

# Labour Party facing loss of Glasgow City Council

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The Labour Party is in a state of near collapse in Glasgow. The party is considered to be facing defeat by the Scottish National Party (SNP) in local elections on May 3. Across Scotland, the SNP regularly outpolls Labour in opinion polls and currently controls the Scottish government with more than double Labour's tally of seats in the Scottish parliament.

Were Labour to lose its position in the palatial City Chambers, it would be a shattering blow for the party in its traditional heartland in the central belt of Scotland's former industrial areas.

Labour is also expected to lose control of North Lanarkshire, the only other local authority in Scotland it now fully controls.

Labour has run Glasgow City Council (GCC) and its predecessor, Glasgow Corporation, since 1933, almost without interruption. As recently as 2003, it won 69 of 79 council seats in Glasgow, and in 2007 won 45 against 22 for the SNP, following a change in the local election rules to proportional representation.

This month, however, Labour lost its GCC majority, following a series of defections and splits, as the party sought to pass an annual budget outlining spending cuts of £43 million at the cost of around 500 jobs.

This is the third year in succession that funding has been cut.

In 2010, the city lost £33.5 million. Last year, it lost £58.5 million, following cuts imposed by the SNP government in Edinburgh. Glasgow's budget is expected to fall again over the next two years. The SNP had threatened to impose a 5.1 percent cut on GCC if it refused to again freeze council tax costs. Raising council tax is the only means through which local authorities can raise their own funds. In the end, the cut amounted to 3.6 percent.

These successive cuts have to date cost around 2,600

jobs with a consequent disastrous impact on services. Schools, community centres, voluntary organisations and cultural provision have particularly suffered. GCC continues to employ around 20,000 workers. Across Scotland, some 13,100 public sector jobs are reported to have been lost in 2011.

It is a marker of the Labour Party's advanced state of decomposition and right-wing character that the same party that is imposing cuts on Labour-run local authorities, the SNP, is also benefiting politically.

But in addition to the 12.3 percent reduction over all public spending being imposed by the SNP up to 2015, SNP-controlled local authorities are themselves cutting jobs.

In October, 150 workers in Aberdeen were issued with 90 notices of redundancy as the City Council worked through £127 million cuts to 2015. In Dundee, the SNP administration has imposed £3.5 million cuts, following a £16.5 million reduction last year. The savings have been at the expense of music, physical education and special needs teaching across the city. Up to 90 teachers have lost their jobs. Cuts have been somewhat reduced this year because the SNP, resting still on favourable Barnett formula funding from London and hoping to win on May 3, has directed less onerous packages towards the local authorities it controls.

The SNP has been in power in Holyrood since 2007 and is vigorously imposing cuts in alliance with the Cameron government in Westminster. But it can divert attention from its policies by blaming London for every social ill in Scotland.

At the same time, despite being backed by Rupert Murdoch's News International and much of the Scottish financial elite, the SNP can land blows by pointing to the grasping activities of a privileged local

layer around the Labour Party.

For example, in 2011, one of the SNP majority government's first pieces of legislation was a move to weaken the patronage system whereby Labour, solely in Glasgow, operated a double payment system to Labour councillors sitting on the boards of its stand-alone agencies or "arms length external organisations" (ALEOs).

Across Scotland, around 130 ALEOs have been set up. These have generally met with all-party approval as they are a tool to drive up productivity and cut jobs and wages without the local authority directly taking responsibility for the social consequences. Labour's arrangements in Glasgow, however, allowed the Labour leadership clique to manipulate its own councillors.

SNP councillors have also been able to point to Labour's close relations with property developers and land speculators in Glasgow. A number of scandals have blown up around the Commonwealth Games 2014 site in Parkhead and Dalmarnock, working class areas in Glasgow's impoverished East End.

Dalmarnock has been largely razed over the last two decades, at the expense of hundreds of popular tenement homes, local shops, community centres and schools.

A handful of property speculators, close to the Labour Party, appear to have bought blocks of land in Dalmarnock at knock-down prices, no doubt having been made aware of GCC's aspirations for the area.

Once the East End was confirmed as the 2014 Commonwealth Games venue, the speculators cashed in while GCC evicted local shopkeepers, tenants, and homeowners who had lived in the area for decades.

One developer reportedly made a 12,000 percent profit on derelict land held since 1988. Another was alleged to have been given land for free, which was then bought back from him for £1.3 million. According to the BBC, a number of these cases are currently under police investigation.

Under pressure from the scandals and a well-funded and better-organised SNP, the Labour Party is falling apart.

This, rather than any disagreement on principle, is what lies behind the recent formation of "Glasgow First" by six local councillors deselected by the Labour Party as it sought candidates to stand against the SNP in the May 3 elections.

Labour is only standing 45 candidates, all of whom have been selected by the party's central apparatus. It has excluded as many as 20 serving councillors from standing again.

Matters came to a head in February when a number of the deselected councillors voted against Labour's £45 million cuts. The budget came to within two votes of falling, with the party forced to bribe and threaten some of those it had already deselected to win the vote.

One councillor, Anne Marie Millar, told the press that her disabled son's job at a council ALEO, City Building, was threatened as Labour members pressured her to pass the budget.

Labour finally lost its GCC majority last week when another councillor, Shaukat Butt, decided to quit Labour and join Glasgow First. The new group is as politically moribund as the party they have quit. Their manifesto slogan was reported to be "Glasgow first, Glasgow last, Glasgow always."

In contrast with such shenanigans, the SNP has no record in power in Glasgow. A recent SNP conference, held in Glasgow, promised the city clean government and "political renewal".

In fact, the SNP sees control of Glasgow and the 2014 games as a vital boost to its drive to win a vote for Scottish independence, the purpose of which is to cut corporation tax for big business and fill the pockets of SNP backers while accelerating the impoverishment of the entire working class.



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