



# DCH CONFERENCE: 'SERIOUS AND DETERMINED'

More than 100 tenants from all over Britain, including reps from some of the strongest tenants' federations, came to the conference. They joined campaigners, trade unions, councillors and MPs.

On the ground it's clear the fight is on. Campaign groups are springing up in almost all the areas where privatisation is threatened.

Despite the government's bluster, 'the tide seems to be turning in our favour' as Stockport MP Andrew Bennett - chair of the influential ODPM select committee - put it.

Peter Corte-Massey, of Stockport tenants federation, passed on lessons from their successful No vote campaign. Tenants had no resources, and when they refused to rubber stamp the council's plans, were accused of being 'political'. 'You're only political if you're not on their side', Peter said to loud applause and general recognition.

Tenants from Stroud, fighting a current transfer, summed it up: 'Get the information, wear a badge and get organising meetings on your estate'.

Ros Gladden, Labour opposition lead member for housing on Liverpool City Council was critical of the Labour government's apparent indifference to housing. She catalogued problems of disrepair and empty homes on transferred estates now owned by RSLs in Liverpool.



Pat Morrin from Birmingham explains how they organised their campaign against stock transfer

## 'You're only political if you're not on their side'

Peter Corte-Massey, Stockport Tenants Fed

The growing unity against privatisation was summed up by Mick Graham of the GMB. Council trade unions - among the biggest unions in Britain - have issued a joint manifesto in defence of council housing to every single councillor.

Areas facing Arms Length Management discussed in detail how to get a tenants' ballot and a no vote. 'We should make sure every tenant has the right to vote on ALMO - that's called democracy,' said Bolton MP Brian Iddon.

Other workshops got down to detail on stock transfer facts, figures and arguments, on the case for council housing and the tenants movement.

We agreed the next stage of our dual-track campaign: actively campaigning locally to oppose privatisation and reject blackmail forcing us to transfer, PFI or ALMO, and stepping up the national campaign to win direct investment in council housing with no strings attached.

## MORE SENIOR MPS CALL FOR DIRECT INVESTMENT

John Prescott is desperately trying to bury the commitment made by the previous minister in charge of council housing. Stephen Byers promised that tenants would have an alternative - direct investment in council housing - in any choice of options.

Ministers are now insisting that there are 'only three options': transfer, PFI or ALMO. This is infuriating tenants and unions, and councillors in more than 200 authorities not moving toward any form of privatisation.

If tenants refuse to be bullied into privatisation, government will have to invest directly in council housing if they want to meet their decent homes target.

Byers has again (30 May) backed

Lyn Ralph (right - centre), chair of Doncaster Tenants Federation, was one of 15 people elected to the DCH National Committee.

Doncaster and Rotherham Feds ran a raffle to raise funds for DCH - could yours do the same?



Opening session speakers (left to right) Jenni Marrow (Scottish Tenants Organisation), Mick Graham (GMB National Secretary), Alan Walter (DCH), Councillor Ros Gladden (Labour Housing spokesperson in Liverpool) and Brian Iddon MP

greater investment for councils wanting to retain management of their stock. He said he was "arguing for a wider range of options so that there was a genuine choice available to tenants... I thought they shouldn't be compelled to go for a private sector solution."

Byers is one of a growing number of senior backbenchers and former ministers: Gerald Kaufman, Andrew Bennett, Clive Betts, weighing in to this debate. It shows that Prescott is not managing to win support for his plan even amongst senior Labour Party colleagues.

If tenants, trade unionists, councillors and MPs unite around defending decent, affordable, secure and accountable council housing - we can win.

## GOVERNMENT'S PRIVATISATION AGENDA 3 NEW STEPS



Government announces allocation of council Housing Investment Programme (HIP) will be pooled with money for Housing Associations. The new Regional Housing Boards will decide whether to repair & improve council or RSL homes.



Housing Corporation assistant chief executive Neil Hadden invites private developers to bid to build 'social housing'. Inside Housing reports the House Builders Federation says 'developers would be keen to get social housing grants'.



Wendy Jarvis, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's head of local authority housing finance says "The Communities Plan raises the need for both public and private sectors to work together... [it] really puts partnership on the agenda".

Big thanks to Liverpool Tenants Federation & Liverpool GMB for sponsoring the conference venue, DCH pamphlets for delegates and lunch.

## WHAT THEY SAID...

I do not see why a first class - even a 'good' housing authority should be forced by government to transfer housing by any of the methods we are looking at today. Money that could be spend on bricks and mortar is being wasted.

The money the government had got for flogging off the housing stock, just about balances with the costs. There is no financial gain in flogging it off - it is purely a political ploy. Brian Iddon MP

The council got £54 million through New Deal for Communities on the back of us poor illiterates - then they siphon it all out to private companies. Where the hell has the money gone? And now because the money's gone they want to demolish us. What about our kids, about the future? Delegate from Newcastle Tenants Fed

Our jobs are on the line if they bring in transfer, PFI or ALMO. We work well with Doncaster tenants federation. Other tenants organisations should link up with unions - stick together and we can fight it. Doncaster Unison member

We need to build the independent tenants movement in every area forcing councillors to tell their MPs and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister there is no way we're selling off council housing. Mark Weeks, Tower Hamlets DCH

The minute there is a whisper anywhere that there's going to be a privatisation bid everyone should sup-

port that community by leafleting and getting out there - before the housing association gets in and tried to break down the tenants one by one Diane, Manchester tenant

The council wants to take us to Berlin, with £75 a day expenses Aylesbury tenant reps being wooed by the council after voting against transfer

We live in a democracy. You don't need the council's approval to set up a tenants' organisation. History tells us an independent tenants' movement can be very powerful, linked to the trade unions and political allies. That's when the tenants movement can be important in shaping and changing politics. John Grayson, Northern College Barnsley

I'm against the setting up of an ALMO in Camden. It will lead to job losses. We aren't getting a fair deal. The director will be having a fat salary. There will be no democracy or accountability. I think the board will do

what it wants because the tenants' reps will become executive directors, earning money and not representing the tenants but representing their own private interests.

Lawson Ekpo, Camden UNISON caretaker steward

They are pushing people to buy their houses for security which is another way of breaking up our estates. The conference is very positive. I just wish I could have been here before 1995 when Willow Park was sold off. The council manipulated the sell-off by placing their people on representative committees.

Honor Donnelly, Withenshaw tenant

Council housing was built for people who couldn't afford to buy. We will go back to pre-war times if they are allowed to carry on selling them off.

Claudine Greenland, Southwark tenant

We fought to keep council housing for my great grandchildren. They will need council housing.

Diane Reynolds, Nuneaton & Bedworth tenant



Tenants and trade unionists united lobbying Parliament. This is the way to stop privatisation locally and nationally.