALIZATION OF HOMELESSNESS

Des Moines Mutual Aid stands against the attempt to criminalize the lives of the houseless. We denounce the Des Moines City Council as a mere committee to enact the will of local landowners and developers, and Chris Coleman as their simpering agent. We believe housing is a human right which can and should be provided by expropriating these same local elites, whose wealth is built on theft and exploitation. To the scaffold with the cops, city, and developers, solidarity with the houseless.

This past Friday, the Des Moines City Council announced its plans to step up its war on working people. As previously reported by the *Mutual Aid Monthly*, the city will now clear out the camps of houseless people much more quickly, razing the homes of the working poor within 72 hours instead of the previous 3-5 week period. They have now added that they will clear out certain camps in areas particularly useful to the capitalist class in just one day, with no option to appeal. Most egregious, this pack of hyenas masquerading as a democratic government will consider the act of living outside a criminal misdemeanor, punishable by a \$50 fine. Unspoken in their announcement is the fact that police can arrest people under this statute and hold them in jail until they see a judge, since it *is* a criminal offense, despite the fact that it carries no potential for a jail sentence. *People who cannot afford housing will now be fined and jailed for this 'crime'.*

These new affronts to human dignity in Des Moines put lie to any notion that people in this city live as equals in a democracy. No one asked for this brutality to be enacted. Aware that the move will be unpopular with all decent people, the government has worked in secret to implement this policy. The City Council will push this new policy through an 'emergency session' which will not be accessible to the public and whose outcome has been decided long in advance. They have worked behind locked doors to make criminals of the city's poorest while it offers every tax advantage imaginable to spur luxury condo development for yuppies downtown. The city shows its face here more clearly than ever: it is not a body of the people, but a tool of capital for class oppression.

This new artifact of state violence builds upon decades of slower-moving camp evictions, stolen belongings, trashed tents, and bodies frozen in the woods. For years, the local government has attacked unhoused people who are not middle-class consumers and have thus, in the city's eyes, forfeited their right to exist in public. Police and municipal workers push them from public view and deeper from the urban center, bulldoze their belongings into dumpsters, and have now stepped further, abandoning all pretense of a real appeals process. The ostensibly 'liberal' Council has taken the opportunity presented by a [recent decision of the reactionary US Supreme Court](#) to respond to [last year's 11 percent local increase in homelessness](#) the way they like the best: with handcuffs and excavators.

Considering the current judicial environment and the city's apparent intransigence to public pressure of any kind, it is unlikely that typical forms of legal redress or protest will reverse these policies. We do not have the ability now to stop this atrocity now.

But our day will come. We will remember the compassion of the capitalist government, whose representative Coleman remarked, "I know it's hard to live on the streets". What charity! When we have our turn and the houseless occupy the mansions of South Grand and red banners cover City Hall, we will recall this 'decency' and meet it with an equivalent decency of our own.