

MANCHESTER COALITION AGAINST THE CUTS

PRESS RELEASE

for immediate release

Wednesday, March 9th 2011

COUNCIL DEBATE "A SHAM", COUNCIL LEADER TOLD BY ANTI CUTS PROTESTERS AS MANCHESTER CITY COUNCIL BUDGET IS APPROVED

Anti cuts protesters challenged city councillors to vote against controversial Budget proposals at their meeting today – but, despite proceedings being halted three times, councillors eventually agreed a Budget which will lead to a devastating £170 million worth of cuts and the loss of 2,000 jobs.

During one of the adjournments, members of Manchester Coalition Against the Cuts asked council leader Richard Leese if the executive committee had already agreed that the Budget would be set.

Eventually, Richard Leese confirmed that this had been agreed because - despite opposing Government reductions in public spending – councillors did not want to flout the law and go to prison. But this argument is misleading because councillors would not have been at risk of imprisonment if they had voted against the Budget.

The council leader had no reply to protesters' accusations that, if the decision had already been taken, today's council debate was "a sham".

This morning's protest, held both inside the council chamber and outside the Town Hall, followed Saturday's march against the cuts which saw 2,000 people take to the streets of Manchester, cheered on by shoppers and passers by.

A spokesperson for Manchester Coalition Against the Cuts said: "The city council has chosen to ignore the widespread protests from trade unionists, voluntary organisations and local communities. Councillors have given the go ahead to these swingeing cuts – even though they profess to oppose the Government on this.

"They should have stood by their beliefs and refused to do the Tories' work by setting this Budget. Their failure to do this is shameful, they have betrayed the people of Manchester."

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The following is a report from Mark Krantz, a protestor present at the meeting:

Protesters in Town Hall Meeting

While protesters shouted 'No Votes For Cuts!' Councillors voted through £109 million of cuts in Manchester, a City that has some of the poorest wards in the country, and has been singled out by the Tories for the harshest cuts.

Trades unionists from the council unions, Unite, Unison and the GMB, joined with campaigner from Manchester Advice <http://righttowork.org.uk/2011/03/outrage-as-cuts-forced-through-in-manchester/Manchester%20Advice%20campaign>, Sure Start, <http://righttowork.org.uk/2011/02/1345/> and Levenshulme Baths <http://righttowork.org.uk/2011/03/outrage-as-cuts-forced-through-in-manchester/Manchester%20Advice%20campaign>, and groups of students to form a 100 strong lobby on Wednesday. Later 80 people were allowed to enter the Town Hall to 'witness' the debate. The central demand to the Labour Cllrs was that they, 'Stand with the People! Not with the Tories!' Noisy shouts of 'Don't Make Tory Cuts!' and 'No Ifs, No Buts! No Public Sector Cuts!' ensured that the Council meeting had to be suspended twice.

Although none of the campaigners was given permission to address the meeting, Labour Councillors did come over to address those protesting. In one sharp exchange Council Leader Richard Lees confirmed that the controlling Labour Group had already made the decision to vote through the cuts. 'You have used the Labour whip to make sure Councillors vote the through these cuts,' said Rhetta Moran, a press officer with the Manchester Coalition Against the Cuts <http://coalitionagainstcuts.wordpress.com/>, 'there will not be a real debate here today, this is a sham of democracy not real democracy,'

Campaigners had demanded that the Council refuses to set a Tory budget, but no consideration was given to a strategy of resistance to the Tory Cuts. Many of the speeches made in the chamber rightly placed the blame at the feet of the Tories, who have 'let the bankers take £ millions in bonuses.' It was acknowledged that 'these cuts were too fast, too deep and would damage front line services.'

Protesters held their own vote, which was unanimous against all cuts, and chanted, 'This is what Democracy Looks Like!' and 'That is What Hypocrisy Looks Like!' towards the Councillors.

Leading Lib Dem Cllr Ashley said the 'we are all agreed that these cuts are unfair to Manchester, and Eric Pickles is not fit to be the Secretary of State.' The Lib Dems seemed to be in denial that their party is in a Coalition with the Tories. The Lib Dems were booed, called 'liars', and 'yellow Tories' whenever they tried to speak.

Manchester Labour did eventually vote through the Tory Cuts to cries of 'Shame!'

Video here <http://www.twitvid.com/0BI2H>

They then scurried out of the chamber. Protesters marched out of the Town Hall to hold a defiant rally on the Town Hall steps. 'This is just the beginning, we will continue to fight every cut,' said Mark Krantz, an activist with the MCAC which organised the lobby and protest.

Labour Cllr Neil Swanick said, 'I do not feel good about what has happened today, but we had no alternative. Now we will have to move on and together find ways of uniting to fight this Tory Government.' For the TUC March For An Alternative demonstration on the 26th March, transport to London from Manchester is already running out fast, all three trains are full and there are few coaches left to hire in the city.

Manchester Coalition Against Cuts <http://coalitionagainstcuts.wordpress.com/> will be meeting next week to plan the next steps in the fight back. The campaigns to save Manchester Advice and Manchester Youth Service continue.