

Thousands march in London against housing crisis, but capitalist politicians offer no way forward

Ioan Petrescu and reporters
20 April 2026

Several thousand people marched through central London on Saturday in a national housing demonstration organised by the London Renters Union (LRU) and allied campaign groups. Demonstrators assembled in Soho Square Gardens and marched along Oxford Street to Berkeley Square, demanding rent controls and council housing.

Workers attending the rally gave voice to widespread anger over the housing affordability crisis. Between 40 and 50 percent of all working age adults across the UK are struggling to meet housing costs or falling behind on payments.

Fowzia, a member of Housing Action Southwark, said families were facing impossible choices while councils and landlords washed their hands of responsibility: “If the landlord, for example, increased rent by about £2,000,” the council’s response was simply, ““Oh, just pay it”. There is no help whatsoever.” She said of tenants, “most of their income goes to rent,” adding, “The other day I saw a nurse [who is] working at the NHS... and she’s on food banks. How much worse can it get?”

The situation was especially dire for families placed in temporary accommodation. She described how one family had been sent miles from their workplace and schools, forcing them to make exhausting journeys, “One of the children, their hair started falling out because of the stress... When they say temporary accommodation, it’s not temporary when you’re there for three years, seven years, nine years.”

She denounced the demolition of social housing for profit and the fraud of “affordable rent” being advertised as part of new private housing developments, saying bluntly, “It’s not affordable. It’s not like social rent.”

Mrs Smith from Bromley described the misery of “shared ownership,” a scheme long touted by

governments and housing associations as a route to security. It involves part-paying rent and part-paying a mortgage. She explained it has meant years of overwork and financial ruin, “I work full-time and the salary I get is not enough. I have to work two jobs.” Her rent is £1,200 a month and her mortgage £1,150. “That’s all my salary gone literally on those two things.”

Joe, who had travelled to London from the Sheffield Tenants’ Union, said Britain faces “a major crisis of affordability in housing”. He denounced the fact that “people are using homes as investment portfolios.” Until recently, around 30 percent of his income went on rent. Fred, who had travelled with him, said that Britain had become “a country of landlords,” and that “there does need to be a more fundamental change in the system.” Joe added that “the whole economy is hooked on high housing [prices].”

Workers are facing an economic order in which housing has been subordinated to speculation, finance and private profit. A statement issued by the Socialist Equality Party, “The socialist answer to the housing crisis in Britain”, was distributed by SEP members, with some attendees asking for multiple copies to distribute in their area.

The statement explained: “Housing has been transformed over the past 45 years into a speculative arena for the enrichment of the banks and major institutional and private investors”. It linked this to the domination of the oligarchy over every aspect of life, explaining: “The housing affordability crisis testifies to the parasitism and non-productive nature of modern capitalism. The UK has 156 billionaires, with the 50 richest families owning more wealth than 34 million people. Society can no longer afford the rich! The wealth of the billionaires must be confiscated and directed to meet urgent social needs.”

The speakers invited by the Renter's Union all served to obscure this fact.

When Labour MP Apsana Begum arrived onstage, she was met with loud booing and shouts of "When are you leaving Labour?" She presented the government's housing policy, including a ban on Section 21 no-fault evictions and prohibition of blanket discrimination against tenants with children or on benefits, as proof of "progress" and that pressure politics works.

But Begum was silent on Labour's expanded and reworked Section 8 regime, under which landlords can invoke formal repossession on grounds that even the government describes as "clearer and expanded". The courts have been handed a streamlined digital possession process and extra capacity to move cases through faster.

Under reactionary new Ground 7B regulations, entire households can be evicted with only two weeks' notice if even one tenant is deemed to have "no right to rent" under immigration law. The result is not the curbing of landlord power, but its legal reorganisation into a more codified, efficient and in some cases broader eviction machinery.

The Shelter charity reports that since Labour was elected more than 30,700 Section 21 claims were issued and more than 15,000 households were removed by bailiffs under the no-fault procedure, while tenant groups have reported a last-minute surge of landlords trying to push through evictions before the May 1, 2026 deadline.

Green Party politicians were also featured speakers. London Assembly Member from Hackney, Zoë Garbett, called for rent controls and more social housing. She attacked Labour's record and said elected Greens would pressure the government to give local authorities more funds for housing.

Green MP for Brighton Pavilion Siân Berry used her speech to promote a parliamentary petition addressed to Chancellor Rachel Reeves. It calls for billions in additional spending so that councils can buy back homes that were privatised under Thatcher's Right to Buy scheme. As if to underline the futility of such appeals, Reeves has announced in recent days that higher military spending targets will mean significant public spending cuts.

Your Party leader Jeremy Corbyn who was billed as a keynote speaker was a no-show. A letter to Your Party members on April 15 claimed to stand "firmly behind the National Housing Demonstration in London this Saturday", promising "more details on how members and supporters can take part". But there was no Your Party

delegation visible at the rally. Zarah Sultana MP was its only speaker, lamenting that "there is always money for war" while her practical demands amounted to a ban on landlord MPs, a national landlord register, landlord licensing, and vague demands for public housebuilding and "rent controls now."

These reformist palliatives would barely scratch the surface of the housing crisis. Any genuine expansion of public housing means a political struggle to break the grip of the capitalist oligarchy over society.

LRU speaker Joshua Virasami proclaimed that "rent controls is a demand whose time is coming" and called for rents to be capped to a third (!) of workers' income—a massive burden under conditions where food and fuel prices are spiralling rapidly. EY Forecasting Club warned this week that the US-led war on Iran threatens economic and social disaster. Its chief analyst stated that, "Spiralling energy costs and disruption to supply chains will push the UK to the brink of a technical recession in the middle of this year. Consumers' spending power will be squeezed." It predicted 250,000 more people will be made jobless by mid-2027, pushing unemployment to more than 2.1 million.

LRU speakers reduced the task before renters to more protest stunts, more local campaigns and more demonstrations aimed at pressuring the powers that be. The SEP advanced the only genuine solution at Saturday's rally, stating: "Access to universal and high-quality housing cannot be achieved by tweaking housing legislation or financial regulation; it can only be won through a social and political struggle by the working class against inequality and the capitalist profit system."

Are you involved in the fight against evictions? If you have feedback on this article or want to publicise issues in your neighbourhood, contact the Socialist Equality Party today!



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