

# HOMES FOR ALL!

This week the latest homelessness figures were published by the housing charity, SHELTER. They themselves admit that they are a sorry testament to their 20 years of campaigning for better housing. SHELTER calculate that an average of 300 families are living in one room in bed and breakfast accomadation in every borough in the country - they say that there are now children of school age who have been born and brought up in these conditions. Worse off still are 80,000 young homeless, living rough or on friends' floors, the numbers of vagrant homeless are said to be incalculable but may be much larger. SHELTER say that these figures are over 20 times higher than when Shelter was founded and they're getting worse. In addition they say there are over half a million pensioners living in houses that have been declared 'unfit for human habitation'. Not only do people on low incomes have to put up with constant harassment by the civil service who control their purse strings, they also have to put up with damp, cramped, squalid conditions in their homes. It's no wonder that many of the homeless in London are helping themselves to empty houses, there are an estimated 5000 squats in London now. Outside London squatting is not really an option for homeless or badly housed people, but soon people are going to be forced to squat and defend squats as they would ordinary homes, if things don't start getting better soon. At the rate local councils are selling off letting stock we'll be forced to squat the council offices.

Last month, Chancellor Lawson said that councils should fix rates of pay for their employees at a local level rather than abide by a nationally agreed wage. It's no coincidence that Ridley, the Enviroment secretary is pushing through legislation that will force councils to allow private contractors to carry out services - rubbish collection, cleaning, etc.

This drive for privatisation is not, as some labour bureaucrats claim, "an attack on councils", it is purely and simply an attack on council employees, their wages, conditions, and security of employment. Privatisation isn't simply the religious principle followed to the letter by crazed Tory philosophers - it is merely a weapon in the armoury of the employewsto cut their costs by driving down the living standards of the employed, whether on the buses or in the hospital laundry.

It doesn't matter whether a council or a private employew hires municipal workers as long as they are being employed at "competitive" rates i.e. paid as little as possible. This is where Lawson's "local pay agreements" come in - which council can pay the least? As it is many councils employ temporary workers on the "Community Programme" schemes at half the rate of pay of "permanent" staff ( YES! "Jobs That Pay The Going Rate", as the Restart advert claims!)

Just like the "competitive" buses and private hospital catering all this has got nothing to do with "improved service" or efficiency as the Tories pretend X- it just means management ( public or private- Tory or Labour) cutting their costs as much as possible. Pushing employees tonthe limit by cutting breaks, bonuses, extending work hours and generally being pushy for jobs to be done without the necessary materials or the time to get the job done. As usual when it comes to the employers cutting costs we end up on the slab. What are we going to do about it?

