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### The Right to Housing

## Who Decides When It Comes to Providing Adequate Affordable Housing?

- Serge Lachapelle -

Never has a call been as just and urgent as the demand for adequate affordable housing for all Canadians. It has been three weeks since the federal election got underway and everything indicates that the election is going to be another cynical joke that will totally dismiss our concerns. Personal attacks, diversions and shameless promises replace a rational discussion in which the people fully participate.

In this anachronistic system called a democracy, the majority does not rule. In an election parties can even promise the moon and stars. We are asked to compare election programs; we are expected to abandon whatever we have been fighting for for years and vote for one of the cartel of parties so they can claim a mandate to govern in our name. Yet, none of these parties which claim to represent us is accountable to the people.



Across the country, those collectives of the people fighting to affirm the right to housing are working out what is required to achieve this aim of providing housing for all. By speaking in their own name,

they ensure that the right to housing for all is on the agenda, and that the discussion cannot be diverted by false claims by the cartel parties, the monopoly media and their experts.

What is needed is a profound renewal of the political process so as to empower the people. The most important thing for us is to move forward on the basis of our own agenda.

*Serge Lachapelle is the MLPC Candidate in Laurier-Sainte-Marie.*

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## The Right to Housing -- a Central Issue in the Election Campaign



**Demonstration in Montreal, September 15, 2019.**

Two actions took place in Montreal in defence of the right to affordable housing on the weekend of September 14-15.

On September 14, more than 200 residents, tenants and homeowners in Montreal's Mile-End protested property speculation. They demanded that measures be taken by both the city and the Quebec Legault government and a banner displaying the names of 80 people who have been evicted from their homes was unfurled during the action.

"We love our neighbourhood and demand that active and stringent measures be taken against property speculation," said Pierre Pagé, a spokesperson for Montreal For All and the Business Neighbourhood Life Coalition. "Many small businesses are being suffocated. Others are obliged to move out," he said. The consequence: many empty storefronts.

Tenants also suffer at the hands of unscrupulous landlords. For example, artist Patsy Van Roost was



paying \$1,440 per month in rent, including heat, for her dwelling. The landlord informed her he was raising the rent to \$3,600 per month without heat.

Pagé proposed measures to alleviate such problems, including a radical change to the taxation system, reforming the Rental Board to provide it with an improved control system and setting up a Business Rental Board.

More than 200 people responded to the call of the People's Action Front for Urban Renewal (FRAPRU) the following day to kick off the election campaign with a demonstration organized by the Point Saint-Charles' Housing Information Group (RIL) and endorsed by Action-Gardien, the neighbourhood's Community Development Corporation.

Many big cities across Quebec and Canada have faced the challenge of a tenant housing shortage since the turn of the century. Organizations in Montreal are demanding that the Peel Basin, which is federal land, be used for the construction of social housing and projects to respond to the needs of the local community and all Montrealers.



**September 15, 2019 demonstration marched to Peel Basin, which they demand be used for social housing and other needed projects.**

"There are huge social housing needs everywhere," says FRAPRU spokesperson Véronique Laflamme. Her organization's view is that the private housing funded by the National Housing Strategy results in prohibitive rents which in no way correspond to most tenant households' capacity to pay, especially if they are not adequately housed or have low or modest incomes.

In FRAPRU's opinion, for the next federal government to assist Quebec in dealing with the crisis, it cannot allow the private market to impose its dictate. It must generously support communities interested in developing cooperative and not-for-profit housing. In particular, the organization is demanding that federal political parties commit to investing at least \$2 billion per year in the construction of new social housing units and guaranteeing all the funds necessary for the maintenance or refurbishment of those already built.

"Ottawa must also guarantee long-term financial access to those social units, both for poor households already living there, as well as for future needs," Laflamme stated.

***Housing Is a Right!  
All Out for Concrete Measures for Its Realization!***



40 Years on the Frontline -- Snapshots from People's Action Front on Urban Renewal Struggle

(Photos: FRAPRU)

## Housing Crisis Affects the Most Vulnerable

The Canadian Rental Housing Index (RHI) has released a statement calling on political parties to make the right to housing a central issue. The communiqué emphasizes, among other things, that the housing crisis is getting worse. It should be noted that the RHI brings together stakeholders on the housing issue across Canada.



RHI data from Statistics Canada indicate that almost half a million of the 1,300,000 Quebec tenants (457,375) spend more than 30 per cent of their income on housing, placing them in a difficult financial situation. Among those, nearly 40 per cent (195,645) spend more than half of their income on housing, an unsustainable financial situation. Of all Quebec tenants, seniors (42 per cent of them) and newcomers (40 per cent of them) allocate the greatest proportion of their income for housing, says the RHI.

"The data shows that we have a problem all over Quebec," said Jacques Beaudoin, Secretary General of the Quebec Network of Nonprofit Housing Organizations.

The Canadian group is also concerned about overcrowding. In Quebec, overcrowding is closely tied to high housing costs, and many tenants share their homes with roommates, well beyond the capacity of the housing unit. It is estimated that seven per cent of Quebec tenants (92,220) live in overcrowded housing. This proportion is twice as high among single mothers (18%) and almost three times higher among newcomers (26%) who are hardest hit. Overcrowding particularly affects the ridings on the Island of Montreal, as well as Abitibi-James Bay-Nunavik-Eeyou, Laval-Les Îles, Brossard-Saint-Lambert and many others.

The percentage of households in each of the following 10 constituencies that spend more than 30 per cent of their income on rent and utilities is indicated below in parentheses:

- Ville-Marie-South-West-Nun's Island (46%)
- Outremont (44%)
- Lac-Saint-Louis (42%)
- Notre-Dame-de-Grace-Westmount (41%)
- Rivière-du-Nord (41%)
- Laurier-Sainte-Marie (41%)
- Laurentides-Labelle (40%)
- Mount Royal (38%)
- St. Lawrence (38%)
- Argenteuil-La Petite-Nation (38%)

Housing rights activists are realizing more and more that at the heart of the issue is political power. Those who have been fighting tirelessly for decades must be the ones who decide. The slogan *Who Decides! We Decide!* is on the agenda more than ever.

(SOURCE: Canadian Rental Housing Index. Photos: FRAPRU)

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## United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Housing Condemns Speculation

Leilani Farha, the United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on the Right to Housing, recently condemned real estate speculation, which plagues cities such as Montreal. "It became clear when I assumed this role a few years ago, that there was a major housing crisis worldwide. People could no longer afford to pay their rent. Some were being evicted from their homes and I wanted to understand why," she explained in an interview with the *Métro* newspaper.

The reasons why big cities are less accessible to those with lower incomes may vary from one location to the next. However, the UN expert has identified one common denominator to the "crisis": the role played by the financial sector.

Notably, she looked into the case of Blackstone, a U.S. investment firm which purchases affordable housing all over the world in order to profit from it by increasing its value. The corporation also has property assets in Montreal.

"[An investment corporation] locates properties, purchases them, renovates them, often only cosmetically, then increases the rents. And that's what forces people to move out of their homes," the UN expert notes. In her estimation, this often results in immediate rent hikes of up to 15 per cent.

"Investors then willingly allow those purchased units to remain vacant so that they can resell them at a higher price a few years later. They then become 'financial assets.' 'It's amazing how there's this housing crisis with so many units remaining vacant," she said.

On the island of Montreal, the most recent property assessment rolls show an average increase of 13.7 per cent in property value.

"We must change our conception of housing to ensure that people are provided access to it, particularly those with low incomes. Housing must be recognized as a human right," she concludes.

(Quotes translated from original French by Renewal Update.)

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