

Composite 10 passed at the Labour Party Conference, 27 September 2006:

“Conference notes the outcome of the DCLG July 31st deadline for applications from local authorities in England for stock transfer or ALMOs and the statement that "This bidding round will be the last within the decent homes programme". This leaves many councils unable to meet the government's 'Decent Homes' standard, others facing concerted opposition to transfer, PFI or ALMOs and denies tenants the choice to keep the council as their landlord and get improvements to their homes and estates.

Conference reminds government of the clear 2005 manifesto commitment "By 2010 we will ensure that all social tenants benefit from a decent, warm home with modern facilities."

A Labour government cannot leave council tenants who have rejected privatisation without improvements. Conference believes that decent, affordable, secure and accountable council housing can make an important contribution to tackling growing housing need and that there is strong support amongst council tenants, elected councillors, trade unions and MPs for direct investment to improve existing council homes and estates as well as enabling local authorities to build new council homes.

Conference re-affirms the decisions of the 2004 and 2005 party conferences and our commitment to a 'Level playing field'. This should include ring-fencing all the income from tenants rents, capital receipts as well as equal treatment on debt write off and gap funding available to councils who transfer their homes to give tenants real choice and provide a long term future for council housing. Conference again calls on government to provide the 'fourth option' of direct investment to council housing as a matter of urgency.”

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We won't accept attacks on security of tenure whether in the form of watering down protection, means testing or time-limited tenancies. Secure housing is a basic human right needed now more than ever. And whilst we have no objection to 'choice', councils should not be allowed to spend £ millions of tenants money on consultations and continually re-ballot tenants until they get the 'right answer'.

There should be a clear code of practice for such consultations, as recommended by the House of Commons Council Housing group, for a 'fair and balanced debate' with resources available to ensure that both sides of the argument are heard, with a definite timescale for a formal ballot in every case.

Tenants want a strong voice - and to be heeded, not just patronised. This

requires permanent and ongoing organisation. There has been a deliberate strategy, often in the name of 'tenant empowerment' to undermine effective tenants' organisation and replace it with toothless self selected or appointed focus groups and panels.

The latest proposal from the Cave Review for a national tenants 'consumer panel' and the growing industry of expensive consultants paid for out of tenants rents is not acceptable.

In many areas the threat of privatisation has triggered the rebuilding of a strong and independent tenants' movement often widening its base across generations and ethnic backgrounds. This has been crucial to see off the threat of privatisation and stop the Nazi BNP using housing desperation to gain a foothold in our communities.

We want to encourage re-building the independent tenants movement rooted in every estate and area, with Tenants Federations and similar organisations informing and co-ordinating campaigning within and across authorities.

We oppose marketisation and deregulation of housing. Access to public subsidies, land or other assets must be conditional on clear regulatory controls including allocation policies, rents and other charges and meaningful consultation.

The alliance Defend Council Housing has constructed is a powerful force for change. Together tenants, trade unions, councillors and MPs can win the 'Fourth Option' to improve our homes and estates, start building new council housing and maintain every one as first class homes for tenants today and future generations to come. ■

# Defend Council Housing

“By 2010 we will ensure that all social tenants benefit from a decent, warm home with modern facilities.” **Labour Party 2005 manifesto commitment**

Tenants, trade unions, councillors and MPs say:

## ‘FOURTH OPTION’ for COUNCIL HOUSING



1. Enable local authorities to improve all existing council homes and estates;
2. Allow local authorities to start a new council house building programme;
3. Ensure that local authorities have sufficient revenue to maintain all council homes in future years;
4. Detailed proposals and a clearly defined timetable for implementation;
5. An immediate moratorium on any further transfers, PFI or ALMOs, demolition schemes or sale of council land and properties, until the new options have been formulated, to give tenants real choice.



## Defend Council Housing Policy Statement

Government policy on privatising council housing is deeply unpopular. There is no support for the neo liberal agenda. Tenants have rejected privatisation in ballots right across the UK, subsequently several key local authorities have changed political control and, as the *Daily Mirror* identified, council housing waiting lists are a major issue for many MPs.

DCH has created an unprecedented alliance of council tenants, trade unions, councillors and MPs opposed

to government bullying and blackmailing tenants to accept one of their three privatisation options (stock transfer, PFI and ALMOs). There is growing support for the 'Fourth Option' of direct investment to improve existing and build new council homes.

We promised our campaigning would put investment in council housing at the top of the political agenda and we have. All six candidates in the Labour Deputy Leadership contest were reported as

supporting the 'Fourth Option' and the new Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, was reported to have an 'open mind'.

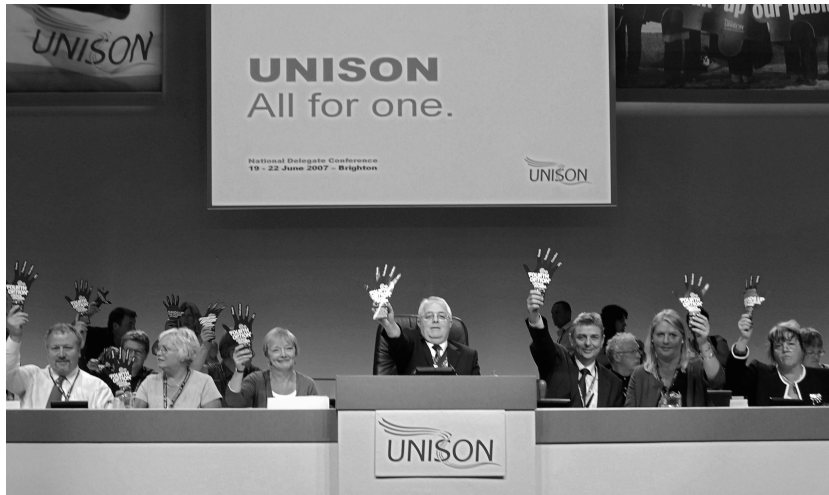
Now we need to turn sound-bites into concrete proposals. Tenants, trade unionists, councillors, MPs and others campaigning for the 'Fourth Option' of direct investment in council housing will measure the government's response by whether they enable local authorities to:

1. Improve all existing council homes and estates;

# Defend Council Housing National Conference



Proud to be a tenant



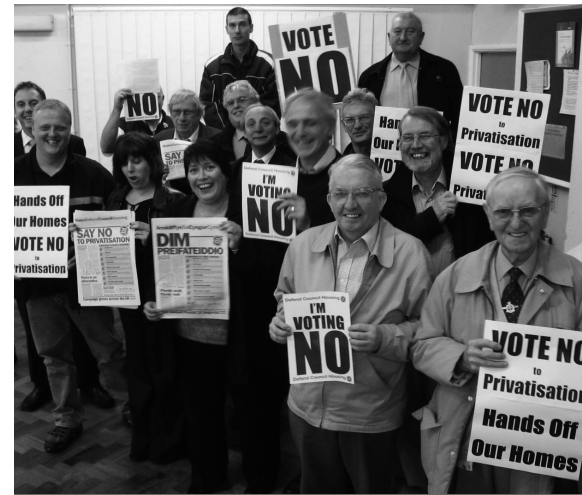
UNISON conference put its hands up for 'Fourth Option'



Brighton tenants demand direct investment



'Fourth Option' priority for Unite – Amicus



Swansea tenants reject privatisation too

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2. Start a new council house building programme;

3. Maintain council housing as first class housing in years to come.

Alongside detailed proposals we need a clearly defined timescale for implementation. The issues have been well debated; the government has a clear manifesto commitment on Decent Homes (above) and needs to respect the decision of tenants who have exercised their 'choice' and rejected privatisation. We have all waited long enough.

We demand an immediate moratorium on any further transfers, PFI, ALMOs, major demolition schemes or sale of council land and properties. Government cannot continue to bully and blackmail tenants and councillors to accept one of their three privatisation options on the basis that government policy is set in stone when it clearly is in the process of change.

We recognise there are many calls on government resources but these include an obligation to nearly 3 million existing council tenants. And a 'listening government' cannot ignore the mounting demands from elected councillors and MPs on behalf of their communities and electorate for a new council house building programme.

Democratically elected local authorities are ideally placed to build again (learning the lessons from the bad design and cheap building methods used on some estates in the 1960s and 70s). They could, and should, also be empowered to CPO (Compulsory Purchase Order) private housing deliberately left empty as they did in the 1970s to provide council homes for those on the waiting list.

The private market, including Registered Social Landlords, have failed to provide the homes people need; the Treasury accepted, during the discussions between John Prescott and 'interested parties' prior to the Labour Party conference in 2004, that there was no justification for discriminating against good performing authorities directly managing their homes as opposed to those with arms length companies (borrowing for both affects PSBR rules equally).

We regret that no agreement was reached in 2004, despite progress in negotiations, because government was not prepared to back up 'warm words' with a definite timescale for change. Three years on we are determined to ensure that we reach a settlement that finally resolves all the issues and secures a long term future for council housing.

The alliance of tenants, trade unions, councillors and MPs who have supported the 'Fourth Option' will actively resist any attempts to divide and rule, playing off new build against obligations to existing council tenants. As Composite 10 (below) passed at Labour's own 2006 conference put it "A Labour government cannot leave council tenants who have rejected privatisation without improvements".

Government itself has now accepted the economic and social arguments for improving housing in terms of the wider benefits to the health, education and social wellbeing of our communities and cannot punish tenants by withholding improvements for expressing their choice to remain as council tenants.

The systematic siphoning of money out of council housing (taking rental income through 'Daylight Robbery' and then 'Moonlight Robbery' as well as receipts from 'right to buy' sales and from stock transfers) is a scandal and the cause of outstanding disrepair. It has to stop now, and the money must be re-invested to clear the remaining backlog of repairs and improvements to existing council homes and estates.

Ring-fencing all the money that belongs to council housing would enable local authorities to manage

and maintain their homes as first class housing in years to come (There could be a discussion about pooling any resources beyond local housing need).

Savings on privatisation setup costs, expensive consultants, higher senior manager salaries and borrowing costs in the private sector, and on spiralling costs of Housing Benefit in the private sector, could all be ploughed back into council housing investment.

Investment in first class council housing makes sense. Council housing is cheaper to build, manage and maintain than the alternatives and the fundamental principles of a democratically elected landlord providing 'decent', 'affordable', 'secure' and 'accountable' housing offers real advantages over private sector (including RSL) alternatives.

1.6 million households on council housing waiting lists shows there is strong demand for council housing. This includes many in temporary accommodation, facing chronic overcrowding, bad housing conditions or facing impossible financial pressures in the private sector. But it is not the case, as some neo-liberal academics and politicians try to make out, that council housing is housing of last resort that only appeals to those who "can't do any better".

Shelter's *Roof* magazine has established that many on council housing waiting lists are not those in 'priority need' but want a council home as an alternative to the high costs and insecurity of the private housing market.

Investment to improve existing and build new council homes is the best way to provide the quality housing people want and open up housing allocation policies once again to alleviate the concentrations of desperation and deprivation caused by council housing allocations policies driven by housing shortages.

Government, and the developers, bankers and private landlords who stand to profit from rising market prices, are hyping up demand and home ownership 'aspirations' for their own ends. In the process they are deliberately seeking to stigmatise council housing to justify an assault on the principles of secure and low cost public housing and to coerce people to accept their 'products'.

Those who want to buy should have the choice. But we strongly object to government taking money out of council housing to subsidise home ownership. We also object to council and other public land being sold off for private housing (often subsidising it in the process) when land is a scare

resource and there is strong local demand for more council (public) housing.

Whilst private developers and Registered Social Landlords talk the talk of providing 'social' and 'affordable' housing they are failing to deliver. Developers are directly motivated by making a profit and RSLs are increasingly driven by the same business dynamics and market pressures of mergers, takeovers and 'diversification' into business plans that put creating surpluses before people's needs.

'Secure' tenancies are valued in an increasingly insecure world where many 'home owners' and private tenants live in fear of losing their home. Council rents are genuinely affordable (as opposed to having just the label) and provide financial stability against the helter-skelter of market forces. And council tenants elect their landlord and have a direct relationship with both housing managers and councillors based in their locality.

So as well as welcoming more people to council housing we are also determined to see off any proposals to undermine the fundamental principles that define and underpin council housing.

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