

# "Will local authorities be privatised?"

## Anthony Davis assistant head greenkeeper of Wentworth's West Course poses the question

THE privatisation of Local Government work - what does it mean? Can it be stopped? Can and will they fight back?

Below is an indication of what has happened, and what will be happening to Local Authorities in the future. Also, if privatisation is a success, will it affect the greens staff at private clubs? The Local Government bill ("The Green Paper") which has sparked off all this controversy has not yet been passed into law but is still going through Parliament. Local Authorities are acting on their own discretion and are accommodating the Bill now. The services the Local Authorities supply, to which I refer herein, are the open spaces, ie. football and cricket pitches, gardens and golf courses.

The "Works Section" of the Council have split into two Sections in preparation for this bill, one being the Clients Section and the other being the Direct Labour Organisation (DLO). The Clients Section are a body of people who have to go out and size up the tasks, estimate and value the whole concept of the work involved, and when finally coming to a conclusion, send out tenders for the operation. With Local Authority

work now becoming competitive outside contractors can, and rightly so, apply for the work involved. This is where it becomes interesting. If the golf course needs to be maintained for the next financial year, which obviously it does, any capable contractor who has the knowledge and machinery to maintain the whole of the golf course can put in his tender to win the contract for the maintenance of the specified open space. The Clients Section will have a policy document guideline on which to base their work. Any contractor not meeting that guideline will be putting the contract at risk, and it is in his own interests therefore to ensure that he meets the requirements set out in the policy document guideline. This is also essential from the point of view of the ratepayers who will be footing the bill. There is a lot of unease amongst Council employees regarding job losses, loss of hours and overtime, and this is where the Direct Labour Organisation steps in. The DLO, the second Section of the Council, are the manual side of this set-up. They are getting themselves prepared so as not to be caught out by all the upheaval. The DLO will have

managers who will fight to win the contracts and to head the field in order to save jobs and money for their employees and employers. The DLO being on the same level as the contractor, also have to tender for the work involved. Therefore, one part of the Council has to apply for the other part of the Council's work. I know it sounds a bit primeval, but it does create stiff competition. The bill, when passed by the Government, will take time to phase in to allow the Authorities and private contractors to establish themselves, especially for open spaces as there are only a handful of contractors who can carry out this type of work. Initially, only a percentage of open space work (around 10%) can go out to tender, commencing in the Spring of 1989 and then 20% the year after and so on until they reach the target of 100% of Council work going out for open tender. By 1993 all ground maintenance will be going outside for contractors to develop themselves, that is if they can "come up with the goods" against the by then well prepared and established DLO. The Government will give exemptions to Councils if the total cost of maintaining specified areas, ie. a

golf course is less than £100,000 but the total cost must include wages, machinery and materials. The bill will exempt that amenity from open tendering, but if the Government feels this figure is sent too high it can, and will, be reduced and kept under review. So in all, the Council will be run more like two separate private businesses which can only mean better quality workmanship, neater appearance together with more of an understanding of the needs of the ratepayer. Pride will be put back into their work. When they have sorted out all the teething problems involved with this complex system, who is to say that, having won their own contract within the Council, the DLO may then start spreading their wings to outside contracts, putting in tenders for private work such as maintaining private housing estates, gardens and even golf courses, thus putting outside contractors under pressure. In conclusion, I would say an exciting time for Local Authorities and entrepreneurs. Contract greenkeeping may well be a fact of the 1990's.

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