

CAMPAIGNING FOR CARE

in social services

DEVELOPING ALTERNATIVE DEMANDS TO IMPROVE SERVICES

Faced with cuts and privatisation it's tempting to immediately campaign using slogans of "Save Our Services" or "Defend Our Social Services". There is nothing wrong with such slogans yet this purely defensive line is not enough.

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Clear lessons have emerged from campaigns in the past 10 years. Firstly that people will not rally to defend services that they see as remote or inadequate, oppressive or ineffective. Secondly many workers will not fight either, faced with low pay, discrimination or harassment from management. They can often see little point in campaigning to save a job that is alienating. Thirdly using purely defensive lines as a basis for any campaign may mobilise workers within the service and some users

but defensive slogans can not always unleash the enthusiasm, excitement or interest of potential supporters. Lastly, being defensive is to accept the opposition's argument and to defend the services as they are run now and not as we would wish to see them.

For these reasons **it is essential to make demands about how services can be improved and expanded.** Most Social Services workers are in a very good position to win public support for such

demands as the needs of old, disabled and disadvantaged. By raising alternative demands you can help:

- increase public support
- undermine the arguments for privatisation and cuts
- increase involvement, commitment and interest in your campaign
- work towards changing the way in which the service is organised and delivered and the involvement of Social Services workers.

How to raise alternative demands

How can alternative demands and ideas be put forward? Alternative demands or plans can be as simple or as sophisticated as you can make them. This will depend on your time and resources and level of organisation. Below we list 7 possible ways of deciding on these demands.

- ◆ A simple charter of demands drawn up by JSSC members or a group of stewards covering most of Social Services.
- ◆ Mini-plans looking at just one part of Social Services e.g. home helps or transport drivers, based on the experience of workers within those sections.
- ◆ Mini-plans for parts of the service drawn up with users of the service.
- ◆ Using the job monitoring section of this pack should

provide you with a lot of information about the service which could be used to draw up a draft plan.

- ◆ Persuading your Council, Trade Union or other organisation to set up a "Community Enquiry" which widely canvasses views, submissions and information from community organisations and individuals on the Service.
- ◆ Organising a Social Service Canvas or questionnaire taken out into local communities to seek public views and hopes for Social Services.
- ◆ Setting up a joint user and worker group to look at the whole service and alternative ideas and demands, assisted by a Trade Union Resource Centre or Support Unit or organisations like SCAT or LRD.

Alternative demands are not a luxury but a necessity. However, you need to discuss carefully what you can hope to start and finish with your resources and what may be most effective in your area and politically. You could use any combination of the seven ideas above but realistically it will depend on your resources and campaign strategy.

WHAT TO LOOK AT

Obviously you will be looking at workers' and users' views of what the service should be. **For Social Services the basis of all planning must be social needs**, including all those needs not presently covered by the Health or Social Services. Your demands or plan could cover some or all of these issues:

- What is the size of the real need for your service? Who should have access to the service? How should priorities be worked out?
- How can the services be made more effective? How can they be organised and developed to reach all those who need and want to use them? Does the quality of the service satisfy users' needs? Does it work in a way which the users want?
- How can wages, benefits and conditions be improved?
- How can the work be better organised, cutting out needless administration and management? How can workers and users be given more control over the service? How can it be linked to other important policies eg equal opportunities and job creation?
- What resources are needed including money, labour, materials and training to expand

- and improve the service?
- What kind of action is needed to get the demands or plan implemented?

The first step is to decide on who will be responsible for drawing up alternatives. (eg JSSC, representatives on a JCC, special branch sub committee etc). Elsewhere we have discussed the types of possible organisations. It is important to be clear who will do the work and co-ordinate it.

Secondly, decide who else will be involved? Alternative plans in the public sector cannot be simply workers plans, they need to be based around workers and users needs. Whilst most workers will have direct experience of users needs and dissatisfactions it is important to involve users in discussion or in drawing up the plan wherever possible. However, you may decide you do not have the time or resources to do this and opt for using workers experience as a basis for your demands or plan.



Format

Thirdly, you need to define the purpose of your plan: which parts of the service will it cover, how detailed will it be, what questions will it try to answer, how does it fit into the rest of the campaign and how will it be used once it is prepared.

Fourthly, what additional resources can you involve? Can you get a Trade Union Centre to help or a full time official? Would the Council assist for instance through its research section?

Fifthly, how, and with whom, will you discuss the draft demands or plans?

Lastly, what is your provisional

timetable? Can you realistically carry this out so as not to waste all your efforts?

WHAT A PLAN IS NOT!

In recent years some groups of workers have offered 'savings packages' involving fewer jobs and greater productivity, and sometimes reduced earnings. For instance many refuse workers and school cleaners have kept their direct labour service this way. Others have tendered for their own jobs in competition with private contractors, either through in-house tenders or occasionally as a cooperative as was planned but dropped by Liverpool dustmen. These are a form of 'workers plan' but have been a last resort for those workers. They have involved workers doing management's work in cutting and saving and are inadequate in challenging the whole process of cuts and privatisation. **When we talk about alternative plans we mean looking at the service on the basis of OUR ideas about needs and organisation, not using man-**

agement's definitions and terms of reference. It is vital to move the debate from focusing only on the cost of the service.

BACKGROUND OF WORKERS AND USERS PLANS

Throughout the 1970s tenants groups produced alternative plans in their fight for redevelopment schemes based on tenants needs. The most publicised plan in the private sector during this period was the Lucas Aerospace Plan, a detailed look at how to switch from manufacturing weapons to making socially useful products like kidney machines and rail buses. This

plan inspired many others in the private sector (eg Vickers, Dunlop, Plessey, Metal Box, ICL).

However many plans are best described as 'alternative plans' and not workers plans or even workers and users plans. It is important to distinguish between these three groups. Many 'alternative plans' have in fact been drawn up by research sections or special committees of the TUC or major unions and tend to look at an overall industry or service often in terms of its future markets and company organisation. They have often been drawn up with little detailed contact with the workers in the industry.

Workers, tenants and users have enormous knowledge about how jobs and services are run — and how they should be run. Workers and Users Plans are a means of bringing these ideas together and using them as part of a campaign. Some examples of such plans in the public sector are included in the box opposite.

HOW COULD IT BE DONE IN SOCIAL SERVICES?

A Workers' and Users' Plan in Social Services could, for example, focus on the needs of the elderly. It could examine a whole range of issues including:

- the need for residential homes and sheltered housing
- stricter controls on private homes and sheltered housing schemes
- the need for day centre/luncheon club provision
- the need for domiciliary services such as home helps & meals on wheels
- welfare benefits & welfare rights provision
- opportunities for work and leisure pursuits

A Plan could be developed jointly with Pensioners' Groups and/or Retired Trade Unionists Groups where they exist, or with interested individual pensioners from clubs and other organisations, such as tenants' associations. The Plan could include a strategy for developing and/or strengthening pensioners' campaigns.

- Information on needs & existing provision could be obtained from the council's Social Services Committee papers, information collected from the last census (from the public library), local organisations such as Age Concern.
- Local Pensioners' Groups and old people's organisations and clubs could be invited to send



EXAMPLES OF WORKERS AND USERS' PLANS IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

- ★ In the Roehampton district of Wandsworth in London when the caretaking service on estates was threatened with privatisation, tenants' associations and caretaker stewards drew up an alternative plan for the service to challenge the council's plans. The service was privatised despite joint trade union and tenants association action, but the alliance is continuing its joint campaign to expose the failings of the new service and demand a return to direct labour.(i)
- ★ Since the Local Government Planning & Land Act 1980 forced competitive tendering on council building departments and building DLOs faced threats of cuts and job losses, in some areas such as Hackney and Camden in London, DLO shop stewards and tenants association representatives held meetings to work out joint demands and alternative plans for repairs services which would give a better deal for tenants and also protect and improve the jobs of building workers. In both boroughs some of the proposals have been implemented, (to a greater degree in, Hackney) and a firm alliance has been built, which has continued on other issues.(ii)
- ★ Health Emergency Campaigns have developed in many areas over the last 2 years bringing together health service workers and supporters in the community to challenge cuts & privatisation in the NHS and present alternative proposals for local health provision.(iii)
- ★ An alternative plan for London Transport is being prepared by CILT, the Campaign to Improve London Transport, based on a series of studies of workers' and passengers' experience, criticisms and demands about public transport services in London. This will be used to challenge the moves to higher fares, fewer services, partial privatisation and reductions in the workforce made by the new London Regional Transport Board set up when the GLC's control of London Transport was removed by legislation.(iv)
- ★ Striking domestics at Barking Hospital, fighting to get rid of Crothalls Ltd, and for a return to direct labour, produced a Workers Plan "Part of the Team" which used the cleaners' own experience, combined with scientific evidence and government guidelines on standards, to challenge the whole basis on which the contract had been drawn up, costed and awarded.(v)

HOW TO OBTAIN COPIES

- (i) Wandsworth Plans from Junction Resource Centre, 248 Lavender Hill, London SW11
- (ii) Hackney Plan from Federation of Hackney TAs, 380, Old St, London EC1 Camden Plan from Camden Federation of Tenants, 30, Camden Rd, London NW1
- (iii) Contact London Health Emergency, 335, Grays Inn Road, London WC1
- (iv) Contact CILT, Tress House, 3 Stamford St, London SE1
- (v) Available from Barking & Dagenham Link, 14 Porters Ave, Dagenham, Essex RM8 2AQ (£4)

representatives to a committee to meet with shop stewards to develop a plan.

- Ideas about what's good and bad about the services and what people would like to see could be collected through simple questionnaires to workers, who could be asked to collect ideas from their clients.
- The joint committee could use the information collected to draft a report covering the needs for services, criticisms of existing provision, and de-

mands for improved and expanded services.

- The report could be taken to meetings of shop stewards, pensioners groups, etc and discussed at day centres, in homes and sheltered housing and anywhere else where elderly people meet and talk.
- The final version of the report after these discussions could be publicised, perhaps launched at a public meeting and featured in the local press. It could be distributed to local councillors and MPs, local organisations, tenants' and community

groups, womens' groups, political parties, trade union branches, etc. It should be accompanied by proposals for action, to launch a local campaign against cuts and privatisation and for better services.

It would also be possible to develop a plan in individual areas of Social Services, such as the home help service, day nurseries or meals on wheels. Many people who don't actually use the service will have ideas on how they could work and it might be possible to collect a wide range of views by contacting a variety of local organisations.

CO-OPS ARE NOT THE ANSWER

Over the past few years some groups of workers have been encouraged to set up workers' co-operatives to take on part of a service as a response to proposals for privatisation or cuts. Indeed a firm called **JOB OWNERSHIP LTD** was set up a few years ago to advise workers how to do this. It sounds an attractive idea. The labour movement has traditionally supported the idea of workers' co-ops as a means of giving workers control over their jobs and a share in the profits. But when management starts suggesting the idea as part of a cuts or savings plan we should be suspicious.

Indeed the Government itself encourages the formation of cooperatives as much as any other small business through the Co-operative Development Agency.

Whilst workers' co-operatives may be a successful form of organisation in some circumstances — they are not the answer to privatisation threats and recent examples show this clearly.

- Forming co-ops to compete for contracts with large companies means having to be competitive in terms of cost. This would mean cutting wages, benefits and conditions to win contracts. Large companies can afford to put in 'loss leader' tenders to get a foot in the door with a public service, and can subsidise that contract by the profits they make on others.

A group of refuse workers in Liverpool set about forming a co-op to tender for the service when privatisation was threatened by the old Liberal council, but dropped the idea as impractical.

- When co-ops are handed part of a service without having to com-

pete for the contract, they still suffer from all the problems of small scale enterprise in an economy dominated by huge national and multi-national companies, not able to bulk buy materials or equipment and having no back up resources to tide them over periods of difficulty. So when crisis hits — such as breakdown of expensive equipment or steep price rises in materials, they can only survive by cutting wages and conditions — or even jobs — of workers.

- In Hereford and Worcester, school meals staff were made redundant and then invited to do their old jobs as self-employed 'co-operatives'. This system operates in a reported 68 schools in the county. Staff have lost all the benefits of permanent employment (and you can't claim sickness or unemployment benefit if you're self employed). In some schools they are taking the same wage as before, but in others it is as low as £1.20 per hour, and all report working unpaid hours. This is clearly self-exploitation.

- On Tyneside a group of 80 redundant shipyard workers invested all their redundancy money in the yard when they took it over in the autumn of 1983. By March 1985, the yard, Readheads, was facing collapse, and the Government refused to help. Where the Government encourages workers to form co-operatives, it refuses to give them aid when they are in difficulties.

- When public service workers move out to form independent co-ops they lose all the benefits of public service workers — security, pension rights, trade union protection, sickness and holiday pay, protective clothing, etc.

- It does nothing to halt the process of privatisation and is a diversion from the struggle to maintain good, accountable public services. Recently Kent County Council suggested to workers in residential homes that they should form co-ops to take over homes. This would have wiped out the whole of public sector residential provision in the county at one go — and the elected council would effectively lose control of its entire provision.

- It is divisive among public sector workers and weakens trade union strength in the public services. The main hope for resisting cuts and privatisation in council services is strong, mutually supportive action by the trade unions and user groups. In many areas cuts plans have been defeated by joint union action — most recently on the Wirral in March 1985, where a 2 week strike by 2,400 workers supported by other workers refusing to cross picket lines, led to the withdrawal of council plans to slash £3.2 million from education and social services. Workers who agree to form co-operatives in place of direct employment by the council have effectively been bought out of trade union activity.

- It is not necessary to form a co-operative to gain more control over your work. We have to fight for more control within direct labour public services, and not make a choice between control and the benefits of direct employment. For some years there has been a co-operative project — PILAW — within Haringey Council, involving architects, surveyors and building workers.