

FIGHTING PRIVATISATION IMPROVING JOBS & SERVICES

ALTERNATIVE DEMANDS

Why do we need alternative demands?

Many campaigns in the public sector have been fought on simple slogans like 'Save our Services', but experience has shown that a purely defensive stance is inadequate. Success in defending jobs and services from privatisation and cuts depends on solid and active commitment from the workforce, other trade unionists and the community. To win this support and commitment it is important that we provide a positive focus for campaigning. We must shift the debate from simply defending services as they are run now to making demands about how services should be improved and expanded.



- Workers know how jobs should be done and services could be run.
- Users know how they experience council services – the good and bad points and the gaps in provision.
- Both workers and users have ideas about what services should be and the changes needed to achieve this.
- Groups of council workers who have gone out to user

groups and community organisations for support on the basis of working out jointly agreed demands have shown the potential for public support for council trade union campaigns and for long-term alliances based on common interests.

ALTERNATIVE DEMANDS AND PLANS ARE A WAY OF BRINGING TOGETHER THESE EXPERIENCES AND

Why defensive campaigns are not adequate

- Workers who are badly paid, alienated or harrassed by management may not feel that their jobs are worth fighting for, and opt for redundancy or early retirement, offered by management as a means of cutting the workforce.
- People in the community will not rally to support services which they experience as inadequate, remote or oppressive.
- Both workers and users know that council services are frequently unsatisfactory and inefficiently organised, especially after years of spending cuts. This awareness will undermine any campaign against privatisation, unless it can be harnessed together with workers' and users' ideas about how services should be run.

IDEAS. THEY INVOLVE LOOKING AT SERVICES ON THE BASIS OF OUR IDEAS ABOUT NEEDS AND ORGANISATION, NOT USING MANAGEMENT'S DEFINITIONS AND TERMS OF REFERENCE. THEY ARE VITAL TO SHIFT THE DEBATE AWAY FROM COSTS AND CUTS TO WHAT PUBLIC SERVICES SHOULD BE.

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Why alternatives are needed now

The package of proposals in the Government Green Paper on statutory tendering is intended to transform the whole basis of council services from provision on the basis of need to minimal provision at minimum cost with commercial criteria alone determining standards of service.

Tendering is a competition to enter the lowest possible bid in order to win a contract. Whatever the final outcome of tendering, the tendering process itself presents a major threat to levels of service, jobs, wages and conditions and trade union organisation.

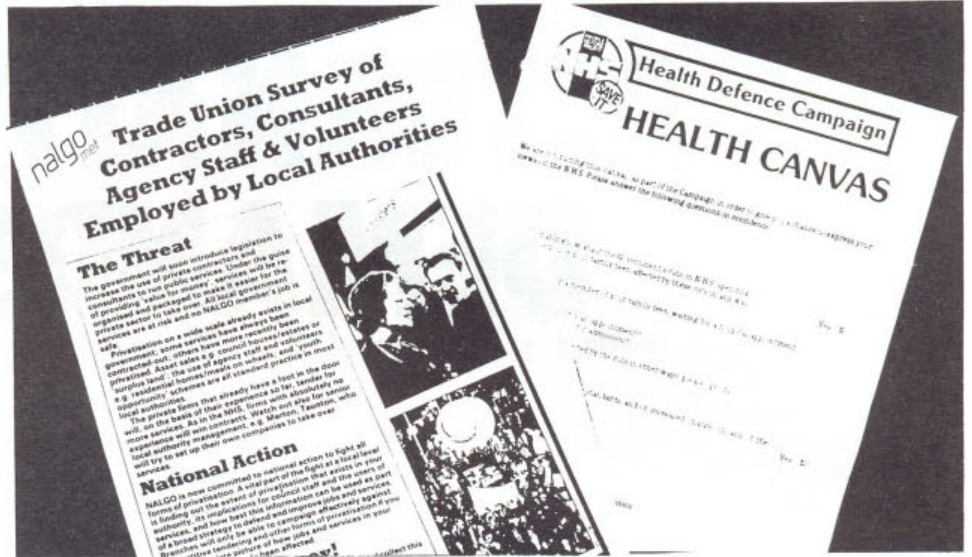
Some councils have begun to develop political strategies to deal with statutory tendering, most have not. But whatever the political complexion of the council, management will have begun to prepare its response. The NHS experience has shown that even where management has in theory been committed to the retention of direct labour, its approach to tendering has been to cut, reorganise and rationalise to compete with private contractors, on the contractors' terms.

If the discussion is to be shifted from simply arguing about the size of cuts and job losses to the issue of how public services can be maintained and improved, it is crucial that the trade unions present an alternative approach.

A set of alternative demands to help to

- change the terms of the debate over cuts and privatisation
- move the issue into the public arena
- increase public support
- undermine existing arguments for privatisation and cuts
- increase involvement in your campaign
- work towards changing the way in which the service is organised and delivered and the involvement of workers.

How can alternative demands be put forward ?



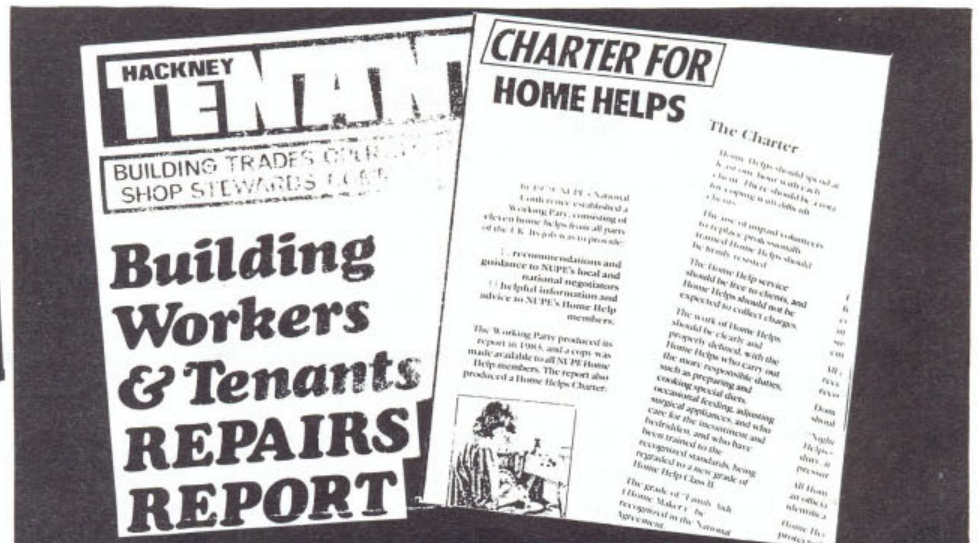
Alternative demands can be as simple or as sophisticated as you can make them. This will depend on your time and resources and level of organisation. Possible forms include:

- A simple charter of demands drawn up by the Joint Shop Stewards Committee or a group of stewards in a service.
- Mini-plans looking at particular sections, based on experience of workers within those sections.
- Mini-plans for parts of the service drawn up with users of the service.
- Using TU surveys of the effect of cuts, existing levels of privatisation etc, to provide the basic information for drafting an alternative plan.
- Persuading the council or union to set up a 'Community Enquiry' which widely canvasses views, submissions and information from

community organisations and individuals on services.

- Organising a canvas or questionnaire taken out into local communities to seek out public views and hopes for services.
- Setting up a joint user and worker group to look at a whole service and alternative ideas and demands, to produce an alternative plan for the service possibly with assistance from a Trade Union Resource Centre or Support Unit or an organisation like SCAT, LRD or CAITS.

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.



History of alternative plans

Throughout the 1970s tenants' groups produced alternative plans in their fight for redevelopment schemes based on tenants' needs. More recently in London, the People's Plan for the Royal Docks and the Coin Street Plan have been used by local people to challenge redevelopment in central London by property speculators and business interests. Workers' alternative plans also started in the 1970s with the Lucas Aerospace Plan worked out by shop stewards to propose the manufacture by the firm of socially useful products instead of weapons. This plan inspired similar ventures by trade unionists in other companies including Vickers, Dunlop, Plessey, Metal Box and ICL.

There have been workers' plans too in the public sector, including the Barking Hospital strikers' alternative plan for cleaning the hospital, which was being used in the fight against Crothalls, the firm currently holding the cleaning contract.



Where do you start?

1. Who will be responsible for drawing up alternatives (e.g. JSSC, representatives on a JCC, special branch sub-committee etc).
2. Who else will be involved? In the public sector alternative plans should not be simply workers' plans, but based on 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.
3. You need to define the purpose of your plan: which services or sections it will cover, how detailed it will be, what questions it will try to cover, how it fits into the rest of the campaign and how it will be used once it is prepared.
4. 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?
5. How and with whom, will you discuss the draft demands or plans?
6. What is your provisional timetable? Can you realistically carry this out so as not to waste all your efforts?

What should you cover?

A set of alternative demands should cover the following questions:

- ★ What are the problems experienced by workers and users with the present service?
- ★ What should your job be like?
- ★ What service should your department be providing?
- ★ What staffing levels are needed to provide a full caring service based on needs?
- ★ How can the service be delivered in a way which does not alienate either workers or users?
- ★ How can workers be given more control over the way their jobs and the service be organised?
- ★ How can the service be made more accountable to its users?
- ★ What are the implications for training?
- ★ What are the requirements for premises, equipment, materials etc?
- ★ Compare this to what the service actually is now.

Resources

- We must continue to press demands for more money and resources and not fall into the Tory trap that there are no more resources and that spending can't be increased.
- In the current economic and political climate however it is important to present alternative demands that won't be dismissed as too idealistic because of the resources they require.
- There are things that can be done within existing resources: demands can be made for changes in the way in which existing resources are used and for different priorities. The Wandsworth joint TA-TU plan for caretaking services proposed a whole range of improvements within existing spending levels.



How do you involve the wider community?

● Your initial approach is crucial – it must include an explanation that an attack on your jobs is an attack on their service; that privatisation will produce worse not better services and why; that you are concerned to improve services; that users of services should get involved in the campaign. If you just ask for support in saving your jobs, you are unlikely to get very far.

● Some services have obvious organised user groups – tenants' associations, pensioners groups, parent-teacher associations etc. DLO union – tenant alliances which have in the past produced alternative plans or demands in places such as Hackney or Camden, have set up working parties or forums to present proposals from their constituent groups, argue them out and take back the results to their memberships for approval. The working parties continued in existence to organise campaigning on the demands – and informal alliances have remained for joint approaches on other issues.

● Where there are no clear organised user groups the process is more difficult. Contact can be made with existing community organisations representing tenants, residents, pensioners, women, parents, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities etc, to invite them to meetings with stewards or to offer to send stewards to speak at their meetings. This could be used to try and set up a joint working party – or simply to gather ideas to include.

● It will be important to consider carefully when and where meetings are held, how they are organised and publicised and to make crèche facilities available so that women can participate.

● For some services this may not seem possible or appropriate, in which case it is possible to collect ideas and signatures of support in door to door canvasses or at shopping centre stalls. Refuse workers in Bury and more recently Ealing have used both these methods to publicise the threat to privatise refuse collection.

Community action against Tories' privatisation

Tenants and unions defend council homes



GRAND MET

TENANTS and trade unions have joined in action to fight Tory plans to hand over the management of tens of thousands of council homes in London to a multinational.

Wandsworth is being used by the Thatcher government as the testing ground for implementing their strategy of privatisation of all the vital services provided by local authorities.

BY PENNY BLOOR

The Wandsworth Tories have already put to private contract road sweeping, refuse collection and gardening, as well as shutting down libraries, day centres, law centres and slashing grants to voluntary organisations.

Now they want to bring in Grand Metropolitan – the catering, brewing, food and leisure concern with operations as far away as Venezuela – to administer the running of 8,000 council homes.

office in the Roehampton district after a move by the council to allow Grand Metropolitan to carry out a feasibility study.

Peter Ramage, NALGO branch secretary at the town hall, told News Line yesterday. The tenants and NALGO and NUPE have organised a joint campaign over the last three or four weeks and this picket is the first fruit of that activity.

We went to the tenants in the first instance, and

tion, focussing on service quality rather than cost-cutting, said Ramage. And the unions and the tenants are absolutely hand in glove.

About 3,500 of the flats are on the massive Alton estate, where the district housing office has been picketed three days running.

Picket

Tenants out on the picket line yesterday spoke to

Prelude

Developing joint worker-user demands

● Experience shows that the early stages in seeking wider involvement in your campaign are likely to be difficult. You may need to make several approaches before you get any response.

● **Workers in services and users of services may initially see their interests as totally opposed.** Most council services are run in a deliberately divisive way, in which dissatisfied users are encouraged to blame the workers for failures in the service. There is usually no forum for direct discussion between the two groups. Moreover, workers who have no way of influencing the level or organisation of services are always in the front line for complaints and abuse from the public. As years of cuts have rendered services less and less adequate, the divisions have deepened.

● Neither workers nor users have much opportunity to express these mutual resentments – so initial meetings bringing groups together are likely to be stormy. They need careful planning and handling – but experience shows that it is worth persisting, and that once people have had the chance to vent their anger, an understanding of the other point of view can develop and there is a real basis for working together.

● **There will be limitations on the areas of agreement possible: there are some real differences of interest.** Some demands made by users for changes may be unacceptable to trade unions in their implications for workers' hours, conditions, job demarcation etc. Other demands may be acceptable to one union, for example 'less bureaucracy', but may present a threat to another union's members' jobs. The aim is to work out common ground and argue from that.

The development of alternative ideas will almost certainly have implications for existing job descriptions and working practices.

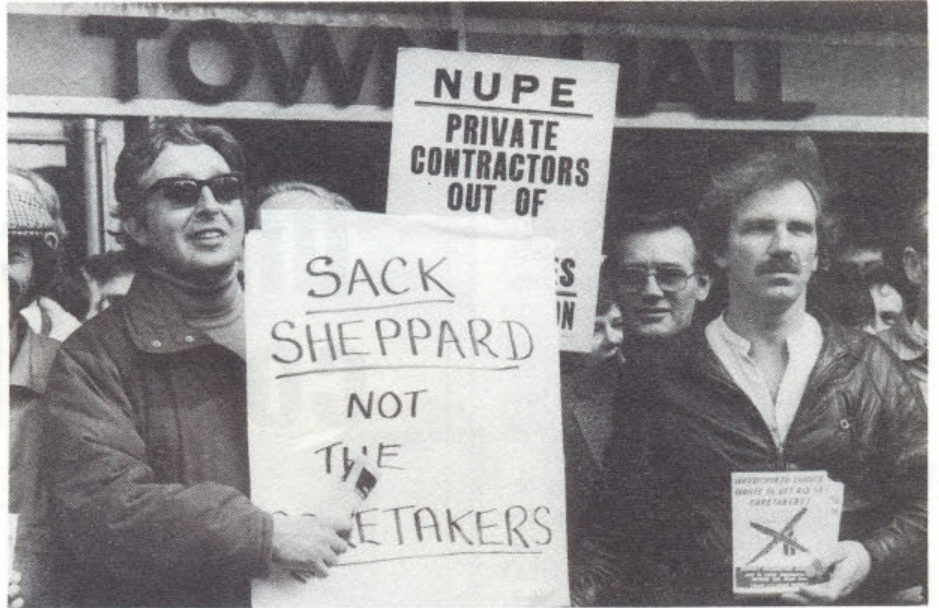
You may be faced with conflicts on what you and/or users see as necessary changes, but which you can't afford to throw into the negotiating ring with employers for fear of how they will use it.

● It is crucial that trade unions work out among themselves what is and is not negotiable in discussions with users. Some matters will be appropriate for TU/employer or inter-union negotiation, but not for worker/user argument. However some willingness to make changes to improve services may be essential if users' support for your demands is to be won.

Launching the plan or charter

It is important to maximise publicity for your proposals to prevent councillors just dismissing or shelving them:

- Produce a leaflet summarising your demands/proposals and the reasons for them, which can be widely distributed and which tells people what they can do to support your campaign.
- You could organise a **lobby** and/or **exhibition** to coincide with presenting your plan/charter to councillors.
- **Press release** it to local and national newspapers at the same time as it is presented to councillors.
- **Send out copies** to all TU branches (perhaps via Trades Council) tenants associations, community organisations and political parties in the area, with requests for support.
- **Circulate it to labour movement organisations outside your area**, via TU regional or district organisations, trade union journals, Labour Research, Public Service Action etc.
- **Organise a series of direct actions** to coincide with the launching of your plan or demands to attract greater publicity.



Keeping control

It is essential to keep control of your ideas and plans. Experience has shown that if councillors and/or management agree to take them on, they suddenly become **THEIR** ideas. If implemented it won't be in the way you've demanded, or in your interests. They are likely to seize on the parts that suit their ideas and interests and the result will be quite different from what you'd planned because the proposals were drawn up as a package – not a shopping list to choose odd items from.

In Sheffield, ideas for expansion and improvement com-

ing from DLO stewards have frequently been taken over by the council and implemented in a way which management thinks it is the right way. In Hackney, the TU/TA plans for decentralisation repair services have been the subject of a continued battle with the council over the way in which they have been implemented.

It is crucial to fight to retain control of your ideas and how they are implemented: acceptance by councillors, whether enthusiastic or reluctant, just marks the start of another campaign over how they will be put into practice.

ALTERNATIVE CARETAKING PLANS PROPOSED

RESIDENTS and caretakers of council properties in Roehampton have banded together and produced a plan for caretaking services on the estates which would save the council more than £1m.

The plan – an alternative to the council's one of privatising the services – was outlined in a report compiled by the Roehampton District Tenants' Association and Caretaker Stewards.

The basis of the joint proposal is that the caretaking service in Roehampton be returned to the former system employed when the caretaking was under the GLC. This means recruiting 25 more caretakers to make an



ALTERNATIVE 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 was continued on other issues.(ii)

■ Health Emergency Campaigns have developed in many areas over the last two years bringing together health service workers and supporters in the community to challenge cuts and 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, producing a Workers' Plan 'Part of the Team' which used the cleaners' own experience, combined the 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 Street, London EC1. Camden Plan from Camden Federation of Tenants, 30 Camden Road, London NW1
- (iii) Contact London Health Emergency, 335 Grays Inn Road, London WC1
- (iv) Contact CILT, Tress House, 3 Stamford Street, London SE1
- (v) Available from Barking and Dagenham Link, 14 Porters Avenue, Dagenham, Essex RM8 2AQ (£4)



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SCAT is a national housing, planning and public service project. Its work includes advice and assistance on campaign organising and strategies, research and analysis, educational workshops, and workers' and users' alternatives for a wide range of local and national labour movement organisations. Recent work has included the comprehensive Campaigning for Care in Social Services Action Pack with NUPE detailing strategies and tactics to fight privatisation. SCAT Publications publishes Public Service Action, the anti-privatisation newsletter for the labour movement. It also produces a wide range of reports, pamphlets and broadsheets covering privatisation, public services and housing.