

FEATURES

Making the Michael



BRIG presents two somewhat contrasting views

of Michael Forsyth's recent visit

You know those plateaus you reach in life every so often when you think you've seen it all and nothing surprises or impresses you any more? It's just the sort of feeling liable to manifest itself while standing in the queue for sixth semester registration. Now God doesn't like the omniscience that this smugness induces and he also tends to do a nice line in rude awakenings. And sure enough some body suddenly walked out of the bank in front of me wearing a Runrig sweatshirt. Christ, I thought that sort of thing only happened in anti-drug adverts of the "ye don't have to be clever to ken that's stupe" variety. On picking myself off the floor this guy when I'd never seen before came along handing out leaflets informing us that our MP, Michael Forsyth, was actually coming to speak at the university. Those familiar with Mr Forsyth's non-profile on campus will appreciate that this almost totally eclipsed the previous event. When the Scottish minister for education finally acknowledges the existence of a university in his constituency and even sees fit to visit, it just has to be worth a closer look.

I didn't think that Central Scotland League had that many men but they must be short of uniforms 'cos there were a few painfully obvious ones who looked more like your standard large menacing punters with ties knocking about. As I walked through the Cottrell car park I was approached by the not altogether welcoming figure of Lee Collier and accomplice expiring as to whether I'd seen any MP's in a sort of after-the-local-disco-get-the-bastard-outside tone. I'd guess there were about 200 people demonstrating outside led by the man with the megaphone, Campbell Reid. An impromptu tutorial was briefly taken by him on the latest anti-Tory chants. Perhaps an early start to the Sabbatical campaign trail? The proceedings were good humoured with the police keeping every one in a tight manageable bunch while liaising with our own lean, superfit security men.

Several false alarms later the ubiquitous black ministerial car appeared and drew up slowly and disgorged the man himself. I'd dearly love to be able to say that he looks different on T.V. but he doesn't. Briefly flashing his characteristic lopsided smile he was ushered swiftly past the now fairly vociferous crowd. He could hardly have been unaware of their proximity. Since even three one of the placards which had been thoughtfully provided for such purposes at him.

When everyone eventually began to file into Logie they were asked to produce their student ID's by CCF (yeah, I thought it stood for Combined Cadet Force as well) "stewards". Presumably

this scheme was aimed at preventing the admission of "outside agitators" and undesirable but was shown up for the complete sham that it was when Allan Hogarth was freely admitted, and seemed to have more to do with making certain individuals feel important. Peoples reaction to this hassle varied. Some produced their cards, others didn't because they couldn't and some merely informed the "stewards" in no uncertain terms that they'd prefer not to be bothered by such trivialities. I'd say there were about 400 people in Logie when everyone got in but this number might vary considerably depending on whether one counts the plain clothes coppers or not.

The level of noise and abuse was consistently high for the first few minutes with Forsyth waiting for it to subside and realising that it wasn't going to, attempting to speak anyway. Pretty useless really as his words, even over the PA, were completely drowned out. Our comrade for the night Mr Gay Kirkwood who incidentally seems to enjoy the limelight of such appearances so much that he proves almost impossible to annoy or provoke, informed us that rather than make a formal speech, Mr Forsyth would move straight to a question and answer session. Ostensibly, Forsyth claimed that this was to prevent detaining the policemen on duty any longer than was necessary, but I suspect he wanted to show that he wasn't one of these political freaks who liked to sit in boring meetings long after most normal people had gone to the pub. After a while things did calm down a bit and



the meeting became reasonably coherent. This was in no part due to the actions of one snappily dressed darling of the new right who, clad in smooth navy bodywarmer and brown brogues, tried to appeal for calm by standing on a bench and waving his arms rather like a swan. Lee Collier leapt at this chance to personalise the whole thing and proceeded to issue threats of violence against the guy. Mr Bodywarmer then spent the rest

of the meeting performing the most amazing contortions probably borne out of frustration at all these lefties. Maybe he was a swan - have you ever heard of the Children of Lir? An undoubted star of the meeting stated that he "would like to congratulate you (Forsyth)... (Boo's and general disagreement from the masses and smug self congratulatory grin from Forsyth)... on being the most incompetent education minister". Of course the audience loved it all the more since it started off sounding like the planted Tory question that everyone had been waiting for as the questioner was seated right in the Tories midst. If his positioning was intentional it was pure genius and if it wasn't it was still pretty funny. It was in answering this question that Forsyth came out with the quote of the night - "We didn't close Newbattle Abbey - we withdrew its grant". Good point, well made Michael.

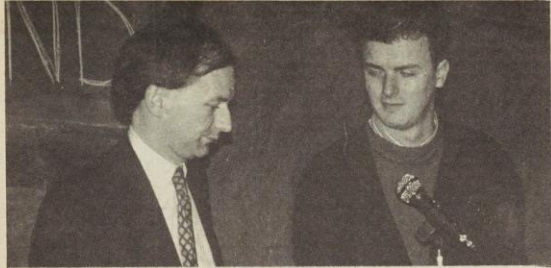
The questions continued with most of the answers being greeted with a roar of derision from which little in the way of useful statements could be deciphered bar the odd heavily scouse "weurkin' class" from Steve Kinsella. It was also good to see members of the university staff there including an AUP official who raised the current AUP dispute. While Forsyth was there mainly in his capacity as education minister and not questions related to this, whenever someone, often quite passionately, tried to widen the debate to include almost all the actions of government he seemed only too happy to answer them in a particularly condescending sort of way. An incredibly valid and important point he shrugged off without a second thought. It concerned how the poll tax would affect students and whether those people who currently pay rates through their rent could expect to pay less rent on the abolition of the rates. I think not. Forsyth's answer to this amounted to a dismissive "well I suggest you see your landlord about it". When bespectacled Steve McLaughlin rose in turn to speak it was fairly obvious that he was simmering. Throughout the course of his diatribe he built up to a spectacular crescendo. Just as it reached its peak I thought he was going to explode. Describing our visitor as "the smartest, sniveliest little wretch" who "knows the misery that exists but he just doesn't care, he should just... just... (violent shaking, bulging veins)... TUCK OFF". Surely that made him a contender for award last held by Kenny Weir, that being "The Person Who Hates Tories so Much That Their Head Falls Off" award. Now Forsyth understandably found this last point quite difficult to answer, but did admit to at least having learned "a new four letter word tonight". Immediately someone at the front replied "Yeah, care - C-A-R-E that's it."

After about an hour and a half as the meeting was drawing to a close the slow clapping had started and this only detracted from the final question as to why one of the fire doors in a packed Logie had been locked for security reasons. Without a doubt the best way to deal with difficult questions is to ignore them which is, precisely what our Right Hon. Member did. Perhaps he thought that peoples' apparent lack of interest meant that he needn't reply.

For the whole of the meeting Forsyth simply re-fed us all the predictable guff that we've all heard before albeit in a refreshingly patronising way so there seems little point in devoting much attention to it here. Also predictable and entirely foreseeable was his recourse to the old "bully boy tactics of the left" remarks. He also made a wholly inaccurate remark about the Queen's visit to the university in 1972 but was probably just trying to elevate himself to a similar level of importance. Personally, I'm not in favour of preventing people from speaking especially when you're so sure that you're going to disagree with them. To actually prevent them from doing so seems insecure. But thankfully, in

Entertaining was my overall impression of the evening which ranged from the ludicrous and laughable ("the right has held the intellectual high ground" which if you consider that the best way to deal with questions of conscience is to ignore them, a very valid point) to the sinister and disturbing locking of the fire door and the alleged police video which was made of the protest. Hopefully this won't be the last enjoyable little soiree held by our CCF friends and who knows, perhaps it won't be too long before Sir Nicholas Fairbairn bursts onto the college circuit. (sigh) I can't wait.

LUKE DOUGAN



spite of the "we won't let him speak" and "we're going to do the bastards" notor" assertions of the previous week, he didn't jump at the first opportunity to abandon the meeting and use the protests against us as I thought he would. "I tried to talk to them but... etc. It's highly unlikely that the initial level of barocking could have been maintained for any length of time and it was almost inevitable that it would subside. As the meeting progressed and Forsyth did begin to command some sort of attention, it must of seemed like he had won some sort of victory by shutting people up. Certainly his confidence obviously increased markedly as time went on and I can't help thinking that we sort of

"Well we certainly pulled off a coup tonight."

With approximately four hundred and fifty students and staff, the C.C.F. at Stirling stage-managed a meeting for our local MP to come in his official capacity as Minister for Health, Education and Sport at the Scottish Office. Quite surprisingly the meeting was a success. The questioners were answered (although I thought Mr. Forsyth's answer to the main question, "What is the future of Higher Education in Scotland?" was both weak and unfortunate), and the people that were chanting abuse at the outset were told to "shut up" or words to that effect by the rest of the audience.

The meeting was attended by some of the most vociferous opponents of the present Conservative government and all they could muster was mindless chanting "Maggie, Maggie, Maggie - Out, Out, Out!" hardly the most intellectual of comments coming from under and post graduates, and the seemingly endless torrent of puerile questions from the University's elected members of Executive, Council and, I am afraid to say, Sabbaticals. Take our President for example, one could quite easily overhear a conversation between her and the Honorary President on why the Chairman was wearing a red jumper (when Conservative presumably). And the final question was presumably a joke. The questioner had been trying to attract my attention for quite some time, the reason - she wanted to know why someone had accidentally left one of the front doors locked during the meeting. We had a Minister of State and that is all she wanted to know.

I think it is an affront to the great majority of the student and staff population at Stirling that our duly elected personnel organise a demonstration and then do not have the intelligence to support that demonstration with any valid or even lucid argument.

The meeting was held up for fifteen minutes by this asinine behaviour but I think it is a hopeful sign that Mr. Forsyth was able to speak, and that he wished to stay until eight-thirty. Previously, the Administration seemed reluctant to hold the meeting; this behaviour was brought on by some-exaggerating tactics by the Sabbaticals not wanting the assembly to go ahead because it would be the greatest and most visible evidence that there is no need to go through S.U.S.A. to organise something of this order and equally demonstrates that the C.C.F. are able to gain some reputation for the University that would improve it in the eyes of the rest of the country; whilst the elected members of S.U.S.A. seem content to live with the bad name that we have had to carry for over twenty years.

I am not satisfied with this approach. I hope there are more coups such as this meeting which show the sham of S.U.S.A. at Stirling University and the general lack of clear minded argument by its representatives.

GUY C. KIRKWOOD - CHAIRMAN CCF



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