Glasgow SNP and Greens vote to cut council workers' pay via "fire and rehire"

Steve James
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Glasgow City Council (GCC) councillors have voted through a new pay framework which will result in 11 percent of the city council's 24,000 non-teaching workforce, including some 1,500 of the lowest paid, facing large pay cuts.

Some workers stand to lose as much as £11,500. Councillors on the City Administration Committee voted by 13 to 9 in favour, with the ruling Scottish National Party (SNP) and Scottish Green Party members both supporting the measure.

Since the August 20 vote, individual workers have been informed of the implications of the new scheme, told whether they fall in green, white or red circle categories. Green circle workers, (63 percent) will get an increase of sorts; white circle workers (26 percent), will stay the same; while 11 percent, 60 percent of whom are women, will lose out after transitional arrangements expire next year.

According to the *Daily Record*, those impacted most include domestic abuse workers, janitors, cleaners, park workers and parking attendants. One male parking attendant said he was informed he was going to lose £3,500 annually. A female colleague stands to lose the same.

Care home staff, low level management and cleansing workers are also facing cuts. Worst hit are said to be domestic abuse advocacy workers with the ASSIST court advocacy service. The *Record* was informed that staff at the service called in sick after being told they stand to lose £11,500 annually.

Hoping to pressure older workers into retirement, GCC has made clear that should workers not accept their new terms, it will "fire and re-hire" them as necessary. GCC has already started legal proceedings under the Trade Union and Labour Relations Act 1992 on collective redundancies.

The new framework is GCC's latest and most brutal response to equal pay claims impacting thousands of, mostly female, city council workers and dating back decades.

Equal pay legislation was first conceded in Britain following a strike in 1968 at Ford's Dagenham car plant. Ford was forced to regrade women workers from "unskilled" to "semi-skilled" as they were doing comparable work to that of their male colleagues.

In the 1980s, competitive tendering legislation was introduced for public sector contracts with women workers in catering and support services most vulnerable to pay cuts. Thousands of women rightly took out pay discrimination cases against local authorities who eventually agreed "single status" agreements to ensure men and women were paid equally for comparable work.

These agreements, however, were generally delivered via "cost neutral" means—requiring that cuts be made elsewhere to pay for the large equality bills racked up over decades by local authorities, who were also being systematically starved of resources by the central government.

Part of the pretext for the regrading exercise in the UK's single largest council (Birmingham) and a trigger for the ongoing strike by bin workers in the city, now in its 20th month, was that the Labour-run council had been bankrupted by an equal pay settlement. Birmingham City Council inflated to £650-£750 million the settlement it was anticipating, then declared a Section 114 bankruptcy. In fact, the real equality payout was only around £250 million, while unelected commissioners imposed post-bankruptcy cuts of £300 million.

Glasgow's local authority, run by an SNP minority administration and propped up by the Greens, is operating from a similar playbook.

In 2007, GCC, then under the Labour Party, introduced a Workforce Pay and Benefits Review (WPBR) to address inequalities. It ended up being declared discriminatory by the Scottish Court of Session in 2017. The SNP took control of GCC the same year, loudly proclaiming their intention to settle the claims.

In 2018, a two-day strike of 8,000 social care and learning support workers, mostly female, drew widespread support for opposing the GCC's continued prevarication. A new regrading operation was set in motion. In 2023, the GCC finally agreed to roughly £770 million in backpay for around 19,000 current and former workers. Eligible workers received payments of an average of £35,000, while regrading continued.

As elsewhere, the equal pay settlement has been made a pretext to increase service costs and reduce the city council workforce, while opening a new revenue stream for the financial oligarchy.

In 2023, it was reported that under a new "sale and leaseback" deal, GCC had sold key public assets to an arm's length "legal entity" previously set up by the council itself—City Property Glasgow Investment LLP (CPGI). This allowed the council to raise cash for the equal pay settlements by CPGI effectively mortgaging such popular institutions such as the Kelvingrove Art Gallery, Kelvin Hall, Glasgow's Museum of Modern Art and two school campuses—Sighthill and Gowanbank.

Under the terms of two equal pay deals, the £770 million raised will cost over £1.5 billion in repayments, apparently brokered by Bermuda based US financier and insurer, Assured Guaranty. As of March this year, the same outfit controlled some $15 billion of debts owned by the privatised and polluting water industry in the UK. Similar deals now account for much of the property formerly owned by GCC.

This entire process has been overseen by trade union officials, with workers largely kept in the dark. Throughout, the GMB, Unison and Unite trade union bureaucracies—all of whom have substantial memberships in GCC—have worked to prevent a joint struggle demanding the resources to meet equal pay claims with no loss of income, jobs, services or public assets.

A joint trade union response to GCC's final equality proposals recorded the unions' concerns over the "urgent need for further significant investment in the overall pay bill and associated implementation costs." But no mention was made of the means used to pay off the debts and the implications of this for the city's population.

Chris Sermanni, branch secretary of Glasgow City Unison, and recently a candidate for the Socialist Party Scotland–?run Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition in Scotland, postured as an opponent of the cuts. He said on social media, "For two decades workers in Glasgow have been let down by the city's politicians. From the debacle of WBPR, to meekly passing cuts budgets, year after year without a fight, and now with their rotten proposals for a new pay and grading system. Instead of standing up for workers and funding a genuine, equality proof, system that delivers fair pay for all, they have dressed up more cuts and pretend it tries to deliver pay justice."

Sermanni is not proposing a unified struggle of local authority workers, resting on powerful support across the working class and seeking to extract wealth for essential services by expropriating it from the ruling class and their wealthiest representatives. Rather he is appealing to GCC and Scottish government to marginally change course, while the three unions will jointly delay, divide and push local authority workers into accepting tweaks to the new settlement. As part of this, Sermanni explained that a consultative ballot would be prepared some time "in the weeks ahead".

The same Scottish government to which Sermanni is appealing has recently announced its intention to sack 20,000 public sector workers. The SNP also intends to decimate National Health Service administration by merging 14 local health and social care boards into two in pursuit of £5 billion in cost savings. Scotland's 32 local authorities are also to be targeted for re-organisation.

To take up the struggle the unions have abandoned, workers in all sectors are posed with building new independent rank-and-file organs of struggle and a genuinely socialist party, the Socialist Equality Party. Contact the WSWS today to share your views and begin a discussion on the way forward.