

Mayors' \$500m revolt against Sheriff Sartor

**Wendy Frew
and Jano Gibson**

COUNCILS across NSW have launched a campaign of civil disobedience, refusing to hand over to the State Government essential community service funds worth \$500 million a year.

At an emergency meeting in Sydney yesterday to tackle Government plans for a radical overhaul of the planning system, local government leaders expressed fears the changes would send some councils bankrupt and deprive communities of facilities such as libraries, swimming pools and sporting fields.

"We are dealing with the most

dramatic changes that have ever been proposed in NSW and if these changes get through we may as well all forget it and go home," said the Local Government and Shires Associations joint president and North Sydney Mayor, Genia McCaffery.

Much of the anger at the meeting was directed at the Planning Minister, Frank Sartor, who was accused of being a man who could not be trusted.

"Frank Sartor is no longer the mayor of Sydney, but he wants to be the mayor of NSW," said Ryde's Mayor, Ivan Petch.

The Government wants to cut the amount councils can charge developers for local services and

'Frank Sartor is no longer the mayor of Sydney but he wants to be the mayor of NSW.'

IVAN PETCH, Mayor of Ryde

hand over control of the funds to the NSW Treasury.

But fearing they will not get the money back, all of the 85 mayors who attended yesterday's meeting voted to refuse to comply with the funding change, announced last October by the Premier, Morris Iemma, but yet to be legislated.

Cr McCaffery described devel-

oper levies, known as Section 94 contributions, as the glue that held communities together. "These funds are critical. This is not about building huge art galleries. This is about fundamental community infrastructure, what makes decent communities worth living in," she said.

The meeting also rejected most of the Government's proposed planning reforms, including allowing home renovations worth up to \$1 million to go ahead without neighbours being notified, and dramatically expanding the role of private contractors to approve development applications.

The associations are planning to spend at least \$100,000 on a

media campaign against the changes and have developed their own planning reform proposals.

The ALP stalwart and Blacktown Mayor Leo Kelly said councils needed to stand united against the Government. He accused some other Labor mayors of being "shrinking violets" in the face of pressure from NSW ALP headquarters in Sussex Street.

"Blacktown is not going to hand over the money to the Sheriff of Nottingham," said Cr Kelly, referring to his council's portion of \$400 million to \$600 million the associations estimate is raised by councils every year
Continued Page 4

Mayors launch \$500m revolt against Sheriff Sartor



Having her say ... Clover Moore asks a question at the forum which was attended by more than 260 councillors and local government staff. Photo: Kate Geraghty

WHAT THEY SAID

'The minister keeps talking about mums and dads applicants, but for every mum and dad applicant there's a mum and dad neighbour.'

GENIA McCAFFERY, president of the Local Government Association

'We don't live in a dictatorship, as much as Minister Sartor would like to think we do. We live in a democracy.'

CLOVER MOORE, Sydney Lord Mayor

'I'm calling on all mayors around the state, including those who are Labor mayors, to take a stand against the unjustifiable Sheriff of Nottingham stunt that the Government is trying to pull.'

LEO KELLY, Mayor of Blacktown

'[When] you start getting Blacktown and the North Shore thinking alike, it shows that all bets are off.'

PAT REILLY, Mayor of Willoughby

smh.com.au

Video: angry mayors target Sartor

From Page 1

through developer levies. "If you are not strong enough to stand up to your political party, you are not good enough to represent your local area," said Cr Kelly, whose comments were applauded by the audience of 260 councillors and local government staff.

The ALP state general secretary, Karl Bitz, did not return the *Herald's* calls. Mr Iemma's office said no directive had been made by his office to councils about the issue.

Half an hour before he was due to hold a press conference at lunchtime yesterday, Mr Sartor

pulled out, citing "an urgent personal matter". Neither Mr Iemma, nor the Treasurer, Michael Costa, would say what the Government would do if councils refused to hand over the developer funds.

But a spokeswoman for Mr Costa said the money would be returned to councils if it was spent

on agreed programs such as child-care centres, libraries and roads.

Building industry groups have supported the Government's changes. The Property Council of Australia said a survey of nearly 700 homeowners had found overwhelming dissatisfaction with the planning approval process.

"Some mayors may protest, but people know that the system is too complex, too slow and too politicised," said the council's executive director, Ken Morrison. He also said it was unfair that new home owners should pay for facilities that would benefit the whole community.

The Urban Taskforce's chief executive, Aaron Gadiel, said high development costs and poor affordability were preventing the construction of new homes and land subdivisions. "Developers are simply unable to profitably produce enough new homes to satisfy the needs of Sydney," he said.