

# DEFEND COUNCIL HOUSING

21 October—Conference 2000 Policy Statement

## Government Policy

The Housing Green Paper effectively signals the government's aim to end council housing. The provision of decent, affordable, secure and accountable council housing, once a source of pride, is now considered to be an unaffordable liability. The core principles embodied in the comprehensive welfare state—quality public services available to all regardless of income—are under threat. Conditions for housing workers are getting worse—cuts in pay and conditions, thousands of jobs lost, apprenticeships and proper training disappear—so profits can be made.

Expectations that New Labour would overturn years of Tory cuts in council housing and stop privatisation have been dashed. They have already privatised more homes than the Tories managed in their last ten years and the Green Paper proposes 200,000 more homes per year for a further ten years. Daylight Robbery from housing repairs budgets still continues and increased housing investment in the Public Spending Review only takes capital investment back to 1990 levels (after Thatcher's ruthless cuts).

The alternatives offered are PFI, a significantly more expensive method of financing public investment, and an arms-length housing company formula that will be unachievable by most authorities, potentially a stepping stone to full privatisation, and is only likely to be supported by lenders if fully "independent" and run by professionals.

The Housing Association sector looks increasingly shaky with many business plans coming apart at the seams and increasing numbers of mergers under pressure from "market forces". The end of council housing threatens millions of working class families with the poverty, hardship and insecurity that "market forces" in housing have always caused.

## Those in favour

Bankers and other lenders, a growing industry of consultants and "hangers on" have warmly welcomed the government's plans—they of course benefited from the £25 million spent last year on fees and other transfer set-up costs and new top salary jobs.

## Those against

Opposition is growing and government is starting to feel it. At local level many more councils are facing organised opposition from local campaigns of tenants supported by council trade unions. Nationally Defend Council Housing has been increasingly successful in constructing a very broad base of support from a large number of tenants organisations, trade union bodies, MPs, councillors and political organisations.

## The role of Defend Council Housing

DCH should prioritise helping to set up local campaigns wherever councils have tabled specific proposals for privatisation. In other areas we should encourage tenants and trade unionists to join together to approach the council to seek assurances that they will not privatise council housing.

Working in conjunction with other tenants and trade union organisations, DCH should continue to produce briefings and campaign material for local groups and the tenants and trade union movement as a whole, and organise major public meetings, further regional conferences in key areas and liaise with others to organise another lobby of parliament.

The campaign should maximise pressure on government ministers, MPs and councillors to explain "why public investment in council housing was affordable in post-war Britain but not today", "why they are willing to write off debts if councils agree to privatise, but not if councils keep their housing" and "why they won't allow councils the same rights as RSLs to borrow to invest in council homes".

Millions of council tenants and trade unionists are a potent force. With a general election and local elections looming, we have the power to force a retreat on this issue.

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