

# Solidarity

## OUR HOMES OUR WAY



The Labour government is continuing its campaign to privatise council housing. Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott is now proposing that council housing ownership should be handed over to Arms Length Management Organisations (ALMOs). Rents and tenancy agreements would no longer be set by the council. This complete privatisation is what campaigners have been arguing that ALMOs were always about.

For the majority of people living in council housing, their need for a decent home and community continues to be overlooked by the government. Social housing only directly benefits working class people and so is not a political priority. Yet a very high percentage of council residents of working age contribute to the economy through their labour and still they continuously see their rights for

decent homes disregarded.

It is obvious that the last 20 years of under investment has led to a backlog of repairs and renovations. Failure to build new social housing has created homelessness and forced people into the private sector where rents are much higher. In addition, in the past few years £13 billion from council tenants' rent has been si-

phoned off to finance housing benefits. This is the poor paying for the poorest.

As anarchists we believe decent housing for all is a basic human right and we should not have to be going cap in hand for what is due to us. Under the current system we will have to be creative and struggle in solidarity to find new ways in order to improve our living standards.

Direct action is one way that can bring about change for those affected by substandard housing and unsociable communities. It means getting directly involved: organising or joining tenants and residents meetings. As tenants we need to collectively push forward our own demands.

### Meeting disrupted

Haringey tenants and other local residents recently disrupted a Council meeting when the Labour council wouldn't listen to their delegation. They were angry because the council would not hold a full ballot on the future ownership and management of council homes. Protesters inside the Wood Green Civic Centre held up council's procedures for 40 minutes by demanding they be given the right to have their voice heard. The protesters left peacefully when the Police arrived, called by the Council.

The campaign is starting to have an effect. Recently at the Labour Party Conference government housing policy was overwhelming rejected by delegates in favour of stock retention and direct investment in council housing. But we can't sit back and wait for politicians, we need to organise ourselves. One option that we need to pursue is the 'rent strike', but this would take strong determination, good organisation and solidarity.

Produced by the North & East London local group of the anarcho-syndicalist Solidarity Federation.

We seek to replace capitalism with a stateless society based on the principle of from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs. We support working class struggles towards these ends. We recognise that not all oppression is economic, but can be based on gender, race, sexuality, or anything our rulers find useful.

Our activities are based on Direct Action — action by workers ourselves not through intermediaries like politicians and union officials. Our decisions are made through participation of the membership. We welcome anyone who agrees with our aims and principles. We also welcome comments on this newsletter, and donations towards the cost of future issues (cheques payable to NELSF). See Page 3 for contact details

# Solidarity

for anarcho-syndicalism

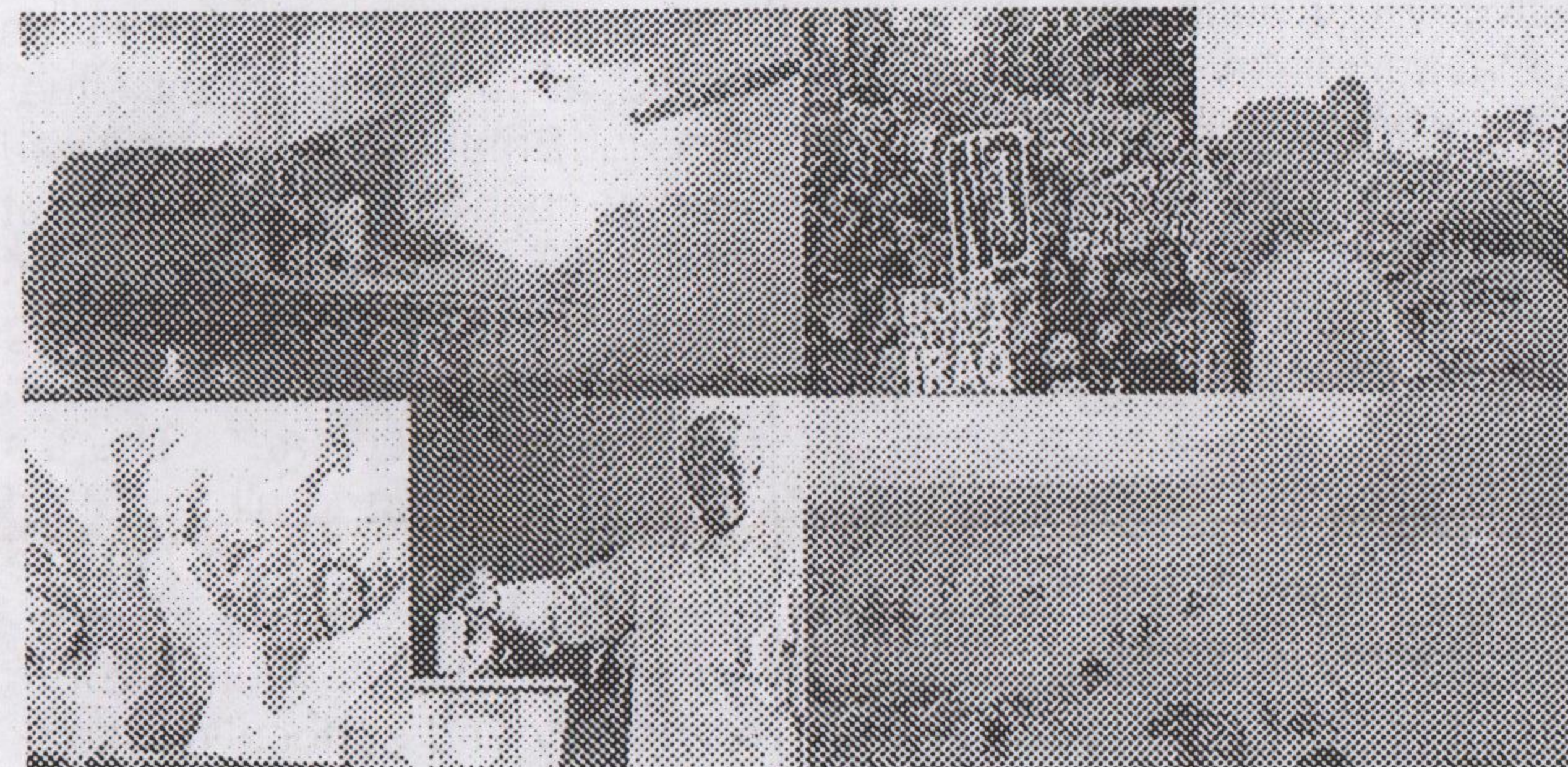
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## Meet the New World - Same as the Old World



The slogan of the European Social Forum, held in London in October, is "Another world is possible". It is supposed to be a kind of "anti-G8 summit" where people involved in radical movements in different countries get together and talk about moving forward. We'd question just how radical it really is.

For a start, Ken Livingstone, Workers' Party are involved Mayor of London, is sponsoring through front organisations like the ESF to the tune of £400,000. *Globalise Resistance*. They This state support supposedly hope to try and recruit people doesn't compromise the ESF, attracted to the wider anti-even though Ken rejoined the capitalist movements which the Labour Party this year, at the ESF claims to represent. height of the scandal over the distortion of intelligence to concoct a case for invading Iraq.

Political parties are not supposed to participate in the ESF, but they have found ways to get round it. Labour Party activists mostly run the trades unions who have sorted out the organisation of the ESF. Other political parties such as the Socialist For example, the Stop the War

Coalition was used as a recruiting ground for "Respect: the Unity Coalition" by the SWP, channelling energy into electoral campaigning which reduces people to canvassers and voters. Not only did it divide the anti-war movement (first between those who are in favour of electoral politics and those who are not, then between those who support Respect and those who support other political parties); it also diverted energy and resources away from the campaign.

This shows the limitations of "revolutionary" politics as advocated by the "left" who see this kind of activity as taking the campaign to a "higher" level. Their aim is to take people who participate in struggles and turn them into people who "intervene" in them.

Single-issue campaigns may have limited objectives, but they can embrace a range of activities and methods of organisation. Although these parties supposedly have broader political agendas they actually limit their political horizons by reduction of people's involvement. Their method is to limit the objectives and activities of any campaign, control decision-making, and to concentrate on high-profile activities such as lobbies and demonstrations. They aim to turn these events into party rallies through selection of speakers, distribution of "branded" placards and the at-

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## Industrial strategy

Activists from up and down the country met in September to discuss a new direction for anarcho-syndicalist industrial strategy (see *Solidarity* 4). Discussion focused on the issue of whether we should remain members of existing unions or form independent unions.

A comrade who has lived in Spain described the work of the militant anarcho-syndicalist union the CNT. SF members talked about the different situation in Britain where "political" unions such as the CNT do not exist. SF members agreed that there was little point in setting up new TUC affiliated unions in unorganised sectors. There's no point in going to all the effort of organising at work only to see union full-timers come in afterwards to make us submit to bureaucracy and suffocating legalism.

### Workers' Assemblies

The conference discussed how mass assemblies need to be established in already unionised workplaces. These should be the bodies that control our union activity. Alongside mass assemblies and militancy we also need an anarcho-syndicalist base in each industrial sector we are active in, to spread our industrial and political ideas among the workers.

North and East London Solidarity Federation members are involved in activism in local government, teaching, the voluntary sector and the London Underground. Our local group works to support industrial struggle and new members are always welcome.

## Ken's new best friend

Ken got to invite his new best friend, a Muslim cleric by the name of al-Qaradawi, to the ESF. This is a man who Ken portrayed as a moderate because he says Muslims shouldn't kill people for having gay sex... because that undermines the authority of the state. al-Qaradawi actually believes states should execute them!

Fortunately this bigot can't attend, but ESF is supposed to oppose homophobia. Ken's motive for inviting this man is to maintain links between the Muslim community and the Labour Party which alienated them by attacking Afghanistan and Iraq. ESF's principles are being compromised to benefit the Labour Party.

### New World...

(Continued from page 1)

tendance of hitherto unseen party members to sell papers. Limiting the scope of campaigns in this way leaves out the politics, and prevents campaigns developing beyond single-issue consciousness.

### Beyond single issues

However, there is a desire by many people to gain a deeper political understanding and go beyond single-issue campaigning. This is what the left exploits to falsely pose itself as an alternative, presenting single-issue politics as something that can only be overcome through joining their party. The kind of low-profile, patient organisation and propaganda work among working class people necessary to win an industrial dispute or a mass campaign are not on their agenda, indeed this is seen as a threat

and will be opposed and obstructed in an attempt to maintain party control.

### How we organise

We try to politicise struggles by rejecting representation and adopting collective decision-making and direct action. We seek to place each issue in the context of the wider struggle against capitalism and the state, thus creating the basis for a revolutionary consciousness. We want to use this to build a different kind of revolutionary organisation which can take struggles further. We also believe that political issues should be addressed through direct action by working people. We want people to remain involved in struggles, and to organise in a way in which decision-making remains collective. We reject the idea of institutionalised leadership - initiative must remain with those involved in a struggle.

## "Red" Ken backs war criminal

Ken Livingstone has given his backing for war criminal Tony Blair. On 6<sup>th</sup> June of this year Ken told the *Observer* newspaper that any attempt by the Labour Party to get rid of Tony Blair would be a "disaster" for the party.

The Mayor is one of the leading backers of the European Social Forum (ESF). The fact that the ESF organisers have chosen to accept the support of Livingstone is another sign that the "left" is never going to change its soft attitude to the Labour Party. We need to organise a grass roots movement based on direct democracy and direct action against the Labour government.

Blair supported the invasion of Iraq knowing full well that its result would be gross human rights abuses against Iraqi civilians. Before 2003 US abuses in Afghanistan and Guantanamo Bay were well known. It was perfectly clear that the US would behave the same way in Iraq.

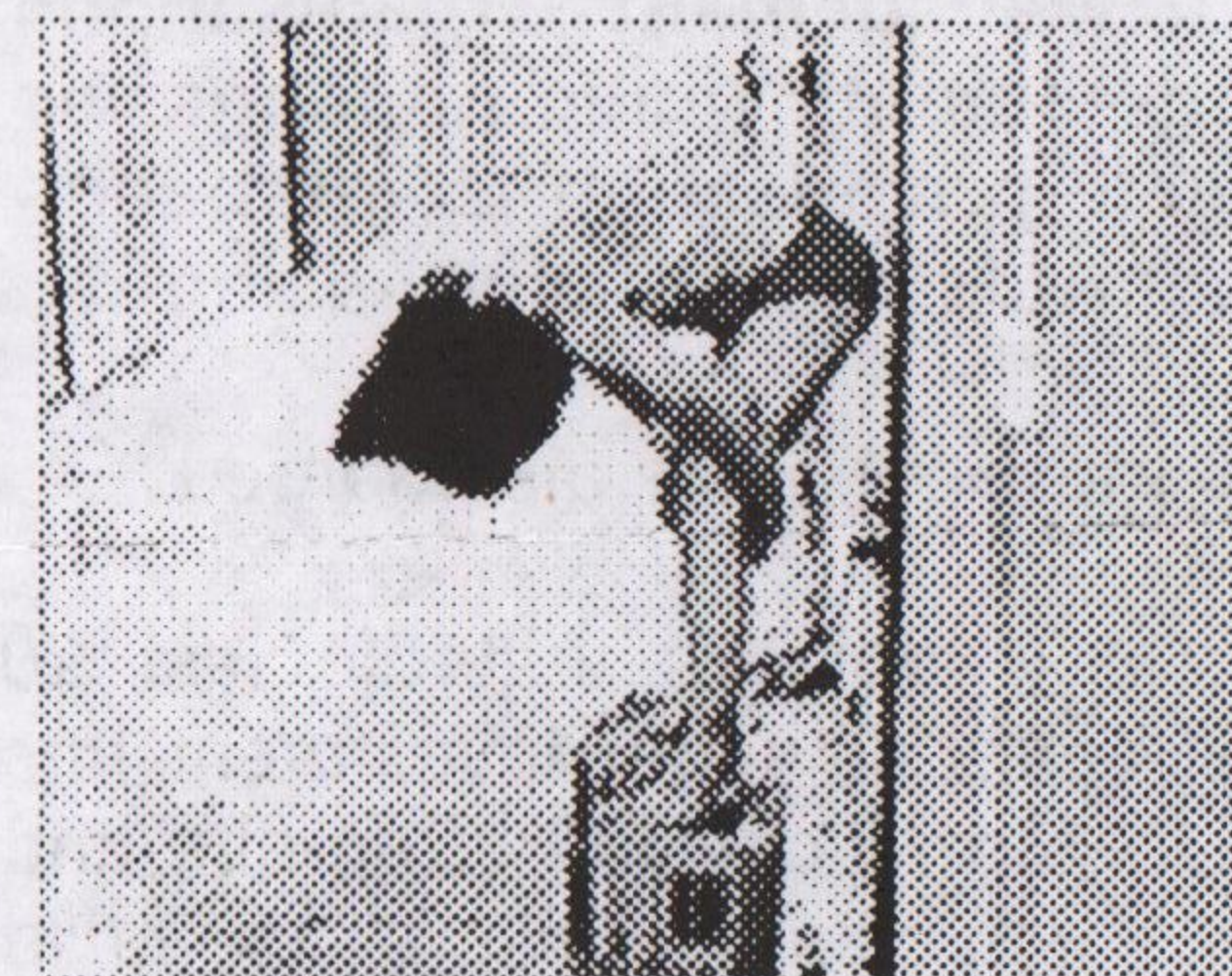
In Iraq Labour is supporting barbarism. Only a very few pictures of torture in Abu Ghraib prison have actually been released. 1,800 other pictures of abuse were shown to US senators in a private viewing. Senators spoke publicly about these pictures, which included women photographed naked and forced homosexual acts (*Guardian* 13/05/04).

### Abuse

Investigative journalist Seymour Hersh (who first broke the story of the My Lai massacre in Vietnam) made further revelations to the American Civil Liberties Union in July. He described videos he had seen of US soldiers raping teenage Iraqi boys (*Al-Jazeera.Net* 01/08/04). The leaked Taguba US military report, which can be accessed

via the Amnesty International website, acknowledges the existence of a film showing a US serviceman raping an Iraqi woman.

A letter smuggled from Abu Ghraib by a woman detainee in December 2003 to a group of Iraqi female lawyers claimed that US guards had been raping women prisoners and several were pregnant as a result. The letter urged the resistance to bomb the prison to kill the women and end their



abuse (*Guardian* 20/05/04). Not only is Blair colluding in torture, but also this collusion is part of a racist onslaught of the most frightening kind. Britain has its own Guantanamo Bay

in Belmarsh Prison. The law that allows the indefinite detention of "terrorist suspects" here applies only to foreigners, not British citizens. On the Tube immigration officers and police are allowed to stop and interrogate passengers on the basis of how "foreign" they seem. When the *Evening Standard* exposed this on 9<sup>th</sup> August the Home Office defended the practice.

### Attack on human rights

Labour is carrying out a racist attack on human rights. We have to challenge the "left's" toleration of careerists like Ken Livingstone. Ken and his cronies are prepared to go along with all the atrocities of the Labour government and its Neo-Conservative allies in the US.

Supporters of Blair should not be at the ESF. When they hold public events, we have to be inside protesting. They must be isolated and excluded from our campaigns. We also need to organise within the trades unions to break their links with the Labour Party.

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