

**Submission
No 158**

INQUIRY INTO SOCIAL, PUBLIC AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Organisation: Communist Party Australia - Port Jackson Branch

Date received: 28/02/2014



CPA -PORT JACKSON BRANCH Port Jackson Branch

SELECT COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL, PUBLIC AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING

NSW Parliament

Introduction:

The Communist Party of Australia Port Jackson Branch welcomes this opportunity to submit its suggestions on social, public, and affordable housing as shelter as this need is peoples' most important need after food. The present situation in NSW is not acceptable as we face a waiting list of 55,000 which will take more than 15 years to clear and a maintenance system that allows public housing tenants to live in substandard conditions. The NSW auditor general has found that the Department is over \$330 million behind in its maintenance needs.

The only solution to these problems lie with the Government not with the private sector and not with Private Public Partnerships (PPP).

The need for real action on housing can be seen from the sources from as far removed as Boris Johnson, our own history of public housing, and the UN.

We draw your attention to the comments of Boris Johnson the well-known Tory Mayor of London:

angered colleagues by saying he would not tolerate housing changes that led to "Kosovo-style social cleansing" of London. He told BBC Radio London:

On my watch, you are not going to see thousands of families evicted from the place where they have been living and have put down roots... The last thing we want to have in our city is a situation such as Paris, where the less well-off are pushed out to the suburbs.

The politics of affordable housing in London May 17 2011 Economist

In 1944 the Commonwealth Housing Commission said in its report on housing 'We consider that a dwelling of good standard and equipment is not only the need but the right of every citizen...'

The right to live in affordable housing is enshrined in the United Nation's Declaration of Human Rights which says in Article 25:

Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services...

Housing all Australians

The Communist Party of Australia supports a national, publicly funded housing program, with rents based on a set percentage of the tenant's income. Without accommodation people are deprived of their human right to shelter.

We believe government has a responsibility to provide housing for ordinary families and individuals.

The housing should be solid, secure and have the fittings for modern 21st Century life eg plumbing, heating and connections to phone and internet lines. Maintenance of the housing and measures to encourage residents to take pride in their housing should be undertaken to make housing estates proud and happy communities.

Our Documents state:

Public housing, which provided rental accommodation for a substantial section of working people, also reduced the pool of tenants to be exploited by landlords. Today, public housing no longer serves either of these purposes. Restoration of substantial public housing would reduce rents generally and provide a buffer against loss of jobs through retrenchment and sickness for many lower paid workers. Party program p17

The Present Situation

Over the last 30 years both State and Federal Governments have sought to diminish and do away with public housing following a neo liberal agenda. The first step in this process was to do away with Commonwealth Housing Agreement and put the whole responsibility onto the states. The states in their turn have allowed what is called 'demolition by neglect'. Maintenance has been deliberately withheld and many estates are looking the worse for wear.

The Government has taken on the role of only being engaged in welfare housing rather than housing itself. Hence the definition of who is to be housed has been narrowed down to the frail, the sick, the dysfunctional and the addicted. In this climate housing estates are a byword for violence and social problems which provides Governments with a ready excuse for withdrawing from housing altogether. Public Housing is diminishing all over the country due to these policies.

The private housing sector has benefited by state schemes which enables those most in need to use the private rental market by a combination of subsidies and part payment to gain housing. These schemes lead to housing stress. The CPA -PORT JACKSON BRANCH opposes such schemes and agitates for fully funded public housing.

Housing affordability has fallen to its lowest level ever, yet over the past decade more than \$3 billion was taken out of public housing.

More than 176,000 households are on waiting lists for public housing in Australia. It is estimated that by 2020, one million Australians will be suffering from housing stress.

CPA -PORT JACKSON BRANCH policies

1. The CPA -PORT JACKSON BRANCH recognises Public Housing as the means to house all Australians. This would bring about jobs in the housing sector both in building, and other sectors. These housing schemes would be also increase the public sector jobs.
2. The CPA -PORT JACKSON BRANCH does not agree in dividing public housing up into social housing, community housing but will work for an integrated housing scheme where all those on incomes of \$80,000 or lower are eligible for public housing. This will provide a mix of people and not concentrate people in pockets of disadvantage.
3. Presently the Governments – Commonwealth and State spend 6 times on private housing what it spends on public housing; the CPA -PORT JACKSON BRANCH believes this trend should be reversed. The money spent on private housing is money wasted and causes the problems with housing we have today.
4. The CPA -PORT JACKSON BRANCH believes that the promotion of private housing encourages a class approach to housing where the rich get accommodation while those on low incomes get shabby or even precarious shelter. We oppose all schemes that favour landlords and private housing for the poor.

5. The CPA -PORT JACKSON BRANCH believes in bringing the cost of housing down and making it more affordable by concentrating all housing subsidies and benefits into subsidised housing. This process will reverse the ever upwards trend in the cost of housing. There are few houses and even apartments in Sydney which are under \$750,000, even what were formerly moderate costing housing suburbs have become areas where the mean price of houses is around \$1 million. The committee has to look at the whole spectrum of housing from private housing to homelessness and everything in between. By just concentrating on social and affordable housing the chance of real solutions to the problems faced by the citizens of NSW will not be addressed. The CPA -PORT JACKSON BRANCH believes its policies will eliminate homelessness and address the issue of indigenous housing. Australians living in housing stress in 21st Century is unacceptable.
6. NSW along with all Australian states is reporting chronic shortages in Public Housing with waiting lists going on for years. We believe it is the responsibility of the Commonwealth Government to engage in more funding for subsidised housing Australians and expect the other levels of to do the same.
7. The CPA -PORT JACKSON BRANCH urges the NSW Government to increase its efforts to get the state of maintenance up to scratch rather the woeful state it is in at present. All public housing maintenance and upkeep should be to a level that the tenants are in secure and friendly places.
8. Large scale public housing will drive down housing cost making it more affordable and will tackle homelessness. Support and welfare services for those who cannot cope with housing has to be provided to ensure that those who are vulnerable are catered for as well as support services for all in subsidised housing should also be provided.

Immediate steps to alleviate the housing shortage

1. Tax arrangements that allow negative gearing to be used to build the numbers of private rental properties should cease, instead investment of funds from super and other sources be encouraged into the affordable housing sector.
2. All housing supplied by state should be called subsidised housing instead of Housing Commission, Public Housing etc, so as to do away from the stigma of public housing estates. Broaden the range of people in such housing instead of concentrating fragile and socially disturbed people on isolated estates which is a recipe for social problems and exacerbating our state's social problems.
3. We further encourage the Government to stop first home owners buyers schemes which is simply a flow of money into the coffers of Real Estate and Developers' Companies.
4. Those wishing to become private home owners could start with living in subsidised housing, while they gather the resources necessary for home ownership.
5. Housing stress affects 1 in 5 in NSW, the committee should address this issue. Housing stress happens when over 30% of income goes on accommodation. By pursuing neo liberal policies this amount stress can only get worse.

Conclusion

There is no material impediment to Australia adopting once again a large scale commitment to public housing only the Government's priorities and its neo liberal agenda. The Government's commitment to the military or funding big business are some of the areas where resources can be extracted to house all Australians.