

# Housing

## The Case for Intergenerational Solidarity

**Housing is in desperate need of a response emphasising inter-generational solidarity. Young people cannot afford to buy and private rents have become extortionate, while social housing is under attack. Retired workers are often facing the "bedroom tax", while the government proposes to charge a "market rent" for households in social housing who have reasonable occupational pensions. Revenge evictions from rented accommodation have become commonplace.**

### Housing Crisis

There are three motions on housing on the agenda of this year's TUC Congress. These argue that less than half the homes we need are being built. As a result the UK faces an accumulating shortfall of over 100,000 homes a year. Decades of underinvestment in housing have led to 1.5 million fewer social and affordable homes for rent. This has pushed up rents and house prices and squeezed the incomes of citizens.

Cuts in housing benefit, particularly for young people, and rising rents have left thousands at more at risk of rent arrears, evictions and homelessness, causing financial hardship to those affected. A recent survey of over 2,000 Usdaw members identified housing as one of the biggest single costs contributing to the cost of living crisis.

Many workers, young people and families alike, cannot afford to buy homes and there is a severe shortage of rented social housing. This has left many people with no option but to turn to the private rented sector and rents for private lets have soared as a result. The bedroom tax is plunging many households into rent arrears and making it difficult for people to find accommodation.

### **The UNISON motion to the TUC Congress calls for a campaign:**

- + for a public house building programme, which will create homes, jobs and lower housing costs
- + for an end to the right to buy across the whole of the UK in line with Scotland.
- + for stronger rent controls and better regulation of the private rented sector to drive up standards
- + to highlight the effects of welfare reforms on vulnerable people and young workers.

### Right to Buy

Shelter estimates there are more than 1.8 million households on waiting lists and that many families' lives are being blighted because of a severe shortage of high quality social housing. Yet, government policies such as the right to buy have shrunk the social housing stock; 17 per cent of families live in social housing today compared with 31 per cent when the policy was introduced in 1980. A consequence of the policy is that a third of properties sold end up with buy-to-let landlords, with private tenants paying higher rents.

The government's housing and financial policies have led to the development of 'buy to let' as the main source of private rented housing in the UK. Government plans to extend the right to buy to housing association tenants in England, will further reduce social housing stock. Meanwhile, the unfair bedroom tax is plunging many households into rent arrears and making it difficult for people to find accommodation. Housing associations will not be able to replace the homes being sold off under right to buy, with many associations saying they will not replace any at all.



**Anti- eviction protest, see page 2**

# Revenge Evictions

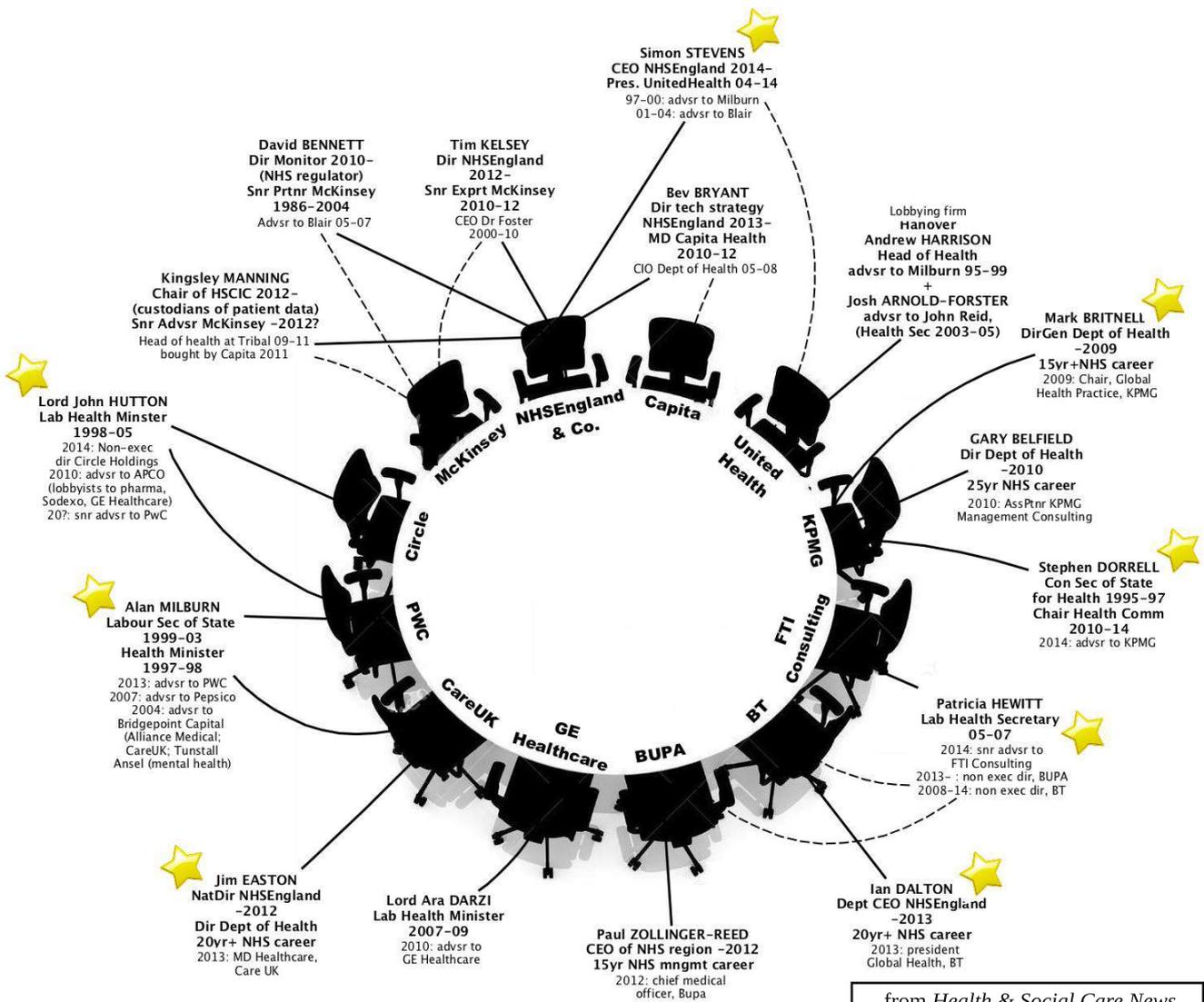
A single mother has declared a 'small victory' after bailiffs attempting to evict her were repelled when campaigners stood firm outside her house.

The bailiffs, accompanied by a locksmith, turned up to Jale Avcil's home of ten years in Elphinstone Road, Walthamstow, but around 30 members of the Waltham Forest UNITE Community Branch, Waltham Forest Trades Council and local housing action campaigns, as well as friends and neighbours stood by to prevent the bailiffs from entering the property.

Cllr. Gerry Lyons, an elected member of the local council, was among the protesters as part of his membership of UNITE Community Waltham Forest. "The battle may be won but the war is not yet over", he said. "There will be many more evictions as landlords seek to collect higher rents. With the selling off of council houses under right to buy we have seen many cases of landlords putting their house up for market to evict the tenant, only to get someone else in on a higher rent."



# The Influence of Private Finance in the NHS



from Health & Social Care News  
National Pensioners Convention  
Health & Social Care Working Party

## More on Mahdi Abu Dheeb: News from Amnesty

The ongoing incarceration of Mahdi Abu Dheeb, imprisoned by the Bahraini regime for involvement in the reform struggles of Spring 2011, has taken a vicious new turn. On 26th August Amnesty International issued an appeal for urgent action in response to worsening victimisation of the leader of the Bahrain Teachers Association (BTA).

Amnesty reports:

*"Prisoner of conscience Mahdi 'Issa Mahdi Abu Dheeb has been denied his medication for hypertension and diabetes since March. He has also been denied supportive shoes which his doctor says are needed to help alleviate his back pain, which he has suffered from since his torture in 2011."*



### Behind the Rhetoric

The Amnesty text provides further details of regime abuse and is consistent with the broader account of state lawlessness in Bahrain, *Behind the Rhetoric*, published earlier this year by the human rights group. Its most recent report outlines the background to present developments in the treatment of both Mahdi and the BTA as a whole.

Amnesty's call for supporters to lobby the Bahrain authorities urging provision of needed medication, together with the immediate and unconditional release of Mahdi, should be supported. Amnesty's latest intervention can help raise awareness of the nature of the regime. And if conceded, the group's demands would denote significant regime concessions, however much the retreat was spun as magnanimity.

UCU Congress called for a union led inquiry into the Bahrain regime and the British contribution to the situation there. Such an inquiry will be a step toward building support for and developing solidarity with independent trade unions and democratisation movements in Bahrain and in the Gulf region more widely. Unavoidably it will confront, publicly, the British facilitated state smashing of the BTA.

Both the initial suppression of the union in 2011 and continuing measures against its leaders are the actions of a regime recently described by British Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond as "*a very friendly country that is moving in the right direction.*" Hammond cannot be allowed to have the last word.

Links to the *Amnesty International* material mentioned in the article can be found here:  
[www.ucu-retired-london.org.uk/amnesty.html](http://www.ucu-retired-london.org.uk/amnesty.html)



On 29th November, a huge protest will be taking place in London on the eve of the crucial Paris climate talks.

Join us - Let's show international solidarity in the fight for climate justice!

35 members and friends of the UCU London Retired Members Branch sent the following letter to the *Guardian* which, however, declined to print it. It was eventually printed in the *Camden New Journal*

### **Solidarity With Refugees**

*Thousand upon thousand of refugees will die horribly this year in their attempt to escape persecution and civil war (Up to 50 refugees dead in lorry in Austria, p37, Guardian, 29.08.15). Yet Britain is taking a smaller percentage of refugees than almost any other European country. Between 1933-1939, Britain, its population a mere 45m, accepted 70-80,000 refugees escaping Nazism (and that was not nearly enough).*

*We do not want to be compromised by this Government's jingoism.*

*We do not want to be bystanders as thousands of people unnecessarily die.*

*Open the doors to those in the Calais jungle.*

*We demand of this Government that refugees should be welcome here.*

**The National Pensioners Convention will use UN Older People's Day on 1st October to highlight the need for a living state pension.**

Raising the state pension to 70% of the living wage (outside London) will give today's and tomorrow's pensioners a better income in retirement, according to new research from the NPC. Such a move would give older people a basic state pension of around £10,000 a year compared to the £6029 they get currently for a full pension.

Given that many older women don't even get that, the move would improve the lives of millions of older people and establish the idea of a living pension for all. The demand for a campaign to improve the state pension is also being debated at this year's TUC conference.

Ron Douglas, NPC president said:  
*"Decent occupational pensions are in decline and autoenrolment is unlikely to deliver huge payouts for future retirees, which is why the need for a higher state pension becomes increasingly important, not only for today's pensioners, but for future generations as well."*

# Older People's Day

## A living state pension for all generations

Recently there has been a suggestion that older people have escaped the austerity measures at the expense of the younger generation. Not only is this idea divisive, but it is also factually incorrect. In reality, one of the biggest issues facing all generations is the need for a decent state pension in retirement.

### What is the current situation?

- The UK state pension is just £115.95 a week and is ranked 36th out of 37 OECD countries
- Over 6m older people live on less than £10,500 a year and 1.9m are living below the official poverty line
- The poorest pensioners tend to be women, single people and the over 80s
- The new state pension that comes into force in April 2016 will force future pensioners to pay more, work longer and get less

### What can be done?

- Both today's pensioners and future pensioners need a state pension that can take them out of poverty and rise each year in line with the real costs of living
- A living state pension of £192 a week / £10,000 a year would start to give people dignity and financial security in retirement
- There is plenty of money in the UK pension system, but it currently is unfairly distributed towards the better off. This must change



NPC leaflet for Older People's Day

**MPs are discussing the trade union bill, which threatens the basic right to strike.**

**Employers will be able to break strikes by bringing in agency workers to cover for strikers. The bill proposes huge restrictions on peaceful picketing and protests. Striking workers will have to tell their employer all their plans – including what they will post on Facebook - two weeks before they strike.**



### Boycott the National Gallery

Support the PCS strike against privatisation and anti-union victimisation.



### LONDON RETIRED MEMBERS BRANCH

**Next Branch Meeting November 12th at 2pm**  
 at the UCU Offices in Carlow Street NW1 7LH,  
 nearest tube Mornington Crescent.

More details and updates on all the stories in this newsletter can be found on our website :

[www.ucu-retired-london.org.uk](http://www.ucu-retired-london.org.uk)

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