



Struggle-La-Lucha.org

Community defends Echo Park homeless camp against police attack

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The battle of Echo Park, March 24. Photo: [Ted Soqui](#)

On the night of March 24, at around 11 p.m., over 400 Los Angeles Police Department cops — in riot gear with batons and rifles — descended upon the unhoused encampment at Echo Park, the largest homeless community in Los Angeles. Los Angeles County has an unhoused population of [over 66,000 people](#).

Throughout the evening, five helicopters flew over Echo Park as 60 cop cars, two buses and sanitation trucks were preparing to destroy the community, which had expanded during the city's pandemic lockdown. The city says it wants to clear the park to install a fenced perimeter around the park for renovations.

The city could clear the park by providing housing to the homeless. Instead it

invaded Echo Park with an army of cops.

The police were met by a blockade of around 200 protesters defending the community. Cops demanded they disperse, calling it an “unlawful assembly.” When most refused, police used force and arrested 182 people, including several journalists.

By March 26, the last two residents were arrested as the fence’s final sections closed.

Whispers of eviction had spread through the community for weeks, due to the March stay-at-home order being lifted, and the county entering its initial reopening framework.

An earlier attempt to evict the homeless from Echo Park in January used a “cleanup crew.” That attempt failed as protesters blocked a pathway in front of a city truck and demanded that the crew not touch tents and other personal belongings.

But on March 24, the unhoused community was hit with an eviction order with just 24 hours notice, posted on trees. The notice cited an until-then unknown \$500,000 cleanup, repair and restoration project.

“They’re doing it all in secret,” said Ayman Ahmed, a resident who lived at the lake for more than a year.

Project Roomkey

The Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority reported that since the beginning of the week, outreach workers had helped place only 120 Echo Park unhoused individuals in temporary housing through Project Roomkey, a \$100-million-plus state program to house the most vulnerable to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

Project Roomkey is being “phased out,” seen as a failure, [according to the Los Angeles Times](#). It met only 30% of its goal while showing a fascist-like track record in regulations towards the occupants.

“You have to be inside by 10 o’clock, and you can’t leave until 7 in the morning unless you have a job,” Valerie Zeller, a former Echo Park resident, said. “That means you can’t even run to the market to buy milk. Basically they search you when you come in. It reminds me of Nazi Germany. Sorry, but I don’t want to live like that.”

As of March 22, Project Roomkey had 2,616 rooms rented, with only 1,724 occupied, and will be closing in the coming months.

Despite the poor success rate and impending demise of Project Roomkey, gentrified residential communities have played a key role in cutting off funding and progress in giving the displaced temporary housing.

Dozens of gentrifiers close to these locations and in predominantly white neighborhoods condemned the program. They protested outside of the motels used to house homeless people. These gentrified communities are rapidly expanding within downtown, pushing up rental prices and new condos, forcing out the working class and unhoused.

Echo Park was once seen as a symbol for anti-gentrification in LA, with a wealth of history and rich culture rooted in its strong working-class Latinx residents. Though much has changed in the last 50 years due to the city’s steady “renewal” projects, the community continues to show unity through the brave protesters at the battle at Echo Park.

