

Say a Rude Word

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A PLAIN STATEMENT of fact in a news release from the London Borough of Lewisham is headed "Grant from Lewisham Council for Greenwich Theatre." The facts are simple enough and are admirably summed up in the heading. But let us pursue the matter a little further.

The Greenwich Theatre, which naturally enough is in the Borough of Greenwich, is a privately-owned and run theatre and already receives subsidies from the Arts Council and from its own ratepayers. One of its claims to fame is that among its other cultural productions it launched the musical hit "Sing a Rude Song," later transferred to the West End.

I am now wondering under what other less neutral headlines this grant from neighbouring Lewisham could have been announced. It depends, of course, upon the point of view.

For theatre lovers—and particularly those who patronised the Greenwich Theatre—a suitable headline would be: "A Well-deserved Grant from Lewisham."

From the Ratepayers' Association of Lewisham (if there is one): "Lewisham Ratepayers Subsidise Greenwich Playgoers," and from the Greenwich Ratepayers' Association:—"Lewisham Ratepayers also Dunned to Keep Greenwich Theatre Going."

The Greenwich & Lewisham Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Societies would headline their news-sheet

"What about Grants for Us?" And why not, indeed.

Davy Crockett would have taken a very dim view of the whole business. He is reported to have stood up in the United States Senate during a debate on giving a generous grant to a deserving and notable U.S. citizen and offered to start a collection there and then amongst senators who were in favour of the state grant (almost all of them), because, as he put it, they shouldn't give away other people's money no matter how worthy the cause.

It could be argued that darts and dominoes are part of our national culture and thus deserve a subsidy. And then there are fox-hunting and boxing and playing the bagpipes. (Bingo isn't really cultural). Come to think of it, why do we tax some pursuits like horse-racing and subsidise others like opera?

Now if my local authority proposed to engage the Sadlers Wells Opera Company to play a season at our local Town Hall (the programme would have to include Carmen, Faust, Rigoletto and La Boheme), it would have my whole-hearted support as an opera lover if not as a ratepayer. Well, I mean, opera *is* culture isn't it? Particularly that bloodthirsty melodramatic Rigoletto—wonderful music. The trouble with some people is that they can't tell culture from quackery or art from a piece of bent wire. Councillors can, and so are the best judges of what should be subsidised and what shouldn't.

Of course, there is always the spoilsport or Scrooge who doesn't want to spend his own money or that of his neighbours on theatres and such like, and he can always be relied upon if not to sing a rude song, at least to say a rude word.

A Planner as Seen by the Public

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What is a planner?

A planner is a close relative of the Income Tax Inspector. He has no personal relatives since his parentage is doubtful.

Planners come in three sizes—thick, very thick and bloody impossible. A planner is difficult to recognize. He has no face whatsoever, but might be spotted by his corduroy shoes, pink shirt and yellow suede tie. Because of the planner's vague affinity to the Arts, most local authorities will allow him to wear a higher percentage of mod gear than a clerk or an engineer. There is an unspoken agreement between authority and the planner as to how

much he should support the image of the establishment.

Most planners are employed by local authorities solely to create problems in order that they might justify their existence. The planner's efficiency in doing so, is equal only to his powers of multiplication once he is appointed.

Having entered into Local Government service the planner is immediately let loose on the most important work in hand. He is encouraged to converse with all manner of people on all topics and within a few short weeks is able to engage in long conversations without understanding a single word. Here he learns to develop his technique. The broad smile, the confidential grin, the nervous giggle and the

elementary standard insurance of non-committal openings to each remark.

Once he has been successful in creating a few minor crises he can expect rapid promotion and a series of pay rises.

A planner has many talents. He is extremely skilled in the art of delay. Any planner worth his salt can produce a six-month delay with contemptuous ease. A skilful manipulation of Committee meetings, sickness, holidays and the democratic process, coupled with assistance from the law, can be devastating. Decisions can be avoided for years on end, and a quick transfer to another authority can enable the process to be repeated *ad infinitum*. A planner's dearest wish is to send everything back first

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