

POLL TAX SECURITY OUTRAGE

COMMENT



"We're all worried about security," she said. "It's essential that the chamber is secure and I want to look at this situation for myself."
 Certainly, there must be a thorough inquiry.
 In the event, yesterday's demo was largely humorous — more of a circus than a serious riot.
 But it could have been very different. And nobody would have been laughing.

Darker side of this pie farce

WE would be less than honest if we did not admit to having had a chuckle over the "custard pie" poll tax protest in Nottingham's council chamber yesterday.

The flying foam, creating slapstick scenes in the customarily stuffy and formal atmosphere of the chamber, was the basic ingredient of the best farce.

You had to be totally devoid of a sense of humour not to find some of those scenes very funny.

There is nothing funny, however, about the security questions the protest poses.

In the main, this "riot" was good natured.

There appeared to be more fun than venom on the faces of the perpetrators. It had the aura of a student prank.

And only a bit of pomp and pride was hurt.

But those "custard pies" could have been bricks.

The good natured intent of the protest could have been vicious.

And today, we could have been reporting on very serious cases of physical assault on those councillors.

And the ease with which the pranksters were able to get into the chamber and approach councillors must give great cause for concern.

In the aftermath of the demo today a lot of questions were, rightly, being asked.

Conservatives are calling for a full inquiry into the events. And Labour leader Coun Mrs Betty Higgins has promised her own investigation.

Tory leader Coun Bill Bradbury is very suspicious about the knowledge which the invaders clearly had about the inside of the Council House.

WINDING CORRIDOR

He reckons it must have been "an inside job" and is demanding to know how they got in.

Certainly, you have to wonder about the slickness of the invasion.

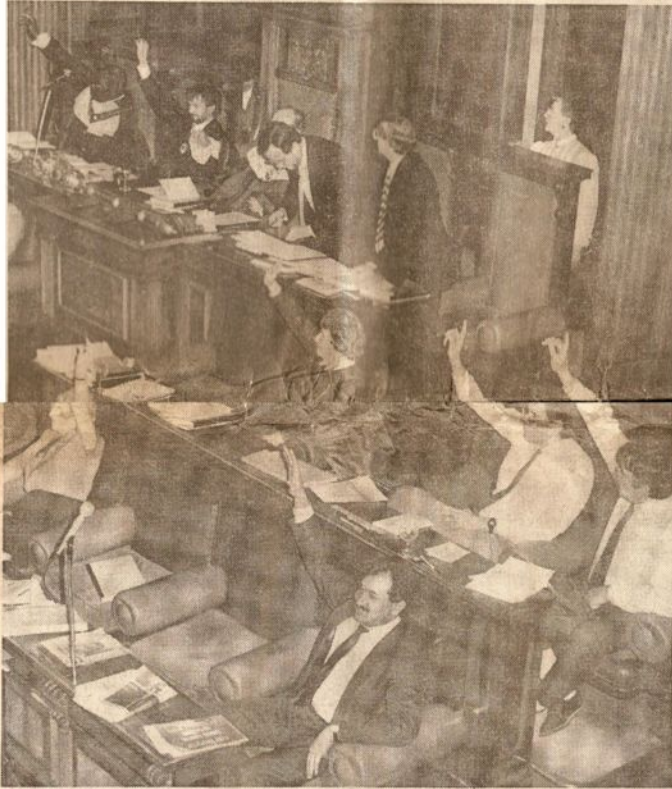
Anybody who has seen the inside of the Council House knows that it's a confusing labyrinth of corridors, doors and stairs.

It is very easy for a stranger to get lost in there.

Coun Bradbury says the invaders' route was along a narrow winding corridor which people outside the council could not have known about.

"I've been here for 19 years and I would not have known that way into the council chamber," he added.

Coun Mrs Higgins agreed that the protesters must have known where they were going.



● The crucial vote — Labour councillors support the poll tax figure

'Inside job' claim

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the blame at anyone's door I have my suspicions," he said.

"I was assured before the meeting the council chamber was secure but it was not and I'm demanding to know how these people got in.

"They must have been let in by someone. Their route was a nar-

Six policemen were injured and 11 demonstrators arrested after violence flared during Haringey council's poll tax meeting in north London. Hundreds of protesters thronged Wood Green civic centre while councillors called for a charge of £573, Britain's highest. The meeting was adjourned until Friday.

row winding corridor which they could not have known about.

"I have been here 19 years and I would not have known that way into the council chamber.

"They obviously know more about the Council House than I do," he said.

Opposition Conservatives are

calling for a full inquiry into yesterday's events.

"We're absolutely furious about what happened," said Coun Bradbury.

"It was a disgraceful act."

City council leader Coun Betty Higgins (Lab) said the protesters had some knowledge of where they were going.

She said she would be conducting her own investigation.

Protesters overran the chamber — many dressed as Robin Hood outlaws — took over the civic bench and hurled toilet rolls, pulled party poppers and unfurled banners.

Plates of shaving cream were pushed in the faces of some councillors including Barbara Ricks, Alan Clark and Shaikut Khan.

Police reinforcements were called to remove the invaders and one was hauled downstairs on his knees.

Three people have been bailed without charges pending police investigations.

"We're all worried about security and it's essential that the chamber is secure but I want to look at this situation for myself," said Coun Higgins.

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THE invasion of Nottingham City Council chamber by poll tax protesters was an "inside job", says city Tory leader Coun Bill Bradbury.

His claims were made as police investigated the invasion by about two dozen demonstrators who ran amok as councillors met to set a poll tax figure.

The meeting eventually continued after a 25-minute halt and a poll tax of £390 was passed.

But today an angry Coun Bradbury was demanding to know how the protesters knew of a back route into the council chamber.

"No one could have found their way in as they did by accident and while I will not lay

Angry Tories fail in bid to cut bill by £27

CLASH AS £390 POLL TAX IS SET



● Riot in the council chamber — demonstrators cause uproar at the poll tax session

Gary Freeman of the Nottingham Anti-Poll Tax Federation said his members decided to protest to show opposition to the Tory poll tax and Labour's decision to implement it.

He said: "The poll tax of £390 is unaffordable and would leave at least 90% of householders worse off."

From Page One

"The tax is already in crisis. We're appealing for mass non-payment of the poll tax to ensure its final defeat."

Protesters scattered books and papers over the council chamber while councillors used toilet rolls to remove shaving cream.

The police maintained a conspicuous presence throughout the meeting allowing only 38 people at a time into the public galleries.

Coun Bradbury also wants to know why police were delayed in entering the chamber.

"The police could not move on to private property without the permission of the Lord Mayor or a top official."

"I want to know why they could not get in immediately to stop what was going on. Why was there a delay?"

The galleries were draped in banners.

The disruption was, for the most part, tolerated with good humour.

The loudest heckling was reserved for Coun Bradbury who was received with shouts of "Tories out".

Approval of the tax was greeted with shouts of "disgrace" by the handful of protesters at the end of the meeting.

Paul Shawcroft of The Meadows Anti-Poll Tax Union said: "The campaign for non-payment will continue. The poll tax will be defeated in the streets."

LABOUR set a poll tax for Nottingham of £390 with the help of the lone Communist Coun John Peck.

They slammed the new tax claiming it robbed the poor and helped the rich.

But Tory leader Coun Bill Bradbury led an onslaught on Labour accusing them of extravagance and "spending out of control."

The new figure was set, however, after the Tories failed in their bid to cut £27 off the bill.

Labour singled out three Tory councillors who do not live in the city and yet voted to fix the poll tax — councillors Bernard Bate-man, Graham Kilbourne and Martin Suthers.

Coun Jon Collins said: "When they may have paid business rates in the city and have a say in the spending of the authority, that was all right."

"But now all the business rate is paid nationally so why are they allowed to pontificate about the level of poll tax paid in this city?"

"Why can we have three councillors sitting here voting for a poll tax they don't pay?"

'Disgrace'

Coun Collins said the poll tax meant 79% of those in the constituency of Nottingham East were losers, 83% in Nottingham North and 74% in Nottingham South.

Coun Bradbury dubbed Labour's budget "a disgrace".

He said: "Where are the economies? Where is the attempt by Labour to alleviate this hardship? We can see no attempt in this budget to minimise the effect on those people Labour claim to care about."

"All we can see is new schemes and expenditure totally out of control."

In a lengthy speech, Coun Bradbury accused Labour of increasing spending by 16% from £31.8m to £36.8m — and if the council overspent, the increase could be 20%.

However you look at it, whatever excuses Labour make, the community chargepayers are paying for Labour excesses.

By RICHARD TRESIDDER

agree a smaller increase in council house rents to cushion tenants.

"Only Labour would seek to hit tenants with an unnecessary rent increase on top of an unnecessarily high community charge."

Coun Bradbury proposed cutting spending by more than £3m.

He said the city treasurer's allowance of £21 per person for non-payment of the tax was too high. A more realistic estimate would allow a further £10 to be axed from bills.

"I believe that on the basis of this Labour budget, this council and Notts County Council deserve to be capped. They cannot justify this spending and the Government must not allow them to get away with it."

Coun Bradbury proposed cutting three more area caretakers, senior neighbourhood wardens and adventure playground staff



● Coun Higgins — 'bills will rise'

from future developments. Council leader Coun Betty Higgins said 80% of Nottingham people would be paying more.

Billed

"Many households will be billed for twice or three times as much as they have been paying under the rating system — a system often criticised in the past as being unfair to people living on their own," she said.

Coun Higgins said Nottingham would lose £7m in



● Coun Bradbury — 'budget is a disgrace'

business rate. And she added: "That's daylight robbery in my book."

She said the Government had "bungled" the introduction of the "rotten poll tax".

She rejected Tory claims of a 16% rise in spending. Only four per cent was for growth and eight per cent imposed by the Government.

She urged councillors to agree spending of £196.3m.

Bills would rise as

reserves ran out, predicted Coun Higgins.

"Hopefully, before that happens, there will be a change of government and a more equitable system of financing local services. But since it is just possible that poll tax will haunt our budget-making system... we intend to allow no developments unless they can be financed within the present budget."

"It is extremely doubtful if any growth will be possible in the following year — inflation alone will cause poll tax bills to rise."

'Weapon'

Labour deputy leader Coun John Taylor described the poll tax as the latest "Thatcher weapon" in her war on democracy and accountability of local government.

He said the moral responsibility of setting the poll tax "weighs heavily on my conscience."

And he added: "It does not matter how much we tweak the margin of more reserves, less developments, fiddle the financing of capital and revenue, charge £385, £390 or £395, the poll tax is still an evil, unjust measure that people simply cannot afford. It is plain and simply wrong."

"How can any measure that makes rich people richer and poor people poorer have any morals, let alone financial justification?"

"It is hard to tell a family

of four adults in Forest Fields they've got to cough up nearly £1,600 when key Tory supporters like Lord Vestey who heads the Dewhurst butcher family empire has managed to avoid paying all but a pittance in income tax over the past ten years.

"Only a government arrogant on ten years of power, led by one who will not listen and followed by those who are afraid to speak, can have managed to turn a mistake into a disaster. For if the tax is bad in theory, then its introduction has been an unmitigated cock-up."

'Injustice'

Communist Coun John Peck supported the poll tax bill.

He said: "The poll tax is a bad tax in concept and more unfair than rates because it does not relate to income."

"The way the tax has been introduced has compounded the injustice."

"Domestic ratepayers contributed £40m this year — but under poll tax it rises to £57m. That is a gross injustice."

Coun Hassan Ahmed (Lab) told members that he did not support any court action against poll tax defaulters who can't or won't pay.

He said: "It is bad legislation and I don't see why the council should be the Government's henchman and send people to jail."

Evening Post; 6th March 1990

"However you look at it, whatever excuses Labour make, the community chargepayers are paying for Labour excesses."

"Labour are trying to convince the chargepayers that this burden is all due to the Government."

The Government's own poll tax estimate of £254, he conceded was unrealistic. But he rounded on the ruling Labour group at County Hall for imposing a £584m budget on Notts.

That translated to a rate for the county of 32p in 1990-91 and 42p for the city.

"The county is up 59p and the city up 10p," said Coun Bradbury.

He urged the council to