

THE CAPITAL

Bulletin of the London Division — National Union of Public Employees



Tory housing policies have been disastrous for London. Working class people in London have suffered more severely from the frantic attempts to boost the private housing market and the effects of cuts in public spending than most other parts of Britain.

We urgently need real alternative policies to achieve radical improvements in the housing system as a whole for council and private tenants and home owners. This has to be combined with increasing the supply and use of housing to eliminate the shortage and bad or overcrowded conditions.

Council housing can and must be expanded and improved by developing alternative policies covering tenant control, increased resources, more choice, effective public service organisations with good quality jobs.

Radical alternatives needed NOW

Alternative policies should include:

- Increasing the provision and quality of council housing by building more new houses to good quality standards; and to increase the range and choice — type, size, location, facilities — within council housing for families, single people and those wanting to live in groups.
- A large scale municipalisation and rehousing programme which would involve buying up houses from owners wanting to sell, unable to keep their property in reasonable repair, unwilling or unable to do essential improvements and modernisation, or deliberately keeping property empty.
- Integrating the planning, design, building, repair and maintenance of housing with tenant and trade union involvement at all stages, through the setting up of area or district teams of architects, planners, building workers, tenants, housing workers and councillors.
- Improving, expanding and diversifying Direct Labour Organisations into building, production and service organisations carrying out work for housing and other council departments and public bodies. These

publicly controlled and accountable organisations would eventually carry out all new housebuilding, improvement, modernisation, repair and maintenance work on the basis of need and not profit. They would also carry out socially useful design and production of items used in construction, and furniture and equipment for homes, schools, hospitals and other public services.

- Setting up special repair teams within these expanded direct labour organisations to deal with remedying dampness, building defects and to carry out repair and maintenance work for owner occupiers whose homes require urgent repairs to prevent further deterioration.
- Stopping the sale of council housing and other sales schemes like shared ownership, building for sale, improvement of existing property for sale, within the public sector and the sale of council land to private builders.
- Reversing the takeover of public housing provision by housing associations and transferring their ownership, management, design, construction, repair and maintenance so that they become publicly

London's Homes

THE FIGHT IS ON

controlled and accountable within local government.

- A large scale acquisition programme of suitable land for housing by the GLC and boroughs using compulsory purchase powers where necessary.
- The provision of housing for rent at reasonable cost with local facilities for working class people on key sites in London eg South Bank, Docklands, Covent Garden.
- Introduction of tight controls over the use of public money for improvement and repair grants and house purchase to stop exploitation and the gentrification of working class areas.
- Improving and extending the role of public service by the creation of socially useful good quality jobs with better working conditions.
- The development of a strategic housing plan for London coordinated by the GLC in association with the boroughs, with the GLC having the powers and resources to implement housing programmes on important sites and in boroughs unwilling to meet new building, improvement and clearance targets.
- Introduction of controls to channel the vast sums of money invested by pension funds, insurance companies and building societies into socially useful production and the public services.

These policies can only be the start of developing a wide range of radical alternative policies for housing, health, industry etc. People active in all sections of the labour movement must be involved in thinking, discussing and developing these alternatives. We need both local and national alternative economic, political and social strategies stemming from the mobilisation of tenants, workers and the unemployed in order to gain the powers and resources to carry out these strategies.



London's South Bank

Working class families are being driven out of their homes and jobs in the centre of London. 10½m sq ft of new speculative office space will be completed in central London between now and 1984. Campaigns are trying to prevent great chunks of London's south bank eg Hays Wharf, Coin Street, being turned into corporate office ghettos instead of family housing, leisure and community facilities. While the recession hits industry the property share index recently hit an all time high. The big building and property companies like Taylor Woodrow, Costain, Hammerson and MEPC are set to make a killing out of the redevelopment of Docklands.

Conditions get worse

Despite improvements in housing conditions over the past 30 years, London still has a massive housing problem and **conditions are now rapidly getting much worse**. A quarter of London's housing stock (642,000 dwellings) were unsatisfactory (unfit, lacking basic amenities and/or requiring major repairs) in 1979.

● 1 in 10 dwellings are unfit — most of these are concentrated in the inner boroughs especially Haringey, Islington and Hackney. Nearly 25% of all privately rented dwellings are unfit. 72,000 owner occupiers live in unfit houses.

● There are still nearly ¼ million homes in London which do not have one or more of the five basic amenities — inside WC, fixed bath in a bathroom, wash basin, sink, hot and cold water at three points.

● A further 252,000 homes, despite being fit and having all the basic amenities, nevertheless require repairs costing over £3000 to give them a 30 year life.

The problem of disrepair is growing nationally but the last English House Condition Survey in 1976 found that it was growing twice as fast in the South East than in the rest of England. In London 150,000 owner occupiers face these massive repairs bills. Clearly many working class owner occupiers cannot afford the full cost of home ownership — they struggle to repay mortgages but then have to constantly postpone badly needed repairs and regular maintenance. Altogether there are more than twice as

many owner occupied houses in unsatisfactory condition compared to those owned by local authorities

It is **not** simply an inner city problem any longer. Many of the outer boroughs eg Barnet, Croydon, Richmond, Ealing, Kingston upon Thames have between 8%-12% of their dwelling stock unfit; nearly half of the dwellings lacking at least one basic amenity are located in the outer boroughs; two thirds of the homes in disrepair are also in the outer boroughs — much of this is in speculatively built housing which expanded rapidly in suburban areas in the 1930's.

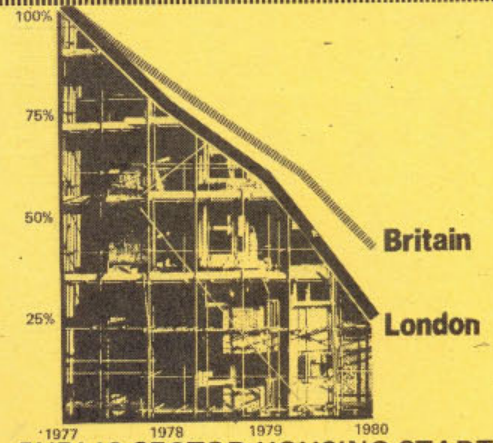
These figures don't take into account the full extent of defects in many London housing estates mainly caused by contractors shoddy work and design faults. Dampness, heating breakdowns, water penetration are just some of the effects suffered by tenants. In 1976 remedial costs on GLC estates alone were estimated then to cost £30m and other faults have since come to light on recently built estates. Many boroughs face similar problems —

- ★ £15m needed to rectify concrete floor distortions in Southwark's Bonamy Estate.
- ★ Islington's Marquess Estate, design award still intact, requires nearly £1m to keep out water.
- ★ Six tower blocks in Westminster are fenced off because of falling concrete — cost nearly £¼m.

While conditions deteriorate, London's councils have been selling off the best council housing — they now sell 1 in every 5 council houses sold in England and Wales, a threefold leap since 1977.

The problem is getting worse, but less and less money is being spent. The Housing Investment Programme allocations for 1981/82 for local authorities spending on new building, improvement etc represents a **major shift of resources away from London**.

The GLC and the inner boroughs bear the brunt of the cuts — the GLC's budget is slashed by half while the inner boroughs face a 36% cut. London's budget in total is cut by 37% compared with an average cut for the rest of the country of nearly a quarter.



LONDON

Further government cuts in housing investment with more big rent increases will only accelerate the crisis.

Jobs lost

There are now 33,000 unemployed building workers in London, nearly ten per cent of the national total. They represent 13.2% of the unemployed in London which is twice the capital's overall unemployment rate.

The construction industry is in crisis — new orders last year were 15% down on 1979 — with public housing orders dropping 42%. By the end of 1979 the value of contractors new housing orders at current prices was 23% up on 1977 but in London they had reduced by 9% — clearly London felt the effects of the cuts much earlier than the rest of Britain. Many building workers are now either drifting away from the industry or are joining the lump.

Yet building shares in the London Stock Exchange have been going through the roof. The Financial Times Actuaries building materials' and contracting and construction indices recently hit all time peaks.

Over the last four years the Tories have made a savage attack on jobs in the GLC. The staff of the housing programme group have been cut by 3,600. Hardest hit have been architects

LONDON SALES

1977-1980 incl.

30,000 council houses by GLC and London boroughs

452 acres GLC housing land — enough for 5500 homes

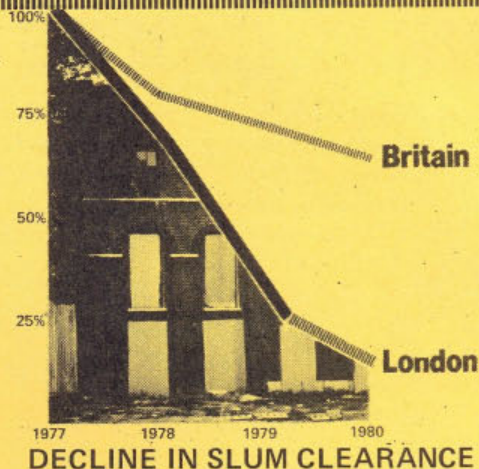
3200 GLC dwellings let to those intending to buy at rents 33%-125% above normal level

80% of sales by London boroughs were in the outer areas

A GLC 'instant lets' queue in Hackney



LONDON'S HOUSING WAITING LIST - DOUBLED BY 1984!



DECLINE IN SLUM CLEARANCE

LONDON'S HOUSING CRISIS

ment and subsidies to council housing
erate the decline in London's housing.

and building workers. The Tories had hoped to have completely closed down the GLC Construction Branch but have failed because it won't complete over 1000 homes on nine sites until next year. The GLC have used compulsory redundancies, redeployment and voluntary severance pay to cut down staffing levels.

Many borough architects departments have also lost jobs — there has been a 20% reduction nationally. The Tory Government's new controls on Direct Labour Organisations are likely to lead to further job losses — 3000 were lost last year. In London 600 building workers' jobs are to go in Camden, 150 at Barking.

Transfer deal saga

The transfer of GLC estates to the London boroughs and district councils in the South East has been part of the Tories attempt to completely abandon the GLC's London-wide housing role and strategic responsibilities. While the transfer of estates has been debated for many years and local control by tenants and workers should be supported as a principle, it is the terms of the transfer and it being carried out in conjunction with other Tory housing policies which has led to strong opposition.

Several boroughs reached agreement with the GLC — 112,000 dwellings were transferred in April 1980, mainly to outer boroughs and district councils outside London, and a further 21,000 this year. 30,000 GLC homes in Tower Hamlets will be managed by a Joint Management Committee until full transfer in 1985.

Eight boroughs — Brent, Camden, Hackney, Haringey, Hounslow, Lambeth, Lewisham and Waltham Forest — have fought the terms of the transfer of 54,000 homes including taking unsuccessful legal action.

A compulsory transfer order will now take effect on April 1982.

The transfer deal has included the GLC agreeing to design and carrying out modernisation and improvement work on estates (over 60,000 GLC dwellings were built prior to 1945 and another 21,000 are in post war tower blocks of 10 or more storeys); paying for all major faults occurring on the transferred estates over the next ten years; and the GLC to have between 20%-50% nomination rights on dwellings becoming vacant until 1990.

The cost of all modernisation, improvement and repair work is estimated to be £450m — a third of which relates to the eight boroughs still fighting transfer.

Some key issues arising from the transfer of estates include:

- ★ 4000 GLC workers have been transferred to the boroughs (including vacant posts in some cases) including caretakers, building workers, housing department staff. With the GLC having better wages and conditions than the boroughs there have been many teething problems.

- ★ Despite all the talk about local control tenants have not been involved in the transfer — the only thing which has changed for many is the name of their landlord! No co-ordinated attempt has been made by boroughs opposed to transfer to involve the tenants movement — they simply resorted to negotiation and court action.

- ★ Despite the agreements between the GLC and the boroughs there is nothing to ensure that tenants on inter war estates get full modernisation. The GLC's estate modernisation programme was cut in half last year and further cuts in housing are planned. Inner city tenants wanting a transfer to houses in the outer boroughs have increased rapidly over the past few years — only to see their chances of transfer and choice greatly diminished and existing conditions deteriorate.

Soaring costs

Londoners not only have to face a severe shortage of housing and

deteriorating conditions but also soaring housing costs. Rents, rates and house prices are much higher than the rest of Britain — and Tory policies are widening the differentials. There are also big differences between boroughs. Wandsworth's rents have increased £4.50 in April to an average £16.50 per week making a total increase of 143% since the Tories took over three years ago. In contrast Newham, Tower Hamlets and some other boroughs rents are several pounds lower.

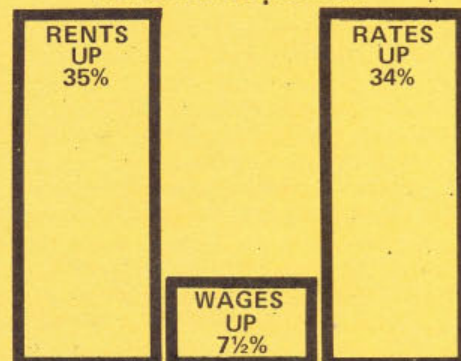
London's council rent increases of an average of £3.45 per week compares with £3.25 or less elsewhere. Average rate increases in inner London are double the national average of 20%.

Average London house prices are now £32,000 — double the price 5 years ago. Buyers average income is nearly £11,000 and first time buyers need a deposit of at least 30% of the price.

Many families will be hit severely hard by these increases. Weekly outgoings on council rents, rates and heating charges in London will be £30-£40 per week for most tenants and this is on top of double figure inflation. Yet local authority manual workers average weekly earnings in London are still below £100 per week (for 44 hours and including bonus payments) and substantially less for women workers.

BIG RISES IN 1981

Wage increases based on local government manual workers settlement.



WHAT CAN BE DONE

Housing struggles in the past have concentrated action at council meetings and departments and participated in government public inquiries. While this action has to continue we have to add a second dimension to housing campaigns by directly confronting the private interests so embedded in the provision and control of housing.



Action by the labour movement

London is the centre of a number of new developments in which these private interests are increasing their grip on housing e.g. several inner city sites sold to Abbey National Building Society to build for sale and rent at high prices: shared ownership schemes like 'community leasehold' now being developed in several boroughs by housing associations; council house sales in Epping funded through insurance companies; the rapid expansion of housing associations – many now operate across several London boroughs and nationally. Property speculation and gentrification are rife and multi-national construction companies dominate London's building sites.

This means we have to challenge their power and develop an understanding of exactly who is responsible. It means directing action at building societies, property companies, banks, builders, insurance companies and pension funds. Action must not simply be concerned with defensive demands but should also be a means of publicising and building support for radical improvements and alternative policies.

It also means we have to:

1. explore ways of organising home owners around specific housing issues.
2. take action and make demands directly against the various elements of the private market.
3. expose the increasing role of the state in supporting the private market.
4. build a strong and effective London wide housing movement in which tenants and trade unionists campaign collectively.

Some examples of local organising and action, in addition to those included on page 4 of the accompanying 'Homes: New Crisis Looms' broadsheet, which could be developed in London are:

- Organising democratically controlled tenants associations and action groups on estates or group of streets to fight rent increases, heating costs and dampness, campaign for repairs, improvements, local facilities and new council housing.
- Forming alliances between groups and campaigns to take action together eg supporting industrial action, rent strikes, and the strengthening of existing and forming of new borough-wide tenants federations and housing campaigns.
- Joint Tenants and Workers Committees set up between tenants federations and trade unions eg Lewisham, Southwark, should be extended across London and represent all trade unions concerned with housing provision and management eg caretakers, building workers, architects.
- Tenants Unions could be a means of organising private and/or housing association tenants who may well be spread over many streets with no common landlord. Supported by and possibly based at law centres, advice and action centres and community projects. Tenants Unions could fight collectively for better housing conditions, security of tenure, more council housing and give collective support to individuals at rent hearings etc. Since many private tenants are in low paid service jobs, organising a tenants union could be

carried out in conjunction with efforts to establish trade union membership and representation at work.

- Organising Building Society Action Groups with members of particular societies raising questions and demands about policy, control of the society, sex and race discrimination, scales of fees, links with insurance companies, where the society invests its reserves, the quality of new housing on private estates etc. These Action Groups could attend annual general meetings (normally anyone with £25 in their account can attend), demonstrations, picketing and leafleting of building society head offices and branches, organise boycott and account withdrawal campaigns etc.
- Families living in high rise flats having to wait longer for transfers because of council house sales and the freeze and cuts in council house-building could organise Transfer Action Groups. They could publicise widely the effects of high rise living on women and children, demand changes in council's relets policy, take action against council houses being sold, particularly vacant homes.
- Tenants and trade unionists should organise joint day and weekend educational workshops and courses for labour movement organisations to
 - explain the causes of the economic crisis
 - examine London's housing crisis
 - develop ideas about what sort of housing we want and discuss ways of achieving this.
- Building Bans could be imposed by building workers and unions, supported by action by tenants and community campaigns, to block the construction of office blocks and high income housing on key inner city sites.
- Demanding action by local authorities against defects and delays by building contractors. Expose much more widely contractors shoddy work, overspending and failures to complete schemes.

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