Do you think we could surcharge John Prescott for this? [1]

Written by **Tim Worstall** [2] | Saturday 23 February 2013

This is something I don't actually know. Is it possible to surcharge a Cabinet Minister for the losses to the taxpayer caused by their own gargantuan stupidity? Or is it only local councillors we can go after in that manner? I rather assume that we can't go after Ministers because I note that there's at least some of them who are not bankrupt at present: but it would be interesting to know.

The reason for this musing is this story from Liverpool [3]:

> UP TO 400 people have already shown interest in buying homes in Liverpool for just £1. And with only 20 homes so far earmarked for the rock bottom price deal there will be stiff competition between the competing buyers. Liverpool city bosses have yet to confirm what the criteria for deciding who will be sold the houses will be, but it is understood they are keen to prioritise people who have links to the area and will commit to living there for five years. Many of the houses in Kensington and the ?Granby Triangle? have been boarded up and empty for years because successive regeneration schemes have fallen through.

OK, so we've empty and derelict properties owned by the council. A council which cannot actually manage to renovate them itself. So, yes, why the heck not? Flog 'em off for anything at all and allow the little platoons to do them up and then live in them. Or rent, them, sell, them, do absolutely anything they want to with them really.

But why would I want to surcharge John Prescott over this? Well, for this reason:

> Many of the Liverpool homes bought up under the failed Housing Market Renewal scheme cost the council around £70,000 each to compulsory purchase.

We really are seeing the gargantuan stupidity of government planning here, aren't we? These are Victorian two ups two downs in Liverpool. And they managed to pay £70,000 for each of them? I mean, what? If something is worth £70k in Liverpool then it's not actually derelict or in need of regeneration is it? And then we find that even having done that they cannot manage the regeneration so thus have to, to all intents and purposes, give them away. This isn't government's most shining hour.

And as to John Prescott: this was part of his "Pathfinder" scheme. The basis of which was that to increase the amount of low cost housing in the country we should buy up 400,000 low cost houses and destroy them. And there in Liverpool we're seeing the scrag end of exactly that plan. At which point my call for being able to surcharge Prescott himself. It was clearly and obviously an entirely lunatic plan in the first place and much taxpayers' money has been wasted in the process. i think we should be able to claw back the losses from those who initiated such a monstrosity.

There's only one real problem here (leaving aside whether we can in fact surcharge a Minister) and that's well, why should it only be Prescott? We've this thing called collective ministerial culpability and at least some of the last lot were nominally adults so why should they get off scott free for allowing this plan to go through?

Bankrupt the lot of 'em *pour encourager les autres*. But only bankrupt them mind: the Royal Navy no longer has enough quarterdecks to take more traditional measures on.

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