

Nottingham Defence Fund

Newsletter April/May 1992

Nottingham Defence Fund, Box DF, 72 Radford Road, Hyson Green, Nottingham.

The NDF was set up in March/April 1990 to support unconditionally anyone in the Nottingham area facing criminal charges as a result of anti-poll tax actions. "Unconditional" means we do not make judgements on any alleged offence, whether as a result of self-defence, pre-meditated attack, or simply being in the wrong place at the wrong time. "Support" means we aim to help defendants, personally, and financially as far as possible with our limited funds, and many defendants themselves have played and still play an active part in the group. We support all poll tax prisoners nationally and we are affiliated to the Trafalgar Square Defence Campaign Prisoners Support Group with whom we maintain regular contact. More recently we have extended our role to supporting the growing number of non-payer prisoners, along with Nottingham Against the Poll Tax.

(STILL) NOT PAYING THE POLL TAX!

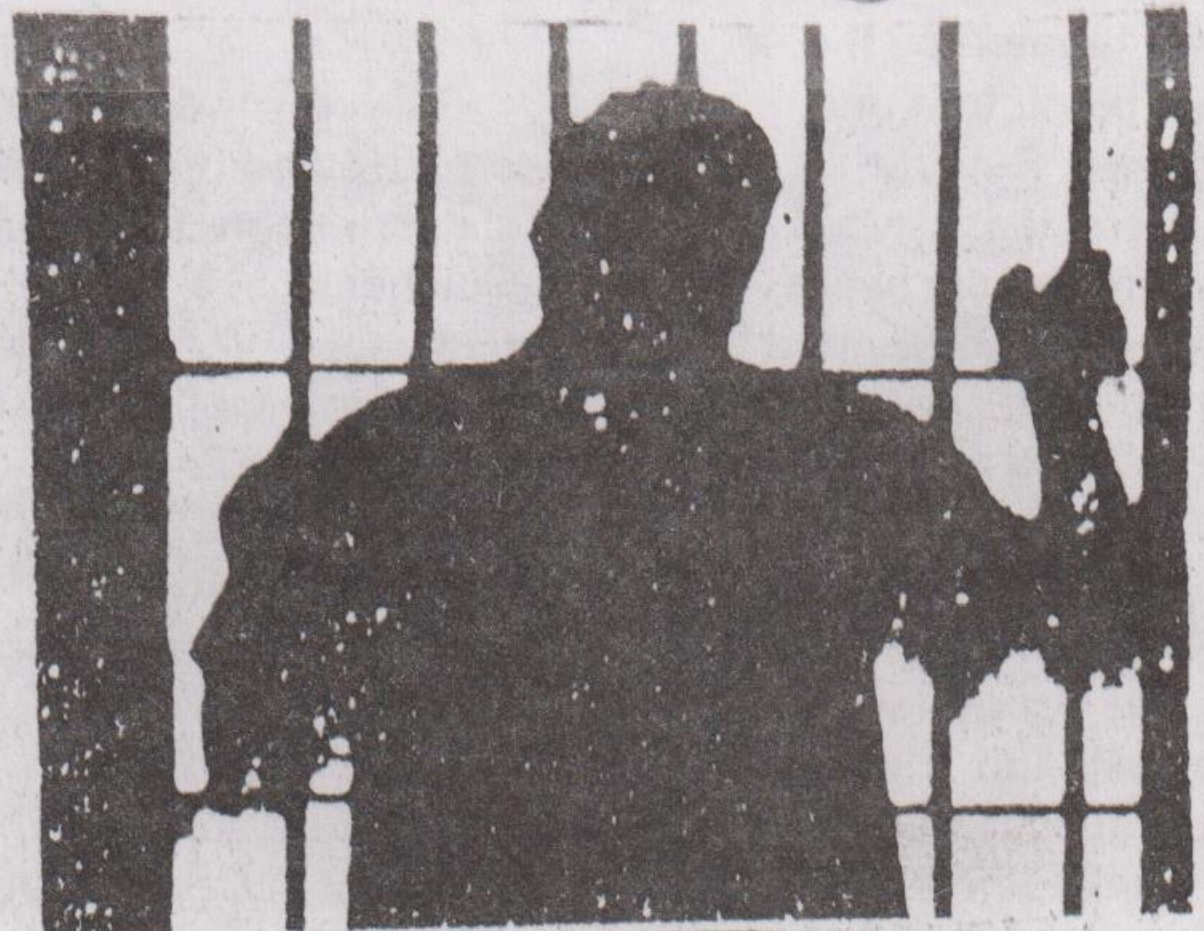
AFTER THE General Election, Britain's millions of non-payers still stand firm against the poll tax. The Tories told us that they have abolished it, the Labour Party canvassers promised us a 'fair rate' to make us forget about it, but the reality is that we will be faced with unaffordable bills for another year.

Most people can't begin to pay it and will be faced with years of arrears, pursual through the courts by local councils (Labour or Tory), bailiffs and threats of prison. This is the situation for non-payers, and those that have been forced to pay either through wage/benefit deductions or by intimidation face increased poverty as a result. That is why the anti-poll tax movement is demanding an immediate end to the tax and an amnesty for all those arrears. The impossibility of collecting the tax, and the hostility it has brought about against local councils, mean that the only practical response from the town halls has to be to write off the debts as of now. Otherwise they will continue to spend more in collection than they will receive in payments. It is already possible that efficient local taxation, 'fair' or otherwise, will never be viable again now that ordinary people have realised that non-payment and non-cooperation is a realistic option. This is the result of the compliance of local councils with the poll tax.

Nottingham City and Borough councils are still employing bailiffs, who are competing in true free-market spirit from all over the country for the job. Local businesses may have suffered, with the hated M.A. Julious losing some local work in this way, but the people of Nottingham are glad to see them go. Goults of Manchester who have taken over some of the recovery work aren't finding the job any easier, however, and only a few houses have been entered, with non-payers refusing to open their doors to them, and calling bailiff-busters who have chased them off.

The City Council, normally enthusiastic about dragging its poorest residents through the courts, was quiet enough before the election. The Labour party don't like to remind us that they are as much a part of implementing the tax as the Tories who invented it. But now the council are again filling the courts with non-payers and local anti-poll tax groups are

Dont Forget



The Prisoners

receiving dozens of calls from those summonsed as determined as ever not to cooperate, and even prepared to face prison sentences.

As well as supporting people locally, the Nottingham Defence Fund is continuing to support people nationally in prison or facing criminal charges for anti-poll tax actions, such as Trafalgar Square defendants, the Colchester 16 and Nottingham's own anti-poll tax demonstrators. Along with non-payers in prison, they need support in the form of letters, and donations to help with visits from family and friends can be made to ourselves 'NDF', Nottingham Defence Fund, or the Trafalgar Square Defence Campaign Prisoners Support Group 'TSDC'. Money is always needed as the likelihood is that 1992 will see many imprisonments by Nottingham City Council and a continuation of those in the county. Please help us support non-payers and others imprisoned for fighting the poll tax.

SUPPORT THE COLCHESTER 16!

On March 17th 1990, only 12 days after the Robin Hood "Custard-Pie-Demo" here in Nottingham (lest we forget), and before the huge Trafalgar Square demonstration, the town of Colchester in Essex was part of the massive wave of unrest happening in towns across England and Wales, as local councils set the rate for the Poll Tax and many people suddenly understood the significance of what the high bills would mean.

Two thousand people marched in the streets of Colchester, the biggest demo from there since 1381 when local people joined in the revolt against the first poll tax, resulting in the beheading of the Chancellor in London.

The police prevented marchers entering the high street, and some demonstrators standing outside the Conservative Club building were taunted by those within. Coins, paint, fruit and veg were thrown. Several people were arrested. Elsewhere more people were arrested as police cordoned off the High St. and charged the densely packed crowd with horses.

POLICE TACTICS

Snatch Squads were sent in to arrest and injure, reminiscent of tactics used in the Miners' Strike and outside 'Fortress' Wapping print works. Police blamed the 'violence' on "left-wingers hell bent on wrecking havoc" and at-

tempted to justify the use of horse charges which injured a bystander shopping with her children.

Twenty five people in all were arrested on that day, and sixteen, soon to become the Colchester 16, were charged with a wide range of Public Order offences. In court cases over 2 years after the event, 5 have been acquitted and 4 have been sentenced, 7 are still waiting to stand trial.

The 4 who were convicted were sentenced in Norwich Crown Court on April 6th 1992. NDF members attended the hearing in solidarity with the defendants. The charges were

serious. Terry Frost and Andrew Hester faced a possible 10 years for Section 1 riot, and Christine Hammett and Patrick Tyler (17 at the time of the demo) faced 5 years for violent disorder. Terry Frost was accused of throwing a small stone at the Conservative Club, Andrew Hester of throwing a Pils bottle, Christine Hammett of hitting with a placard, a police officer who was beating another protester.

POLITICAL SENTENCES

Patrick Tyler was shopping and was never even on the demo, but he was grabbed by a cop who said he threw a stone. The convictions were clearly political, like the Trafalgar Square ones. The sentences, given 3 days before the Election were lower than the maximum, and maybe this was also political. However, Terry was given 2 years in prison, Andrew 18 months, Christine 9 months and Patrick 6 months in youth custody (EDR, Earliest Date of Release, 6/7/92). Patrick has since been released on bail pending appeal and the others are considering appeal although the process may take longer than the sentences.

Write as often as possible to these prisoners at the following addresses :-

Christine Hammett, TV0063, HMP Holloway, Parkhurst Rd., Holloway, LONDON N7 ONU.

She is being kept in the psychiatric wing, in a cell with a broken window. A picket outside Holloway Prison has been organised in support of Christine for May 15th, 6-10pm. Please support this demo if you can. (Her EDR is 12/8/92).

Terry Frost, NL1911, HMP Norwich, Knox Rd., Norwich, (being moved to Wayland Prison shortly). Please send all mail for Terry to the Colchester 16 Defence Campaign address. (Terry's EPD, Estimated Parole Date 6/12/92, EDR 6/12/93).

Andrew Hester NL2430, HMP Britannia, Knox Rd., Norwich. (This is the open wing of the prison - he has a job in the kitchens). (Andrew's 6/10/92, EDR 6/4/93).

The other 7 defendants will stand trial on May 18th at Norwich Crown Court. Another demo at the court is being organised and supporters are welcome - contact John Tipple (Ex-defendant) on 0255 506216 for details.

Further info about the Colchester 16 Defence Campaign can be obtained c/o Terry Peach, Secretary APTU, AEU Halls, Barrack St., Colchester, Essex or via us in the NDF.

The Colchester 16 situation can only remind us that some people have PAID for the poll tax by long prison sentences, as well as NOT PAYING the tax itself.

MORE NEWS FROM THE COURTS

George Downton attends his first hearing for assault charges in the Crichtons Bailiffs case on June 15th, which is expected to be adjourned. Phoebe Watkins has had a reprieve on her committal hearing, after her arrest by Islington Council forcing her to attend court. She has already won her fight against her employer, Camden Council (also Labour), who threatened her with the sack if she was imprisoned for non-payment. Her committal hearing has now been adjourned to May 19th, after a sit-down protest on 21st April in Highbury Mag. Court resulted in 22 arrests for Contempt of Court (all released without charge).

TOMMY SHERIDAN: DOING HIS BIT FOR THE CAMPAIGN AT LAST?

The following is a letter sent to Tommy Sheridan, key executive member of the All Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation (and recent unsuccessful Parliamentary Candidate for Pollok, Glasgow, for Scottish Militant Labour) after his recent imprisonment for defying a court injunction ordering him to keep away from 'poindings' (seizure of goods by bailiffs) in Scotland.

Dear Tommy,

We congratulate you on the stance that you have taken against the court's decision which was intended to limit your basic commitment and willingness to the non-payers campaign, i.e. the natural right to self-defence and helping others when under attack.

Although going to prison is not the measure of correctness of one's views regarding the ongoing class struggle, it certainly indicates some degree of commitment and willingness to stand up against those in power at present. You have, therefore, bestowed an honour upon yourself by standing with the millions who are defying this vicious law, and hundreds who have been jailed as a result of poverty or principle, or both.

We hope the conditions inside do not deter you from positive contemplation, particularly regarding the last three or four years of the anti-Poll Tax campaign and the resolute position taken by hundreds on March 31st 1990 at Trafalgar Square, who defended many innocent people and saved many lives, and faced long 'exemplary sentences'. After months of delay and uncertainty many not only carried that defiance to the courts, and did not show any remorse, but clearly justified

and defended their right to self defence and condemned the criminalisation of the basic right to peaceful demonstration, and opposition to the use of terror against innocent people, knowing it could earn them longer sentences.

No doubt such political conviction will point the way for future battles and help establish a true working class opposition, in contrast to those trends and tendencies which make such claims at present.

We respect all those, including yourself, who take such conscious stands, despite earning themselves personal hardship, and therefore hope that you rightly distance yourself from many sadly mistaken views stated by yourself and Steve Nally on National television.

Your incarceration among many is a clear demonstration of the fact that the Poll Tax is far from beaten. We wish you all the best in the continuation of this struggle.

Yours in non-payment,
Nottingham Defence Fund.

PRISONER UPDATE

Receiving letters is vital for prisoners morale, but don't write expecting a reply because prisoners can't write as many letters as we can send in. Note: EPD means Estimated Parole Date. EDR means Earliest Date of Release (Remission Date).

Trafalgar Square Prisoners

Brian Tavares MV3239, HMP Camp Hill, Clissold Rd, Newport, Isle of Wight PO30 5PD. EPD Nov '91, EDR Nov '92; Timothy Donaghy MW0105, HMP Downview, Sutton Lane, Sutton, Surrey, SM2 5PD. EPD Feb 93; Mark Hutchings was released on parole on 24th April; Simon Russell is due out on May 8th. Please send all mail to Mark and Simon to TSDC to make sure they get it. The address is TSDC Prisoners Support Group, c/o 506 Brixton Rd, London SW9. Tel 071 738 7586.

Recent Non-Payer Prisoners

Debby Clark XW2474, HM Remand Pucklechurch Nr. Bristol, BS17 3QJ, Avon. 60 days, EDR 24th May. Jailed by Bristol Council; R. Mole EH0812, HMYOI Brinsford Lodge, Featherstone, Wolverhampton, Staffordshire. 30 days on 3rd April, EDR 1st May.

Some other news

Melvin Hart will be tried in Southwark Magistrates Court, London, Monday 27th April on 2 counts of violent disorder and 1 of criminal damage at Trafalgar Square. He was picked up in May last year as a result of photographic evidence. Another man has been arrested very recently after a hoax on Stoke Newington Poll Tax office. He was also wanted by police after jumping bail for Trafalgar Square offences, so this is very bad news for him.

Finishing off the poll tax?

(Edited from an article sent to the P.S.G Network Newsletter)

The Point:

It's some time now since a section of activists were proclaiming 'We beat the Poll Tax'. Why then do we persist in standing at stalls on cold windy days? Someone approaches. 'Why don't you lot pack up and go home? You've made your point.' Making a point is, it seems, endemic to British politics. The one day strike, the day of action, the small peaceful march directed by police away from anywhere it might be seen, even the 'mass trespass' which first obtains the landowner's permission (well done Notts rambblers!).

Making a point? It's the state that is making the point- the point is that it can easily accomodate these actions. ('You want May Day? You can have May Day. We'll even make it a bank holiday').

So we hold up a placard or two; write a letter; even withhold payment for a few months to really show the councils and government. Then we can all go home, and they can get on with collecting their tax.

The point is, or should be, that we are not making a point about opposition to the Poll Tax; we are simply not going to pay it.

The Fight:

If, then, this is a campaign of 'not doing', how come we are so worn out? What on earth are we doing? More to the point, what should we be doing? We've set up groups; we've leafletted; everybody knows about liability orders and bailiffs, can't we sit back now and wait for the Poll Tax to go away? Obviously not. There is more work to be done now than ever. During the first year of bills people overcame their fear of the courts. Finding that nothing drastic happened to non-payers, more people joined us in the second year. Then committals began- a new

fear to face; waverers to be bolstered. One more year of bills, and then The End?

But we are threatened with pursuance of non-payers until Domesday. That's a long fight yet. It will not end with a new tax, but will continue until all attempts to persue non-payers cease (no imprisonments, no bailiffs, no arrestments of wages/benefits) and all debts are cancelled. This means that even if a new tax should be introduced that we all think is fair and wonderful, or even now tax at all, we still go on until our aims are achieved. Until and unless this happens we cannot say 'We beat the Poll Tax'.

Are activists aware of and prepared for this? (The poorest and most threatened in the Britain, active or not, do not have to ask- they have no choice).

The Activists:

Already we have seen 'activists' looking for other interests (We've done our bit for the Poll Tax; we're into the Gulf War now'). Campaign hopping is another tradition of the British left; and again one which is no problem to the state, which only has to sit back and wait for us to tire of each one and move on.

Of course there are different causes to be fought, and gains to be made from being able to see similarities and draw together the different strands of various fights against state oppression in all its forms. But one lesson we should have learned long ago is that if we cannot win one battle we have no chance of winning the war.

Now is probably the most testing time so far. We're tired from a long fight, and looking at a long way yet. Will we do it? We have to. Otherwise we might as well take the passer-by's advice and pack up and go home now. Then all this time of tiredness, struggle and heartache will have been wasted. And our children will have to begin the fight all over again. Are we prepared for that?

Jacqueline Evans-Ayandeh
March 1992