

# HOMES FOR THE PEOPLE

## HOUSING PROFITS VS HOUSING NEED

The 2008 **financial crisis** was precipitated by the sub-prime mortgage scandal in the US caused by the banks lending more than the value of property on an industrial scale. This triggered an international financial crisis. House prices **collapsed** as they did in the recession of 1990/91 caused by high inflation and interest rates.

When housing is seen as a financial investment there is pressure to restrict supply in the hope of **raising prices**. This has led to decades of underinvestment and a huge imbalance between supply and demand, affecting millions of people in Britain.

Landowners profit from **speculative** land values, driven by developers whose prime motive is enriching their shareholders and who fight their obligations to deliver affordable homes with the threat of refusing to develop land they own.

In England, the Government sets targets on the number of homes to be delivered in each local housing area, and with the extension of rules on so-called permitted developments – the conversion of commercial buildings into housing – means English planning authorities and local communities are almost **powerless** to influence the shape of a built environment which is increasingly developer-led and determined by land availability, rather than local need. It results in the wrong homes, of the wrong tenure, being built in the wrong places, unable to meet assessed housing need. Different rules apply in Scotland and Wales.

In Scotland, the Scottish Government's social housing grants are welcome but the building rate by Councils and housing associations is only half of what is needed. Unfortunately, **social housing** is still seen only as a safety net because the SNP prioritises market provision and boosting the private rented sector.

Official statistics suggest that **325,000 new homes** per year are required simply to meet demand caused by demographic change. This would not tackle the current backlog, and yet this level of house building has not been seen since 1970.

Meanwhile there are over 240,000 homes which have been **empty** for more than six months throughout Britain. Social housing as an affordable option for the population as a whole has been completely undermined by successive governments despite a million plus households on Council housing waiting lists, indicating enduring demand for the security of low-cost, socially-run housing.

Most recently in England this has included the right of social landlords to replace secure and assured tenancies and succession rights for new Council and Housing Association tenants with fixed-term tenancies – with the provision to make this compulsory within the 2016 Housing & Planning Act. That Act also contains provision for social landlords to sell off vacant high-value homes on the open market resulting in an accelerated **loss of social housing** in areas where the market provides no affordable housing options for working class communities.

In Scotland and Wales, whilst secure tenancies have been retained and the right to buy ended, social housing is still seen as a narrow welfare tenure rather than one of choice for a range of households.

**Deregulation, outsourcing and privatisation** culminated in the horrific loss of life at Grenfell Tower with further disasters waiting to happen in the new slums of permitted developments, while a decade of austerity has seen the loss of enforcement resources and expertise in local authorities. In Scotland and Wales, local authorities need to be given the financial clout to turn their notional powers on housing quality and the private rented sector into levers for change.

This crisis illustrates the **class basis** of inequality and oppression within our society.

Here we see exposed for workers the devastating impact of **CAPITALIST SPECULATION**.

### ABOVE LEFT

Council housing in St Ann's ward in Nottingham  
[Wikimedia Commons](#)



## COMMUNIST PARTY CHARTER FOR HOUSING

A good quality, affordable home is a basic human right; one which is denied to millions of people.

The Communist Party campaigns for a new approach to housing designed to meet the needs and aspirations of the peoples of England, Scotland and Wales and eradicate homelessness, rather than creating super profits for landowners, developers, their shareholders and bankers.

Across the nations, progressive housing strategies are needed addressing finance, development, regulation, quality and standards, the utilisation of currently vacant properties, homelessness and tenants' rights.

The Communist Party supports organisations at local, regional and national level that campaign for improved tenants' rights and for housing development to be locally-controlled and based on assessed housing need.



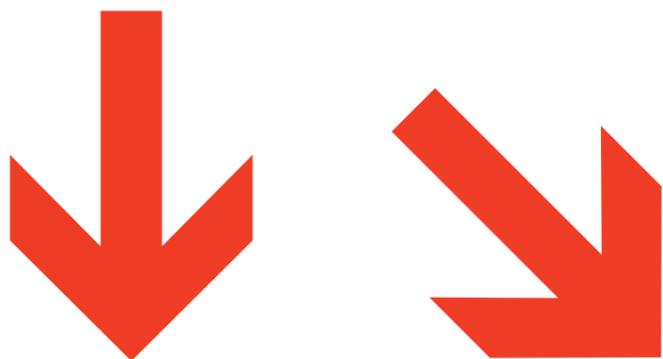


# HOUSING AS A COMMODITY

*'The abolition of private sector rent controls and security of tenure created the conditions in which housing became a commodity for private investment rather than homes – accelerated by the demutualisation of building societies and an explosion of investment by banks into property ...'*

## THE COMMUNIST PARTY'S HOUSING POLICY PUTS THE NEEDS OF COMMUNITIES ABOVE THOSE OF PRIVATE DEVELOPERS AND LANDOWNERS

## THE PROPOSALS OUTLINED HERE HELP MEET THOSE NEEDS



### LOCAL AUTHORITY POWERS

- Reform housing finance to enable a mass council housing development programme, including the regeneration and replacement of run-down council estates without placing new burdens on tenants in terms of rent levels.
- Stop the sale of public land to private developers; utilise Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs) on privately-owned designated housing land where development is unreasonably delayed.
- Progressively tax owners of vacant land and properties.
- Require councils to use their compulsory purchase powers to acquire and refurbish long-term empty or substandard properties and housing land for social use, including unused retail and commercial space.
- Radically extend local authority powers to restrict the growth of holiday lets and second-home ownership in areas of housing need so strengthening fragile communities.
- Relax planning regulations to permit change of use from unsold low-cost home ownership properties to social and affordable rented on a permanent or temporary basis.
- Bring ex-Council voluntary transfer housing association stock and arms-length management organisations (ALMOs) back under the direct democratic control of local authorities; develop proposals for buying back ex-council properties sold under the Right to Buy (RTB) for social rent, including giving first refusal to councils and community-based housing associations on all ex-RTB properties that come up for sale.
- Ensure social rented housing is genuinely affordable by each local authority setting affordability levels within national frameworks.
- Restore council direct labour organisations and in-house design and development expertise

### OTHER CHANGES TO HOUSING LAW

- Remove the provision to deny long-term security of tenure to social housing tenants in England.
- Amend planning and housing law to make the provision of suitable sites for gypsies and travellers a legal duty rather than discretionary power.
- End the financial incentives for homeownership in favour of investment in housing for lower-income households and individuals.
- Give councils the power to ensure that all housing development is undertaken on the basis of assessed need, locally-agreed plans, environmental, economic and social sustainability objectives.
- Enhance space, environmental and building standards for both conversions and new build and in England tackle the abuse of permitted development rights.
- Remove tax benefits for international and corporate purchasers of residential property.
- Institute enforceable limits on the banking sector's involvement in, and exposure to, the property sector including commercial real estate.
- Establish national and local savings institutions that specialise in housing finance and support national and local housing strategies.

### BUILDING DEMOCRACY

- Protect genuinely community and tenant led housing associations and co-operatives against take-overs by "not for profit" property companies.
- Underpinning these measures, build a truly independent tenants movement linked to the trades' unions and the Peoples' Assembly in their communities.
- Involve trades unions and communities in developing local housing and infrastructure plans.

▲ Trellick Tower is a Grade II\* listed tower block on the Cheltenham Estate in Kensal Town, London. Opened in 1972, it was commissioned by the Greater London Council and designed by the famous communist architect Ernő Goldfinger who fled fascism to find refuge in Britain.

The tower replaced outdated social accommodation, and designed as a follow up to Goldfinger's earlier Balfron Tower in East London. It featured various space-saving designs, along with a separate access tower containing a plant room.

All flats in Trellick Tower have a balcony and large windows to let in as much sunlight as possible.

Whilst the tower has become a very fashionable place to live through the commitment of its residents, it has also seen some flats lost to speculation, for instance a 2-bedroom flat previously sold under the right to buy was advertised for sale at £625,000 in 2020. We must resist the fate of the now listed Balfron Tower where its social purpose has been lost by its commodification as a design icon.



# HOUSING AS A RIGHT

Make the provision of suitable accommodation for all homeless households a real statutory duty, in order to end rough sleeping alongside a massive expansion in social housing. Repeal the Bedroom Tax and restore full housing benefit for all under 35s.

## TWO KINDS OF TORY SCANDAL

### GRENFELL TOWER TRAGEDY

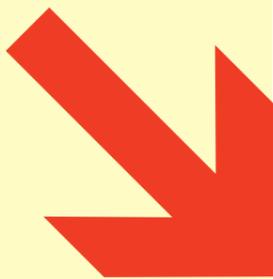
Tory-controlled Kensington and Chelsea Council stand accused of complicity in the neglect and unsafe construction of Grenfell Tower while the Fire Brigades Union says central government bears ultimate responsibility

Tony Blair's New Labour government scrapped the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council which governed fire safety. Edward Heath's Tory government scrapped mandatory fire certification due to the "very considerable expenditure" involved.

The Thatcher government cut building regulations from more than 300 pages to just 25, ceasing a formal requirement to ensure buildings were "deemed to satisfy" fire safety regulation.

And the construction and cladding companies who were responsible for the work on Grenfell Tower knew the cladding was unsafe and a fire risk but said nothing.

Seventy two died while more than 70 others were injured.



## PRIVATISATION & GENTRIFICATION



▲ **1979** Vicarage Gardens, Battersea SW11. Vicarage Gardens tenant's association chair Tony Xmines points out the leaking gutters, mould encrusted rooms and decayed brickwork that has made these purpose-built flats uninhabitable. Aided by the local advice centre the tenant's association took Tory Wandsworth Council to court. Instead of renovating the flats the council moved the tenants out, sold off the flats in a corrupt process that gentrified this solid working class area. Battersea's traditionally left wing council was a pioneer in purpose-built council housing, elected Britain's first ever Black council leader and Battersea was represented in parliament by Communist and Labour MP Shapurji Saklatvala.



▲ **2021** Vicarage Gardens, Battersea SW11. For £450,000 this spacious one bedroom third floor flat is situated within this popular gated development located close to Battersea Square and the River Thames. Featuring a fully fitted kitchen, living room, double bedroom, bathroom, lift service, communal gardens and resident porter.



## POST-GRENFELL

In England, require the freeholders of tower blocks to replace inflammable cladding within 12 months of original notice or transfer said blocks to local authority control. Contractors to pay the costs of removing inflammable cladding. Where this is unachievable, Government grant to be provided to complete this work within 12 months with no financial penalty to leaseholders. Ensure protection for leaseholders from unreasonable service charges.

## PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR (PRS)

Since Margaret Thatcher's election in 1979, the proportion of the British population living in Council Housing has fallen from around 40% to less than 6%, with the majority of residual Council Housing transferred to housing associations and arms-length companies in order to keep borrowing for social housing off the public sector borrowing requirement.

The PRS, which accommodated less than 10% of the population in 1979 – when rents were regulated and tenancies were secure – is now the second largest housing sector with a half million more tenants than Council and housing associations combined.

Some 2 million council homes have been sold since the introduction of the right to buy in 1981. Initially sold to sitting tenants with a public subsidy in the form of a 'discount' on the market value of up to £112,000, around 40% of these homes are now in the hands of buy-to-let landlords, charging up to 3 times the council rent for the same properties. The RTB has finally been abolished in Wales and Scotland under devolved powers. It is high time this is extended to England, which is continuing to lose up to 20,000 social rented homes a year under this legislation.

The abolition of private sector rent controls and security of tenure created the conditions in which housing became a commodity for private investment rather than homes – accelerated by the de-mutualisation of building societies and an explosion of investment by banks into property from the late 1980s onwards.

The fetishization of ownership of land, bricks and mortar has been rammed down the throats of ordinary people for decades, and yet since a 70% peak in owner-occupation in 2001, the proportion of the population that owns its own home has started to fall, with younger people virtually shut out of home ownership altogether, and some 30% of all 30-45 year olds now living in the PRS.

The loss of assured short-hold tenancy is now the largest cause of homelessness and the lack of rent regulation in the PRS the principal cause of the exponential increase in the housing benefit bill. It is clear the PRS can play no long-term role in meeting housing need under the current system.

## THE COMMUNIST PARTY THEREFORE CALLS FOR A FOCUS ON RAISING STANDARDS AND AFFORDABILITY BY:

- imposing local caps on private sector rent levels, subject to national limits.
- introducing full regulation of the private rented sector, including landlord licensing, rent controls, compulsory registration, providing sufficient funding to local authorities to enforce minimum housing standards and ensuring security of tenure for at least five years.
- abolishing the Right to Buy in England

## HOUSING AND WELFARE

Homelessness and the lack of affordable housing to rent or buy, for all age groups, is a chronic and growing political and social crisis across Britain today.

Since the election of the Tory/Lib Dem coalition government in 2010 the progress made under the Blair/Brown government to reduce homelessness and numbers in temporary accommodation has been reversed, with an explosion in rough sleeping, a 42% increase in the number of households in temporary accommodation in the ten years to December 2019. The number of homeless applications accepted by English local authorities in the final quarter of 2019 was 33,270; over three times the number accepted in the final quarter of 2009. In Scotland, the position is little better with 30,000 homeless presentations a year and 10,000 currently in temporary accommodation. This is a direct result of cuts to housing benefit, the bedroom tax, the imposition of the overall benefit cap on unemployed households and cuts to housing benefit for single under 35s.

In Scotland there is rampant gatekeeping via the Housing Options system with many homeless people denied assistance under the homelessness legislation as a result.

Devolved housing powers in Scotland and Wales have resulted in better legal rights for homeless people. In Scotland all homeless households have the same rights regardless of family status or 'vulnerability'.

However, the definition of 'intentional homelessness' has been retained limiting the assistance provided to those deemed responsible for their homelessness, regardless of vulnerability.

The Coronavirus crisis has placed up to a million renters and homeowners at risk of homelessness as unemployment rises to unprecedented levels while housing benefit levels are capped under universal credit.

Changes to housing and welfare benefits legislation are urgently required in order to end the scourge of homelessness once and for all:

- Extend the Coronavirus ban on evictions for at least twelve months.
- Ban bank and Building Society repossessions resulting from the coronavirus crisis and provide 100% benefit to all households for rent arrears caused by the Covid crisis.
- Take housing benefit out of Universal Credit and provide local authorities with 100% housing benefit subsidy.
- Repeal the Bedroom Tax and restore full housing benefit for all under 35s.
- Freeze Social housing rents for 12 months and peg future increases to Retail Price Index (RPI).
- Make the provision of suitable accommodation an enforceable statutory duty and with compensation paid to homeless households when it is not provided within set timescales – payable immediately when emergency temporary accommodation is not provided and when settled accommodation is not provided with 6 months.
- Restore funding for supported housing and housing support services, ensuring the need for hostels, refuges, sheltered and other supported housing is assessed and incorporated into local housing development plans, restoring the 'safety net' for the most vulnerable in society.
- Make the local authorities once again the main providers and the benchmark for staffing levels and pay for other providers.
- Restore funding for housing advice services and ensure legal aid is accessible for all housing-related problems.



# WORKING CLASS POWER

The housing shortage from which the workers and part of the petty bourgeoisie suffer in our modern big cities is one of the numerous smaller, secondary evils which result from the present-day capitalist mode of production. **Frederick Engels** *The Housing Question* 1872

## working class power

We live in **capitalism** – a system of exploitation that generates crisis, inequality, corruption, environmental degradation and war.

Capitalism is innately incapable of solving the most **fundamental problems of humanity**. The capitalist monopoly corporations and the state apparatus which serves their interests are the main obstacles to progress on every front: economic, environmental, political, social and cultural.

**Socialism** is the only form of society that offers the potential for solving humanity's problems in conditions of personal and collective freedom. Because the working class has the most direct and immediate interest in putting an end to capitalism and replacing it with a socialist society, its own class interest also represents the interests of society generally.

In Britain, the potential exists to pursue an alternative economic and political strategy that challenges and ultimately defeats the ruling class. More specifically, a **popular democratic anti-monopoly alliance** can be built, led by the labour movement, to fight for a left-wing programme (LWP) of policies that would make inroads into the wealth and power of the monopoly capitalists.

Any such **strategy and programme** must include far-reaching policies and action to reduce carbon emissions, which contribute to global warming and cause climate change with disastrous consequences for humanity.

Through an upsurge in working class and popular action, a left government can be elected in Britain based on parliamentary majorities of Labour, socialist, communist and progressive representatives, and strengthened by the election of left majorities in Scotland and Wales.

To carry out the most advanced policies of a left-wing programme, the mass movement and its left governments will have to engage in a decisive struggle for **state power** (the means by which one class enforces its rule over other classes and in society as a whole).

A united challenge to British **state-monopoly capitalism** will require a high level of working class and progressive coordination and unity, maximising the democratic potential of national rights in Scotland and Wales and minimising the scope for division.

Achieving **state power** and minimising the opportunities for counter-revolution will create the conditions in which to dismantle capitalism progressively and lay the foundations for a democratic, environmentally sustainable and peaceful future in a federal, socialist Britain.

A **socialist society** can then be built in which wealth and power are held in common and used in a planned way for the benefit of all, with the working class and its allies liberating the people from all forms of exploitation and oppression.

Putting an end to **British imperialism** – the exercise of monopoly capitalist exploitation and power in other parts of the world – is the biggest contribution we can make to international liberation and socialism.

A **Communist Party** that exercises mass influence will be essential if Britain is to take the road to socialism in practice, through political class struggle.

## what we stand for

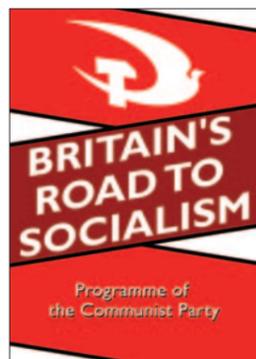
The aim of the Communist Party is to achieve a socialist Britain in which the means of production, distribution and exchange will be socially owned and utilised in a planned way for the benefit of all.

This necessitates a revolutionary transformation of society, ending the existing capitalist system of exploitation and replacing it with a socialist society in which each will contribute according to ability and receive according to work done.

Socialist society creates the conditions for the advance to a fully communist form of society in which each will receive according to need.

Only a socialist Britain co-operating with all other peoples of the world in close, friendly, free and equal association will be able to develop and plan the use of all Britain's material, productive and scientific resources, where every citizen will be guaranteed security, the right to work and leisure, a steadily rising standard of living, full democratic rights, and equal opportunity to enjoy a full and happy life.

### Communist Party Aims and Constitution



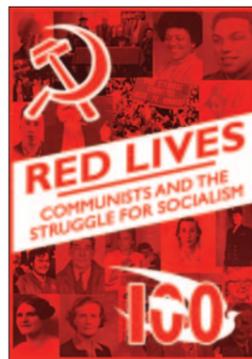
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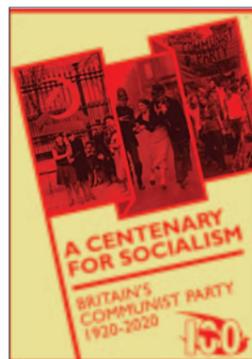
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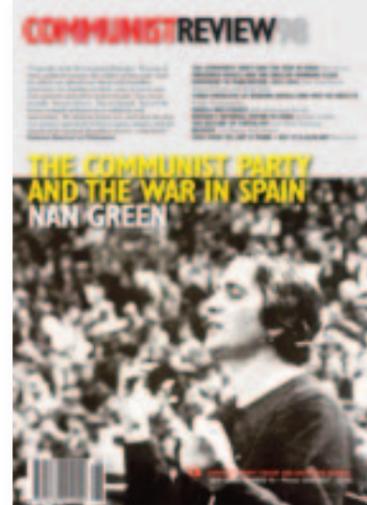


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