Australia: Local council authorises seizure of homeless people’s belongings

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A local council in inner Melbourne—Australia’s second largest city—has empowered its officers to seize the bedding and belongings of homeless people.

The City of Port Phillip Council voted 5-3 last month, with one abstention, to authorise the confiscation of homeless people’s belongings—including sleeping bags, tents and personal possessions.

This is part of a broader nationwide offensive against the poorest and most vulnerable, carried out amid a worsening cost?of?living crisis and an intensifying transfer of society’s resources into military spending and the enrichment of the ultra?wealthy.

A report from the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) noted that Victoria Police have said they will work with the council to coordinate the assault on Port Phillip’s rough sleepers.

The council’s own survey of 708 residents during the March 2026 “consultation” period showed 76.1 percent of surveyed residents opposed the measure. The council pressed ahead, citing “community amenity” and “anti-social behaviour” as justifications for the new law.

The vote followed a council meeting marked by searing testimony from homeless residents and social workers, all of whom warned that confiscating belongings would inflict profound trauma and physical harm on homeless people.

One homeless resident’s statement, read aloud at the meeting and reported by ABC, captured the reality: “This proposal makes homelessness an even more depressing and lonely experience. I’ll be forever looking over my shoulder and feeling like I’m doing something wrong. It feels like the council would rather I just died so that they don’t have to deal with me.”

Catherine, a member of the lived experience advisory group at Sacred Heart Mission, a St Kilda-based homelessness service, recounted her experiences in a statement published by the Mission in March 2026. She described how council officers in Fitzroy—outside the City of Port Phillip—destroyed all her belongings while she slept rough near a legal service.

“I had a bed donated to me, a portable camping wardrobe, clothes, shoes,” she continued. “By the time I worked out where to go to get them back, they’d already destroyed them.”

Catherine spoke out against the City of Port Phillip’s decision, saying: “By confiscating someone’s bed or clothes, you’re taking everything they have. Having nothing to wear, nothing on your feet—it’s demeaning. You lose your mind.”

Councils across the country are implementing similar punitive measures.

In March 2026, the Queensland Supreme Court found the City of Moreton Bay acted unlawfully when it forcibly dismantled a homeless encampment, with Justice Paul Smith describing the evictions as “degrading,” “horrendous,” and “inhumane”—a breach of the Queensland Human Rights Act.

Across Australia, councils have deployed shrill speakers, looping children’s music, and security guards to drive homeless people away. This is a class offensive, coordinated across jurisdictions, against the most vulnerable sections of the working class.

The two Labor councillors in Port Phillip cast formal votes against the bylaw, a meaningless gesture that they knew would in no way obstruct its passage by the majority of the council. This was simply cover for the fact that the council measures are a micro expression of an assault on the right to housing that is being spearheaded by the federal and state Labor governments.

In Victoria, the state Labor government is in the process of demolishing all 44 public housing towers in

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Melbourne by 2051, displacing more than 10,000 residents and handing valuable inner city land over to private developers. These towers house some of the most vulnerable layers of the working class—elderly residents, migrant families, people with disabilities—who are being forced out under conditions of acute stress, uncertainty and rising rents.

At the federal level, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's Labor government's housing policies have all been aimed at maintaining the super-inflated property bubble, including through the effective transfer of public funds to property developers in the form of subsidies and the cutting of building regulations. Labor opposes rent caps and is presiding over the continued decline of the national social and public housing stock.

Its May 2026 federal budget contained no housing relief, or measures to address the soaring cost of living, which is being imposed on the working class. At the same time, the budget maintained military spending at record levels of $60 billion a year and committed an additional $53 billion over the decade.

The government allocates just $1.6 billion annually to housing and homelessness, yet has pledged $368 billion over 30 years to the AUKUS nuclear submarine program—part of a broader militarisation tied to US war plans against China. By the mid 2030s, annual defence spending is projected to reach nearly $100 billion, more than 60 times the annual housing contribution.

Simultaneously, the Albanese Labor government is implementing the largest single cut to a government program in Australian history through the NDIS Amendment Bill 2026. That legislation provides the framework to slash more than $35 billion from the National Disability Insurance Scheme over four years and remove up to 300,000 disabled participants by 2030, throwing hundreds of thousands of people into poverty, insecurity and potential homelessness.

Melbourne's inner regions, including Port Phillip, recorded 4,200 people experiencing homelessness at the start of support in 2024–25, according to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), the federal government's independent health and welfare research body. Roughly 25 people sleep rough in Port Phillip, according to the ABC.

The homelessness and housing crisis is the predictable consequence of governments at every level treating housing not as a social right but as a vehicle for enriching developers, landlords, and financial speculators—alongside record profits extracted by the banks.

According to the AIHW's Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report 2024–25, 288,970 people sought help from homelessness services in the year to June 2025, but tens of thousands were refused assistance because no accommodation was available. Victoria recorded the largest number of homeless service clients of any state—105,126 people—and more than 30,000 of them were turned away over the year.

The right to high quality, affordable housing for all cannot be realised within the framework of the profit system, which treats homes as assets for developers, banks and superannuation funds rather than as a fundamental social necessity. Ending homelessness requires not appeals to the very parties and institutions orchestrating these attacks, but the independent mobilisation of the working class on a socialist program.

A genuine solution would begin with halting the demolition and privatisation of public housing towers, keeping all 44 Melbourne estates in public hands and upgrading them through socially planned investment. It demands a massive expansion of publicly owned, genuinely affordable housing, built and maintained as part of a democratically controlled program of works, not as profit making ventures for private developers.

This requires the independent political movement of the working class against Labor and the capitalist system, based on a socialist program aimed at reorganising society to meet social need.

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