

TOTTENHAM Community Action

72 WEST GREEN ROAD, N15. PHONE 802-9804

WINTER 93/4 ISSUE 2

THE CHILD SUPPORT ACT Another Government Stick Up

On 1st April 1993 the Child Support Act became law. It was said by many in Parliament that this was a law to help single parents and their children. **THIS IS A LIE.** In most cases single parents are going to be either, no better off, or worse off. One reason the government is keen to introduce it is to save them money.

The Act set up the Child Support Agency (or CSA) supposedly to deal with helping single parents get maintenance. The CSA have said that in the

first few years they will only be dealing with parents on Income Support. Why, if not to save money? When they eventually get round to helping single parents who are not claiming benefits they will charge them up to £78 for the service. **NOBODY** except the government will benefit from this Act.

The government wants a return to "family values" (this means a more right wing male dominated society. They blame crime and unemployment on those who do not fit into this

cosy image of the family. Their latest target is single parents, most of whom are women. By doing this they are directly attacking a women's right to live free from financial dependence and male violence. We all know that the reality is that families are as varied & diverse as people. Crime & unemployment are the fault of the bosses and governments, not single parents struggling to bring up children on their own. **LIKE THE POLL TAX WE MUST MAKE IT UNWORKABLE.**

ONLY THE GOVERNMENT WINS - THINK AGAIN

Women (as they are normally the person left with the children when relationships split up) on Income Support who think they might be better off claiming maintenance should **THINK AGAIN....**

THINK AGAIN -If maintenance payments are more than your Income Support you **WILL** lose your entitlement to Income Support and associated benefits such as free dental treatment & prescriptions, reduced cost glasses, free school dinners, etc.

THINK AGAIN -If the maintenance takes you over Income Support plus £15 you may lose all or part of your housing benefit, council tax rebate or mortgage interest payments.

THINK AGAIN -ALL maintenance collected OR AGREED will be deducted straight from your Income Support. It is very unlikely that you will be better off - but the government will. Some single mothers have done a deal with the father and agreed not to fill in the form as long as the father gives them at least the amount of benefit they may lose - see later for details.

THE MAINTENANCE APPLICATION FORM (MAF)

All single parents looking after a child will be sent a MAF. It will tell you that you must fill it in, sign it and return it to them. **BEWARE - WHAT THEY DON'T SAY IS;**

- If you sign the form it gives the CSA the right to find and contact your partner for you. They do not even have to let you know they are doing this.
- The CSA cannot contact the father without your written authorisation - you give them this is you sign the form. You have the **LEGAL RIGHT** not to sign the form.
- If you sign the MAF, your details will be given to the father (if they can find him). So, for example, if you have changed your name and address these will be given to him. It is illegal for them to stop your Income Support until you have signed & returned the form. If they do this contact a local Law Centre, Advice Bureau, Solicitor or us.

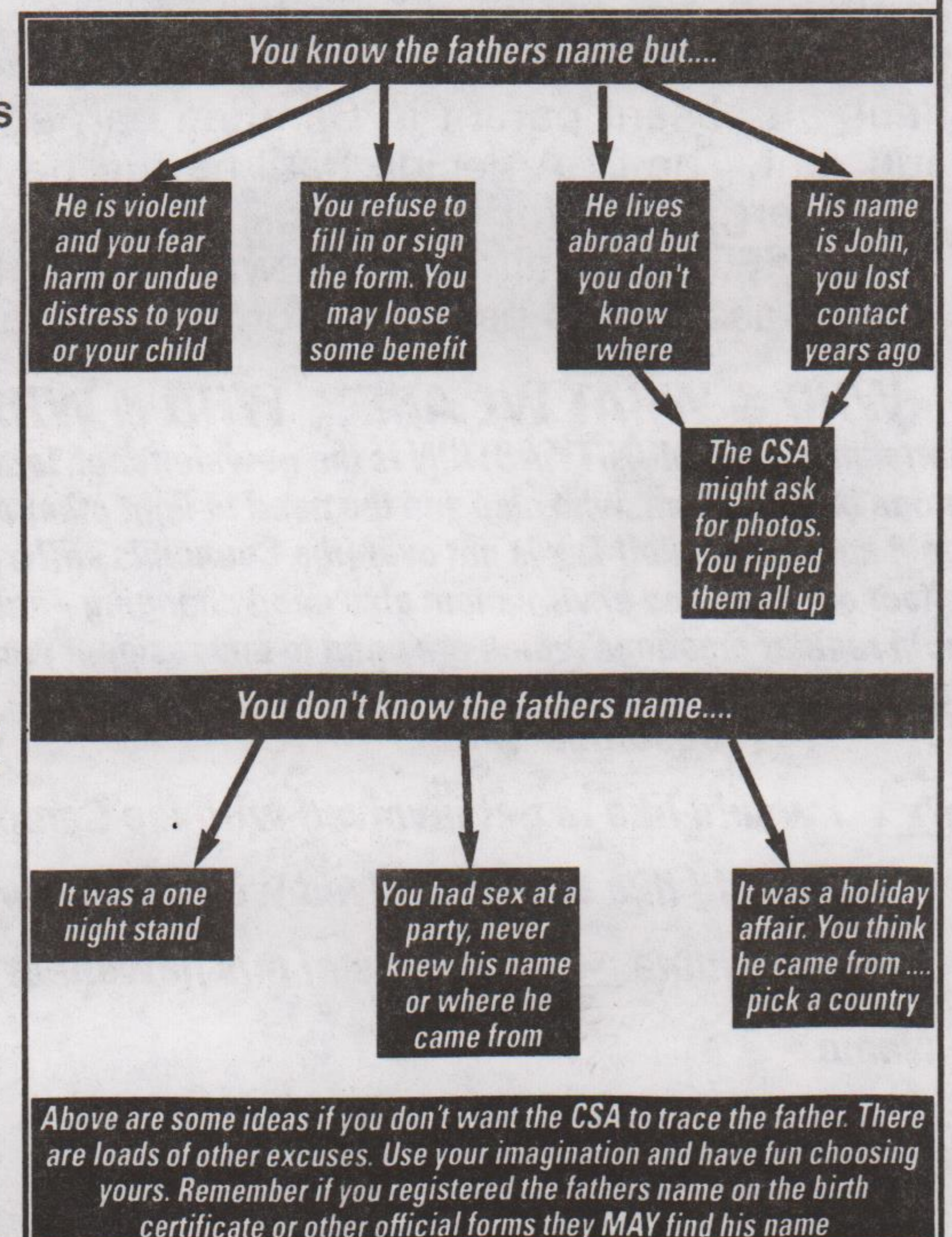
YOU CAN REFUSE TO SIGN

You can legitimately refuse to sign the form if you think that contact with your ex-partner would lead to harm or undue distress to either yourself or your child. Tell the CSA this **BUT** don't sign the form.

The government has said that

no proof of harm or undue distress is needed. However we have heard that the CSA are advising their staff not to believe you unless you can prove it. They have no right to do this and if they do tell them the following; Alistair Burt the Under Secretary of State for Social Security said on April 1st 1993 that "the parent with care (of a child) has a right to be believed unless what she says is inherently contradictory or improbable."

DON'T SIGN, DON'T RETURN



DON'T SIGN, DON'T RETURN THE FORM

If you don't sign the form and the CSA think you do not have a good reason for doing this, they MAY (not will) deduct £8.80 a week from your benefit for 6 months and a further £4.40 for another year. Their decision can be challenged. REMEMBER - it is your legal right not to sign the form. The CSA have said there will be no reduction if the child is ill or has a disability.

Some mothers have agreed with the father that he makes up the £8.80 and she will not return the form. If you have contact with your ex-partner talk about this

idea. You may both be better off this way. KEEP THIS AGREEMENT "INFORMAL" & SECRET.

DO IT ALL IN WRITING - NEVER SPEAK TO THEM IN PERSON

The CSA have said they may wish to interview, or visit you. You can, and should, refuse to do this. Ask them to put everything in writing and only reply in writing. You could send it recorded delivery. If they turn up at your home NEVER, NEVER LET THEM IN and don't answer any questions. If you decide to go for an interview, go to them and take a friend. Write down or tape everything that is said as you may need this

later. Intimidate them before they intimidate you.

BEWARE THE SNOOPERS

The CSA can check your details with other organisations such as Social Security, Inland Revenue, Councils, etc. If you do decide to fill in the MAF, does it agree with other forms? CSA Inspectors (or snoopers) can visit your employer and talk to them or your work-mates. They may also try and get information from neighbours, friends or relatives, but these people can legally refuse to give any information. Let people know not to talk to strangers about ANY of your affairs.

THERE IS WORSE TO COME !

Somebody in the Government must hate single parents. Not content with the Child (un)Support Act, here are a few other evil plans they are thinking about;

- ☞ they want to stop single parents getting Council housing
- ☞ if a single parent has another child you get no extra benefits
- ☞ children of single parents could be put up for adoption
- ☞ in the US they are looking at the idea of sterilising single parents in return for bonuses.

FACTS & FIGURES

The government talks about "irresponsible unmarried women keep getting pregnant to get benefits". This is bullshit and to prove it;

- 2 out of 3 single parents have been married before
- the "typical" lone parent is between 35 & 39 years of age
- fear of violence is often the reason a mother & child leave the father.

ABSENT PARENTS

An absent parent is the parent who does not have the main responsibility of looking after the child. If the mother signs the MAF the CSA will try and find the absent parent even if the mother does not want this to happen. The absent parent will be sent a Maintenance Enquiry Form (MEF) to fill in. If you do you will have to pay maintenance and if the mother is on Income Support the money will go to the government not her. You could both be worse off - see the case opposite.

CASE 1

Paul, an absent parent in Camden earned £164 a week after paying tax and rent. The CSA decide Paul had to pay £65 a week to the child. Paul was charged £78 for the work. The other parent was on Income Support. As the £65 plus Child Benefit was just higher than Income Support they lose all associated benefits. Both parents are now worse off.

HOW WE CAN STOP IT

We are not against lone parents getting cash from absent parents. But ONLY if the lone parent want this. If they want to be totally independent of their "ex", this should be their right to. Bringing up a child is bloody difficult. Anybody doing it needs all of our support and that includes cash. Any extra money they get from their "ex" should be extra - it should not help any government solve their cash problems. If you are a single parent, make it as difficult as possible for the CSA. Delay everything and do it all in writing.

If you are working remember they won't help you for years. If you work in the CSA or DSS disrupt it. The rest of us need to both inform others that this Act is a government con, as well as disrupting it how ever we can - use your imagination.

If you want to fight against the Child Support Act in Haringey, or if you want to give out copies of this newsheet, fill in the form below and return it to Jenny at 72 West Green Road, N15.

WHO & WHAT WE ARE WHO & WHAT WE ARE WHO & WHAT WE ARE WHO & WHAT WE ARE

Tottenham COMMUNITY ACTION is the newsletter of Tottenham Solidarity Group. We are local people who are involved in the anti-Poll Tax campaign in Tottenham, who also see the need to fight other attacks on our community. We are not connected to any political group or party. Although the fight against the Poll Tax is not over (the Council is still trying, unsuccessfully, to intimidate us with bailiffs and the threat of jail), other issues that affect our lives and environment also need changing - and NOW. This newsletter is one way we hope to inform local people about these issues. We hold regular meetings which are open to any resident who feels as we do. For more information leave a message for us on 081-802-9804.

Please tick ✓

I would like to get involved with the Campaign Against the Child Support Act in Haringey

I would like to get involved with Tottenham Solidarity Group and/or Haringey Women's Group

I can distribute _____ copies of this newsheet at my playgroup / child's school / street / estate / workplace / other (please state)

Name:

Address:

Phone number: