

Frank McAveety's tribute to Alistair Watson

Alistair Watson Tribute

To all who are here today – Elected Members, Leader of the Council, former Leaders, MPs and MSPs – thank you for coming today on such a sad occasion.

I stand here today, on behalf of the Glasgow Labour Party, fellow councillors and party comrades, carrying out a task that is premature and totally unexpected.

We share the grief of Alistair's family and their relations and friends. A special word too for Cheryl, Jordan and their mum Christine, Alistair's brothers Jackie and Brian, and the unforgettable Evie whom her Granda doted on.

It has been a tough few weeks for the Labour family in the City with the loss of former Councillor Margaret McCafferty and former Depute Lord Provost Gerry Leonard.

The news early last Thursday of the sudden loss of our friend and colleague Alistair Watson on the day of the final Council meeting before recess shocked everyone in the City Chambers.

Today as we join together, there are two motions that have been tabled in the House of Commons and the Scottish Parliament from an SNP MP and Labour MSP, demonstrating the high regard and respect held for our colleague Alistair Watson.

But the response from all the Party Leaders at the Full Council demonstrated the respect and love felt for our friend Alistair from across the political divide.

We all shared the thought that only Alistair – a Councillor well versed in the Machiavellian skulduggery essential for survival amidst the Victorian grandeur of the City Chambers – was achieving his final revenge by taking over the Full Council meeting.

Alistair would have enjoyed that as he had been a significant figure from the very first day he entered the City Chambers as an elected politician in 1995.

My first encounter with Alistair was to avoid him as he made his way into the Debating Chamber. I wasn't prepared to argue with a 6ft 3 inches railway worker from Govan whose affiliation in football terms was not quite what mine was.

But from that day on Alistair became more than just a physically towering figure in the City Chambers. He made it his own as he represented his constituents to the best of his ability.

He relished the hurly burly of his work in the City Chambers; he enjoyed the nature of the boisterous Debating Chamber where he stood, rock like as his political opponents questioned his values and his party.

But Alistair could cope as he was a product of his family background; a son of Govan, proud of his time at Govan High School and his time working for the railways and representing fellow workers at Corkerhill Depot.

The Debating Chamber held no fear for Alistair and he ensured that his fellow Councillors would hear all about his passions and interests.

For 22 years that is what Alistair did

For 22 years we witnessed his commitments to the people of his Ward..

For 22 years we recognised his contribution to improving the great City of Glasgow.

Alistair loved what Local Government could do to transform his city and to ensure that every person in the city could realise whatever potential within them.

But Local Government needs people who have ideas that are transformative; people who think big about how to change a sometimes cautious and mighty institution.

Alistair was one of those who did think big : from the simple idea of his Socialist youth that ordinary men and women, if given the opportunity, can do extraordinary good things.

To the idea that Glasgow, once again – if given the power and resources – could recreate the ambition of its predecessors as they forged a model of municipal, democratic public services – serving the people and not Mammon.

I had the task, earlier this week, of sorting out the things that were in Alistair's office.

Although it wasn't difficult to gain access – I guessed his entry code was 1872!!

My oh my! What an office that was.

But if a room could sum up what the passions of Alistair Watson were they were contained within those four walls.

- Many photographs of his family – in the good times when they were all together;
- Some fantastic old railway registers – all hand written and entered by his predecessors in the past;
- His train sets, his photograph of Govan High School at the Millennium; his Rangers pennant and Rangers tie! (How he loved to show me those!!)
- His Labour Rosettes from endless campaigns ...

But there were three articles he had written that illustrated the driving commitments of Alistair's political career.

They were all about Transport and Infrastructure:

- One called “At a Crossroads” arguing for greater fairness in the allocation of national funding for roads maintenance;
- another called “Waiting For A Bus” arguing for reregulation of buses;
- and a third one titled “Getting On The Right Track” seeking public sector control of our taxpayer funded railway service.

What they all revealed was Alistair’s relentless quest for making a difference.

They revealed his passion for Glasgow. He said:

“I love going around Scotland, but I always return to my home city of Glasgow”.

But most of all they revealed an unquenchable desire that the purpose of an elected member is to leave a legacy. What a legacy it would be for all of us in this hallowed Church – going back centuries to the heart of Scottish Christianity – if we in public office irrespective of our political affiliations – could fulfil the legacy on putting people and not profit first.

That was Alistair’s credo throughout life and we will miss the energy, passion and commitments he gave every day.

We, in the Labour Group, have lost not just a colleague – but a fighter, a thinker, a doer, a friend and a believer in the capacity of humanity to put each other first.

Alistair may now be on another journey but we should reflect on who he was and the contribution he made.

As he said:

“Mrs Thatcher was wrong. You’re not a failure if you get on a bus. You’re a decent member of the travelling public. On the buses, there is such a thing as society.”

To Alistair’s family – be proud of what he achieved and remember, to the end, he wanted everyone to have a chance. There can be no finer legacy than that.