

Homeless woman dies in Montreal-North: A case of social murder

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The recent death of a homeless woman in a fire at an encampment in Montreal-North illustrates the consequences of a social system that has made housing a source of speculation and profit. The tragic event was a social murder committed by a financial oligarchy that enriches itself through real estate speculation, with the complicity of the capitalist state and all the establishment political parties.

The tragedy occurred at dawn on October 6 on a vacant lot behind a shopping center, near de Charleroi Street and Lacordaire Boulevard. By the time emergency services arrived, the fire that had ravaged part of the encampment had already been extinguished. Police found the victim, a woman in her fifties, unconscious outside her tent. Transported to hospital, she succumbed to her injuries.

Her family confirmed the victim's identity as Mélanie Carboneau, a mother of five children.

Carboneau's death is not an isolated event. According to a coroner's office report, at least 500 homeless people died in Quebec between 2020 and 2024. This figure understates reality, since the coroner only investigates suspicious or violent deaths. At 41 years for women and 47 for men, the life expectancy of a homeless person in Quebec is dramatically lower than that of the general population (84 years for women and 80 for men).

High numbers of fatalities among the homeless population are a feature of social life across Canada. Toronto Public Health reported more than 800 deaths of homeless people between January 1, 2022 and December 31, 2024. In Calgary, at least 284 homeless people died in 2025, and more than 100 in New Brunswick, a largely rural province.

The absence of reliable, up-to-date data on the deaths of homeless people, both provincially and nationally, testifies to the political establishment's indifference and contempt for them. Homelessness is a social problem, not the outcome of individual failings or personal

"irresponsibility." It is the outcome of decades of social spending cuts and "pro-market" policies that have subordinated housing ever more fully to speculation and profit.

As the federal and provincial governments abandoned social housing policies, housing became a vehicle for financial speculation. Real estate investment trusts (REITs) now dominate the rental market and impose exorbitant rent increases on new tenants. "Renovictions"—evictions under the pretext of renovations in order to re-rent at a much higher price—are multiplying, while wealthy individuals accumulate hundreds of thousands of dwellings as secondary, tertiary or additional residences.

The insufficient number of housing starts keeps the vacancy rate artificially low (2.7 percent in 2025 in Quebec, up slightly from 1.3 percent in 2023). This organized scarcity benefits landlords and developers, for whom scarcity drives up real estate prices and rents.

Rents are too high, wages too low, and people end up homeless because they do not have the income needed to pay for housing. In most large Canadian cities, the cost to rent a one-bedroom apartment is higher than an entire month's income for the lowest-paid workers. The result is an unprecedented social crisis and an explosion of homelessness in Quebec and across Canada.

According to the Quebec Ministry of Health and Social Services' April 15, 2025 province-wide homeless count—which was only published in April 2026—2,077 people were homeless in Quebec. This represents an increase of roughly 20 percent over 2022 and is the highest level ever recorded since the annual counts began in 2018.

These figures seriously understate reality, because they count only visible homelessness: people in shelters (about 80 percent) and those living in encampments or outdoors (about 16 percent). They exclude hidden homelessness:

people sleeping at a relative's home, in a temporary motel or in their car.

Although homelessness remains concentrated in Montreal and Quebec City, it is now present everywhere in the province. Since 2018, the regions have seen the fastest growth. Whereas in 2018 about 80 percent of homelessness was observed in Montreal, that proportion fell to 55-60 percent in 2025. Smaller cities or remote regions such as Gatineau, Trois-Rivières, the Saguenay and the North Shore, historically little affected, are now seeing an increase in visible homelessness and the appearance of encampments.

Canada-wide, 65,000 people were homeless in 2025 according to the "Everyone Counts" report, which itself acknowledges that its figures understate the real number.

Contrary to the claims of the political and media establishment, homelessness is not exclusively linked to mental health problems or drug addiction. A growing number of workers have jobs but cannot afford housing. In Quebec, about one homeless person in five reports having a job; in Canada, the proportion is about one in four. That said, because of decades of austerity imposed by the ruling elite, mental health resources have been decimated and many of the people who desperately need them are left to fend for themselves.

Faced with the explosion of homelessness, the response of the capitalist governments is not to house people, but to criminalize poverty and render it invisible.

According to the latest available data, of 726 encampments recorded in Quebec in 2023, 600 were dismantled by municipal authorities with the support of the provincial and federal governments.

In July 2026, the mayor of Quebec City, Bruno Marchand—sometimes depicted as "progressive" for his promotion of public transit—imposed a "zero tolerance" policy toward homeless encampments, giving carte blanche to his brutal police force to dismantle them. Echoing Anatole France's famous phrase ("the law, in its majestic equality, forbids the rich as well as the poor to sleep under bridges"), Marchand declared: "Just because you are a homeless person doesn't mean you have the right to do anything."

This repression is accompanied by austerity policies that worsen the crisis. In 2024, the right-wing Coalition Avenir Quebec provincial government cut the funds allocated to fighting poverty from \$3 billion to \$750 million, while whipping up anti-immigrant agitation aimed at blaming newcomers for the shortage of affordable housing.

Elected on October 5, the very eve of the Montreal-North tragedy, Quebec's new Parti Québécois (PQ) premier, Paul St-Pierre Plamondon, responded with feigned indignation. He declared that the fight against homelessness would be "his personal priority," promised to act with urgency, release emergency budgets and follow through on his commitment to organize a "national summit" on homelessness in 2027. Some two weeks later, the PQ government announced a one-time contribution of just \$28 million to support 200 projects and initiatives aimed at helping shelter and otherwise supporting the homeless this winter.

The reactionary policies of the PQ are incompatible with a serious struggle against homelessness. The PQ campaigned on austerity measures aimed at achieving a balanced budget by 2028-2029, as well as on the creation of an independent republic of Quebec endowed with an army and a military budget equivalent to 5 percent of GDP, in line with NATO's demands—which would require massive social cuts.

In reality, the promise of a national summit in 2027—a tried-and-tested mechanism for buying time and protecting the ruling class—indicates that no significant resources will be devoted to the fight against homelessness. St-Pierre Plamondon's intervention is aimed above all at containing and redirecting popular anger.

Homelessness cannot be eliminated within the framework of capitalism. It is inherent in a system where the wealth produced by the workers is appropriated by a tiny minority. In a rational society, democratically run by the workers who produce all the wealth (including housing), sufficient resources would be mobilized to plan and build adequate housing, in sufficient numbers and of high quality for all, according to fundamental human needs rather than private profit.



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