

notions of reactionary complicity on the part of the Labour party with that bit on the “most sensitive services”. The best argument that the Council can muster goes something like this: GCC knows it is being manipulated and made to look stupid and cruel by Central Government. They cannot imagine any way out of this. They simply cannot set an illegal budget - that would be ruinous for the City and bring them into disrepute. Thus the whole issue boils down to respect for due process of law. It is a legal issue. While they make the cuts in the most painful of ways, workers are at perfect liberty to squeal exactly what they are told to squeal.

As to the last sentence from Forsyth, well, either inadvertently or not the Council's own propaganda sheet “Glasgow” (April 97) hired a professor, Arthur Midwinter (Dean of the faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Strathclyde University) for the purpose of echoing Forsyth's words. At the end of his screed Professor Arthur tells us that “*Glaswegians can hold neither central (sic) nor local government accountable for the crisis.*”

Consultancy is something of a boom industry in these impoverished times. For a grossly inflated price you can hire ‘professionals’ to say practically anything. The Scottish Office spent £250,000 on an ‘independent’ study into council spending. This was carried out by Coopers & Lybrand and a company called Pieda. This said that Councils were “well funded” and was published on 15/2/97. COSLA, not to be outdone spent some of their meagre budget on an ‘independent study’ on the impact of spending controls on local authorities, which said: “The restriction would result in the loss of 17,000 jobs and £30m in household income.” The people who did the study were just Pieda this time. Pieda is run by the boss of Scottish Enterprise an organisation designed somewhat anachronistically to promote ‘Thatcherism’ in Scotland, which itself competes with local government, the NHS etc for central government funds.

To return to the theme of reactionary complicity, we also have the following series of events. Before the Council turned belly-up, the Parliamentary Labour Party announced some good news to a Scottish Industry Forum meeting—“In a clear attempt to convince voters and money markets that he means business”—it was announced by George Robertson that Labour would be sticking to the Conservative's public spending limits for the next two years. Limits set to control Councils and tinker with the welfare state. There would be no extra cash—so we can expect the same cuts next year and the year after that. That was on the 20th of January to a bunch of Business people. The Local authorities got wind of it and were said to be ‘seething’. Five days later George Robertson came up with a brilliant solution: resurrect the Poll Tax. Press reports (Herald 25/1/97) stated that:

“George Robertson offered to open up Britain's tax records to local authorities chasing people who have dodged the poll tax or council tax payments.”

This was to “soften the blow” of new council budgets and is a tactic even the Tories didn't stoop to. It met with a “warm response” from the largely Labour dominated Local authority leaders, the report went on:

“Indeed they have suggested that an incoming Labour government go further and allow Councils to make deductions from Social Security payments without having to go to court.” Barely concealing his glee, a spokesman for COSLA, Financial Director, Dave Sneller—is quoted by the Herald to have stated that:

“He did not think the labour proposals would be viewed as an infringement of civil liberties or unnecessary... ‘There is over £700m owing and we have to get the money somehow.’ He added that enforcement measures, which would involve changing the law, would be targeted at people who had the money to pay and benefit arrestments would involve taking small amounts of money over a long period.”

So it seems that when it comes to screwing the poor strict adherence to the law is not such a big deal as it is when setting a budget or when people protest. The strange thing is that our Labour-run local authority in Glasgow were handing over their hard fought ‘legal budget’ to a Tory government which had about a month left of its existence. Or maybe they thought that the

party wouldn't win, and we can forgive them for that. It is going to be very tricky next year when there is no Tory government to blame. But think of all that £700m. What will they do with it? Spending it on the poor would be an idea which would unite us all, but of course they have to get it off them first. And then every penny of it will have to go back to central government, those are the rules and they know it. This is Councillor Des McNulty, vice chair of policy and resources, complaining about this and inadvertently revealing how the economic renaissance is coming along, why businesses should (or is that shouldn't) come to big booming Glasgow and ‘create’ some wealth:

“Since April last year Glasgow has been squeezed by Government Gerrymandering into the smallest territorial area of the 4 major Scottish cities...Currently, around £210m a year is collected in Glasgow in the form of non-domestic rates is pooled across Scotland. After handing its revenues over, the city gets back less than £160m. In other words, it suffers a net loss of almost £50m. This is a tax on wealth creation in Glasgow.”

There is little talk of changing the law on that little set-up. It is just simply easier to screw the poor over a long period of time and cut the services they depend upon. In Glasgow 58% of the city's 81,000 school pupils receive clothing grants, while around 43% receive free school meals. In Drumchapel the figures are 84% and 68%, in Easterhouse it is 87.2% and 64.3%. We could trot out endless figures proving the existence of widespread poverty, but the council will continue to ignore these facts in favour of their higher calling of turning the city centre into tastelessland, not that many Councillors want to spend much time in Glasgow themselves when there are free holidays to be had. The Social and Community workers, the Teachers and drug workers who were denounced as a violent mob, went on strike because they know that they cannot hold the meagre fabric of social services together. The Council feels powerless because they know they do not have the people behind them. There is no sign of that faith ever returning, not now. When the ‘junkets’ enquiry finally gets published in September, ‘The City’ will be the venue of another Council initiative: the 67th Congress of the American Society of Travel Agents. And the inquiry looks bad, it's not the left they are after, they were dealt with some time ago. The Evening Times of 22/5/97 had this to say:

“Moves being planned include stripping the Glasgow city party of the right to pick candidates for the 1999 election, a move which has angered and upset many sitting Councillors...Labour's purge is unprecedented in Scotland. The only similar action by the party was against Derek Hatton's Militant Tendency in Liverpool, more than a decade ago.” And then of course we have the Sarwar affair.

Questions of fundamental principle have disappeared in Glasgow and questions of management prevail. It is one way for our Councillors to ignore the horror of their grievous mistake. What they also ignore is that our laws are made for the public good, and, for the public good they may be suspended. Furthermore the public good is not to be considered, if it is purchased at the expense of an individual. Authorities are legitimate if they govern well. Whether they do govern well those who they govern must decide. These unwritten laws reign supreme over our municipal law. Or are we wrong as to the basis of democracy. Perhaps there is no such thing as right. Politics are then an affair of might. A mere struggle for power.

Calculated barbarities inflicted on women and children are usually justified by the necessity of striking terror. Then the only message that needs to be officially declared is that whatever is right. What has happened in ‘Glasgow's renaissance’ is that our Councillors have forgotten that they are public servants: they seek to be masters of the public. Their final appeal for justification to be seen as ‘elected representatives’ is a brave one given the mockery they have made of democracy and given the lesser known facts of the ‘election procedure’ which takes place in the back rooms of Glasgow's Labour Clubs.

This is an eyewitness account of the demonstration from an interview with Variant. Although it was offered, we declined to print the name of the individual.

“The response we got to the official strike on the 6th of March was unusually high, about 98%, but when we got to work on the Monday people were unhappy. I walked straight into a Union meeting and heard about the Council making the Budget decision that morning. People asked their area management if they could use their flexi-time to extend their dinner break to attend, it was not intended to be an all-day thing. The management, in collusion with the Council, banned flexi-time, no reason was given. The government has to give us permission to go on strike, several days notice has to be given, so Monday was an unofficial strike, although Unison did back us.

We went down to the march and heard the loudspeakers at the balcony. We had been aware that people had occupied the Chambers over the weekend and we joined the crowd. As councillors turned up people were trying to engage them in conversation, but they were ducking and diving, avoiding the people. A chant of “shame on you” started. That's the first time I realised that the people were getting active, because the Councillors had fucked off round the corner to get in at another door. I personally got a hold of John Young, he was with a policeman, a top cop, and I told him that people wanted him to go home for one day and not pass the budget. He said: “people like you didn't vote me in.” How does he know what I voted? I said: “Are you a councillor? Do you think people are here for nothing?” And all he said was: “They never elected me, I'm Conservative I don't need to answer anything.”

It was not a picket line at that point, just people standing outside the Chambers looking up at the people inside the building who were asking for help and saying, “we can't let them do this, are you going to just stand there and watch?” By this time, about 12, there were lots of people joining in, just people doing their shopping, kids in prams, just the people of Glasgow. A young boy told us that the Councillors were going in the side. Somebody suggested covering the doors, so they'd have to cross a picket line. We knew they needed about 24 to form a quorum, we were getting information from the inside. We were also told that the if meeting had not started by 2.30 it wouldn't happen today, that intensified people's efforts, we were then a working party.

Some people started charging at the picket line. One guy actually grabbed one of the line and put him on the street, we were attacked about 4 or 5 times (all by guys with suits—business people trying to get in to make money). Now the police were sound throughout and told them that that constituted assault. We became very determined: it was a line of iron because of the numbers. The real motivating thing was all the council vans and private cars all beeping their horns and doing circuits of George Square in support. Then it went on the telly and the numbers increased by about 1,000, you could feel the volume: the telly never brought a single dissenter out, they were all supporters. We had two official strikes and the press coverage was as minimal as possible; we have an unofficial strike and we go live on air - why not for the official strike?

The police were asked to assist people going into the Chambers on numerous occasions. What I seen was a brilliant bit of policing by a young officer. A woman was calling us ‘left-wing activists’, and ‘scum,’ basically. The young policeman escorted her over and asked: “Can this woman get through?” We said: “Nobody is getting through, not before 2.30.” The police said: “You realise it's technically illegal not to let someone through?” We said, “yes”. The boy informed us of the law “technically,” and after this he said: “You realise I'll have to inform my superior officer? The woman said: “Is that all you're going to do!” He said: “Other than forcibly removing everyone—which I'm not prepared to do till I've spoken to my superior officer—that's all I'm going to do.” That's what they're meant to be there for—informing the public.

People waited and the word came round that the meeting had been held in a side room. It must have been a short meeting, the decision was clarified by 2.30, there was no way any announcements were heard and a Tory confirmed that to us, because they declared it an illegal meeting.

I've never seen so many drooping heads. But people went round the front. The people on the balcony said: “We tried to stop them and they've just sold us down the river. The police have said that nobody is going to be charged as long as we give them our names and addresses.” Ten minutes later they started to walk out of the building. The press took over: 6 or 7 protesters were escorted down to the cameras as they came out, but they declined an interview or any comment. Then they started walking down the road with a banner in front of them and we all fell in behind them and started marching round the square—the old defiant Scottish thing.

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