

# Glasgow City Council workers strike against cuts and poverty wages

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Two groups of Glasgow City Council (GCC) workers struck against poverty-level wages this week. The 130 primary school and nursery janitors are holding a three-day strike in pursuit of payments for heavy lifting and removal of dangerous materials from playgrounds. Since January, workers have been refusing to remove the materials.

Eighteen CCTV operators are also holding a 48-hour strike seeking allowances for their 24/7 monitoring shifts. Both groups of workers are employed by GCC's so-called arms'-length agencies (ALEOs).

The janitors' action follows years during which these workers have been deprived by Cordia—the ALEO set up by the City Council to run support and caring services in the city—of payments made to other groups of workers employed directly by GCC. The Working Context and Demands payment is worth between £500 and £1,000 annually. Similarly, the shift allowances being demanded by the CCTV operators from Community Safety Glasgow (CSG), another ALEO, are paid to other groups of CSG and GCC workers. Shift allowances can amount to £7,500 annually.

The janitors' and CCTV workers' stance expresses the huge tensions building up between the Scottish government, local authorities and their trade union accomplices on the one hand, and hundreds of thousands of local authority workers and the millions dependent on council services on the other.

Another round of spending cuts imposed by the Scottish National Party (SNP) administration on behalf of Tory central government and passed on by both SNP and Labour local authorities is likely to cost as many as 15,000 job losses. They will result in incalculable social misery in towns and cities where services have already suffered years of cuts and restrictions. Over the next two years, up to £1 billion worth of cuts are to be

imposed across Scotland's 32 local authorities, on top of cuts that have slashed 42,000 local authority jobs since 2008.

Glasgow alone intends to cut £133 million from spending through 1,500 job losses, and restrictions to overtime payments, holiday entitlement, and increased demands for "flexibility". GCC's financial crisis was further exposed with the publication by the *Evening Times* of a leaked e-mail earlier this month in which GCC "suggests" that Glasgow charities, which run a host of essential services, could be asked to repay money paid to them by the city's Integrated Grant Fund.

Scotland's other 31 local authorities are also planning brutal cuts. Edinburgh City Council has announced around 2,000 job losses, and Falkirk Council is expected to announce in excess of 400 more. In Argyle and Bute, all the council's secondary school librarians have been made redundant. Dundee City Council is shedding 200 council posts. Cuts will be made to children and family services, domestic waste recycling, roads and street lighting.

Moray Council was considering raising council tax by 18 per cent and ignoring the SNP's council tax freeze. It backed down after Scottish finance minister John Swinney warned them, and all councils, they would simply lose much of their government funding if they refused to comply. Moray has now set a budget and intends to raise the cost of school dinners and music tuition fees this year, and further cuts are being scheduled. Inverclyde Council delayed setting its budget for a month but in the end agreed to £6 million cuts and 50 job losses.

The trade unions have been a vital component in this sustained, year-on-year assault on council workers and service users. The main unions, Unison (which has

10,000 members in GCC alone), GMB, Unite, the EIS teachers union and builders union UCATT have opposed any struggle. The union executives are solely concerned with maintaining their close relations with local authority management and their Labour or SNP leadership.

Every struggle, which could not be entirely avoided, has been left isolated, with workers left to fight on alone, despite the identical threats and challenges faced by tens and hundreds of thousands of workers employed by the same organisations and in the same unions.

One expression of this is that Glasgow's striking janitors picketed the City Chambers twice this week, but on different days from the CCTV workers, who are also Unison members.

Most of the city council's workforce has not even been asked to vote for industrial action of any kind. As late as March 12, Unison's Glasgow branch secretary announced only, with regard to the assault on workers' holidays, "We're now in the process of moving towards a strike ballot". Unison will undoubtedly attempt to close down the janitors' and CCTV workers' disputes before risking any broader dispute.

The GMB union did hold a "consultative ballot" of 1,000 of its members in street cleaning, refuse and parks. Eighty percent of workers voted in a huge turnout, and of these, 95 percent backed industrial action. GMB official Benny Rankin conceded, "There has never been such a level of support for strike action in living memory". Presented with a massive endorsement of industrial action, Rankin demanded GCC reverse its cuts or "we will move to a formal ballot for strike action".

The reality is that neither Unison nor the GMB has the slightest intention of prosecuting a serious struggle in defence of its members. Rather, both are seeking a marginally altered funding package that can be sold to their members as a great victory.

Covering for the unions the pseudo-left led Defend Glasgow Services Campaign is calling for GCC to set a "balanced no-cuts budget". In January, Unison Glasgow and its pseudo-left leaders and supporters called for councils, and indeed the Scottish government, to set budgets in defiance of central government guidelines. This, Unison claimed, "would allow time and space for the building of a national

campaign to win the money required to fully fund jobs and services".

A statement from the pseudo-left Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) seeks to maintain the same illusions in Glasgow's Labour Party administration and the Scottish government. "It's long past time that so-called 'anti-austerity' politicians from Labour and the SNP stood up and stopped playing pass-the-parcel with Tory cuts".

In the event, not a single council set a no-cuts budget.

Council workers should reject the bankrupt policies of the trade unions and their pseudo-left apologists. In opposition to them, they should establish independent workplace committees to take up a genuine campaign against the onslaught of cuts, and against the Scottish government and council leaders who are implementing them.

Such a struggle must be based on uniting workers and service users across local authorities throughout the UK and would seek the support and active involvement of the widest sections of the working class against the austerity policies of the government, Labour and the SNP.



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