

National Activists Conference

"Which way forward for the anti poll tax movement?"

Saturday 19th January 1991

Manchester Town Hall

10.00am - 6.00pm (provisional)

A new year, and another year of struggle. 3D has called a national activists conference to discuss the major issues facing the anti-poll tax movement.

☆ What have we achieved so far?

☆ Is non-payment enough to defeat the tax?

☆ How can we organise effectively?

☆ What is our response to cuts in jobs and services?

☆ How can we build a movement capable of defeating the poll tax?

The conference will be an opportunity for activists to take a serious look at strategy and will provide a space for political discussion which usually doesn't happen in APTU meetings because of the day to day pressures of campaigning. It won't be a rally where debate is suppressed, but there will be workshops where everyone will have a chance to contribute. There will also be a social and an opportunity to exchange information.

In order to organise an accessible conference, in a decent venue, there will be a registration fee and a pooled fare system will operate. If you want to attend the conference as an individual or as a representative of your APTU please return the tear off slip below.

National Activists Conference

Name:

Address:

APTU/Organisation:

Individuals: waged £2.00 ☐ unwaged £1.00 ☐ APTU: £3.00 ☐ Other organisation: £5.00 ☐

I need places for children aged

Accommodation for Friday night ☐ Saturday night ☐ (priority for unwaged/people with children)

Lists of local B&B accommodation ☐

Please return to Nick Finley, 20 Troutbeck Road, Gatby, Stockport SK8 4RR. Cheques/POs made payable to 3D

Support 3D!

3D has, in its short life, made an important contribution to developing the anti-poll tax movement. If the work of building up the 3D network, keeping activists in touch, organising to raise an independent voice within the movement is to continue we need your support.

There are loads of ways that you can ensure that 3D as a newsletter and a network continues:

- ★ subscribe to 3D as an individual — £5 will ensure that you, and other activists receive the next 5 issues.
- ★ subscribe to 3D as a group — £10 for 10 copies of the next 5 issues.
- ★ make a supporting donation.
- ★ organise local and regional 3D fundraising events — then send us the money!
- ★ write articles, send in photos and cartoons, volunteer to take copies to distribute in your area.
- ★ get in touch with your regional contact and organise a regional activists meeting.
- ★ follow the example of Norwich and produce your own local 3D supplement!

Name Organisation

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3D

on't pay!
on't collect!
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Issue #6 of the open,
independant newsletter
produced by the 3D
network

★ Special Conference Edition ★

The intention of the Tories in replacing the rates system with the Community Charge — the poll tax — was clear from the start.

The burden of local government finance was to be shifted onto the back of the working class as a whole and would fall hardest on black workers, the low paid, women and the unwaged. Under the poll tax it is likely that as a percentage of income the poor would pay almost four times as much as the rich.

One of the main aims of the Tories since 1979 has been to cut public spending. After 11 years of Tory rule most public services — health, council housing, education — are characterised by squalor, although in real terms, public expenditure has probably increased. Resources have been shifted away from local government towards defence expenditure, privatisation and tax cuts.

The campaign against the poll tax has been fuelled by existing anger at service cuts, unemployment and attacks on welfare benefit. Mass non-payment has been a reality across the length and breadth of Britain. There are up to 14 million non-payers, and in Scotland the number of non-payers has increased in the second year of poll tax implementation. These massive levels of non-payment exist despite the open opposition of the Labour and trade union leadership.

Whilst the tremendous strength of non-payment shouldn't be underestimated, a campaign based on passive non-payment is not enough. There are many millions of non-payers but only a tiny percentage are actively involved within the campaign. And for every non-payer that becomes involved in the campaign through the court cases, many more become demoralised as liability orders are issued and the threat of bailiffs intimidates non-payers.

Faced with financial crisis many local authorities have not hesitated to prosecute non-payers nor to break previous policy commitments and use bailiffs as a first resort against non-payers in an attempt to break the back of the campaign.

Unfortunately, many people in the movement, including the Federation leadership spread the illusion that the tax could be defeated by clogging up the courts through the use of "Mackenzie friends". But for every handful of non-payers who stall the court proceedings there are hundreds of liability orders rubber-stamped.

Whilst we should continue to make every effort to slow down and disrupt court proceedings, the poll tax will never be beaten in the courts alone. The courts are not neutral. They exist to hold up the bosses' laws, including the poll tax.

In Camden and Sheffield, the Isle of Wight and Wandsworth, local campaigns have shown the way forward by building mass demonstrations outside the courts and by carrying out militant occupations of court buildings to bring proceedings to a halt. We need to commit our movement as a whole to fighting for the largest demonstrations possible to actively confront the threat of prosecution.

How can we defeat the poll tax?

As the court cases progress the battle is turning to the estates as local councils bring in bailiffs to attack non-payers. In Wandsworth bailiffs have been prepared to break the law in order to force the campaign to retreat. Against the bailiffs we need to build mass estate-based campaigns to defend non-payers, to resist the onslaught of the bailiffs and the police. Anti-poll tax unions can't substitute themselves for such a mass campaign.

We have to support people in organising themselves and not rely on the law (or for that matter a change in the leadership of the Tory Party). We should campaign to drive the bailiffs of the estates by whatever means prove necessary.

Whilst the campaign has been built in the teeth of opposition from the labour movement leadership we have to continue to fight to win the labour movement as a whole to opposition to the poll tax. The paper policies of the Federation have to be turned into action, and local APTUs have to take the fight into the trade unions.

There has been sporadic strike action against the effects of the poll tax on local government workers' conditions and the effects of cuts and capping on local services. But whilst localised strike action must be supported by APTUs, individual groups of local government can't beat the tax alone. In the workplace we should argue for strikes about the effects of the tax to be transformed into strikes against the tax itself.

The poll tax can only be beaten by combining mass non-payment with mass trade union action, backed by occupations, demonstrations and actions against cuts. We shouldn't pretend that this kind of action is easy to achieve. But without it divisions within the working class will widen as non-payment grows and the Tories and the labour movement leaderships blame the non-payment campaign for cuts in jobs and services.

Defeating the poll tax is not simply about reversing the legislation. The Tories, or a Labour government could introduce a "fairer" method of local taxation without dealing with the chronic under-funding of local services, or making the rich pay.

The anti-poll tax movement has to turn actively to the labour movement. We must fight to force Labour councils to refuse to set the new level of poll tax in Spring 1991, to refuse to cut jobs and services, to set illegal budgets and refuse to co-operate with collection.

In every workplace we should campaign to set up workplace APTUs to defend non-payers from wage arrestments and agitate for strikes against the tax. We should actively campaign for DSS workers to refuse to carry out benefit arrestments.

If we are to be able to defend non-payers a pre-condition must be the defence of those who face the full weight of state attacks on our movement. On 31st March at Trafalgar Square and again on 20th October the Tories showed their determination to smash our movement off the streets rather than risk defeat over the tax.

The response of the Federation leadership on each occasion played straight into the hands of Thatcher by refusing to unequivocally defend all those who sought to defend our demonstrations against police attack. We should demand the dropping of all charges against those arrested and fight for the widest possible labour movement support for the Trafalgar Square Defendants' Campaign.

Continued over

Any future attempts to ban our demonstrations should be defied. The Federation must call a demonstration against the poll tax in central London on 30th March 1991 and demand that the Labour Party and TUC support the call as a massive show of defiance from the labour movement and the anti-poll tax movement. We should organise the physical defence of all future demonstrations.

The anti-poll tax movement has shown that it can hit hard against the Tories and throw them into the crisis we are witnessing today. To go on the offensive we need to win the confidence of all those trade union militants and fighters for the oppressed who are not yet part of the campaign. For this, it is vital that the campaign is fully democratic. We need a leadership which is representative, accountable and re-callable. The Federation should be just that — a federation — and commit itself ensuring democratic debate and decision-making within its ranks and the full participation of every APTU in the decision-making process.

Jane Connor and Nick Moss
for the 3D Editorial Collective

Who to vote for!

At the its last national activists meeting on 21st October which was attended by activists from around 50 APTUs in Scotland, Wales and England, a slate for the national officer positions was agreed. It was left up to regions to put forward names for election as regional representatives.

We don't see the elected officers as figureheads or the exclusive spokespersons for the movement, but as activists who are prepared to work as part of a team to carry out Federation policy, accountable to the movement for their actions and prepared to be answerable to the national aggregates and conferences which should be the policy-making bodies of the Federation, not the national committee.

A number of amendments are proposing that rather than having a Chair and Secretary, two national Secretaries are elected as there is a real danger that one person, the Chair, is seen as the "leader" of the Federation. The 3D national activists meeting supported the call for two national Secretaries, but if this amendment falls we would urge delegates to vote for a Chair and Secretary who would act as a team along with all the other Federation officers and national committee members.

Secretary: Vote Danny Burns!

Danny is from Bristol, has been central in building the Avon Federation into one of the strongest campaigns in the country and has been a member of the national committee for the last year. Danny helped initiate the 3D network and is committed to a pluralist, grassroots movement.

Secretary (Chair): Vote Jane Connor!

Jane is from Tottenham in north London and has been co-chair of the London Federation. She has tried to build unity in action and helped bring the two London federations together this year, although the unity has been very tenuous at times. Jane is a member of the Labour Party and a trade union activist.

Treasurer: Vote Nick Moss!

Nick is from Wandsworth in south London, where the council has the lowest poll tax and a vicious, right-wing Tory leadership. Nick has first-hand experience of organising against the bailiffs and cuts in jobs and services. Nick is a member of the Labour Party and a trade union activist.

How to vote!

Unlike the Federation leadership, 3D supporters won't be sitting on the platform telling you how to vote — that is up each APTU to decide (hopefully through democratic discussion). In a movement so large and diverse no one APTU, political group or group of activists can claim to represent everyone or have all the answers.

However, we would urge delegates to vote for amendments that are in line with the aims and objectives of 3D both in terms of policy for the Federation and the constitution. In particular, the motion from Woodhouse (Leeds) APTU summarises the views that have come forward at 3D activist meetings on the constitutions, although there are differences amongst 3D supporters about affiliations from political groups and parties.

3D also urges delegates to vote for motions supporting the Trafalgar Square Defendants' Campaign and for a national demonstration in central London on 30th March 1991 against the poll tax and for the right to demonstrate.

Publicity/Communications: Vote Ian Greaves!

Ian is from Leeds and has been a key figure in developing the movement in Yorkshire. He has been a member of the national committee for the last year and recognises the central role of the Federation in producing information and propaganda.

An open letter to the SWP

Dear Comrades,

We understand that the SWP is proposing to stand a full slate for the officers of the Federation and the regional representatives. Whilst the SWP as a group has not been involved in 3D, individual activists have attended meetings, and in the early days were involved in the Editorial Collective. At a local level 3D supporters have worked closely with the SWP, and whilst there have often been differences about tactics — whether a demonstration should be organised, what kind of leaflets to put out — SWP comrades have generally shared the criticisms that 3D has made of the approach of the current Federation leadership, particularly around the question of state attacks, the need for workplace action and democracy in the movement.

3D as a network has never sought to exclude any activist or APTU which broadly shares its aims. 3D has brought together anarchists, libertarians, socialists inside and outside the Labour Party, trade unionists, and above all activists who are non-aligned. It is not clear that the SWP has a radically different perspective on defeating the poll tax to that outlined in 3D, and in this light it is unfortunate, to say the least, that the SWP has created a false divide by standing a full slate. This will merely have the effect of weakening those forces who want an open, democratic federation that represents the diversity of the movement, and will probably mean that the current Federation leadership, dominated as it is by supporters of Militant, will maintain complete control of the structures.

We would urge SWP members to re-consider standing a full slate and support candidates supported by 3D.

The 3D editorial collective

Aims and principles

The 3D network has been set up to foster open communication and democracy within the anti-poll tax movement.

It does not set itself up in opposition to the All Britain Federation. Rather, in recognising that an all Britain federation has an important role, 3D hopes to be a positive force towards democratising that organisation and enabling it to represent the needs of the thousands of groups on the ground in a way which we believe it has failed to do to date.

We believe that there is a need to learn from the events of the past year, and as a result outline the following principles as being necessary for the movement to acknowledge.

1. The strength of the anti-poll tax movement is its diversity. This must be encouraged. Attempts by any groups, factions, parties to control the movement should be resisted.

2. The initiatives of the movement should come from the bottom up. The role of the national federation should primarily be: provision of information co-ordination of national events national press work.

3. The movement should be united and concentrate its energy on actively pursuing a range of strategies against the tax. It should not get caught up in minor disputes about emphasis. We believe that non-payment and non-collection are mutually interdependent. Both must be actively pursued. We should also continue to put pressure on councils and call for non-implementation.

4. The movement must defend all those intimidated by the police and assertively expose the violence and brutality of the state whenever it moves to strike against us.

5. The movement should clearly state its bottom line and make clear that it will continue to fight until these bottom line conditions are met.

★ A system based on ability to pay ★ A system which protects jobs and services ★ A system which gives local people/councillors the right to determine their own level of service provision and ★ An immediate amnesty for all non-payers of the poll tax.

DEFEND THE RIGHT TO DEMONSTRATE

Rally

Wednesday 28th November, 7.30pm
Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC2
SOLIDARITY WITH ANTI-POLL TAX DEFENDANTS

Organised by the Trafalgar Square Defendants' Campaign
Room 205, Panther House, 38 Mount Pleasant, London
WC1X 0AP ☎ 071-833 8958

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3D Regional Contacts

London: Jane c/o 11 Springfield Road, Tottenham, London, N15 4AY ☎ 081-801 6041)

South West: Danny c/o Avon Federation, 34 Belle Vue Rd, Easton, Bristol ☎ 0272-255504

Eastern: Nick c/o Cambridge APT, 34 Devonshire Rd, Cambridge and Katya c/o Norwich APT, 72 Connaught Rd, Norwich

Midlands: Alex and Tess c/o Hyson Green APTU, 47 Foxhall Rd, Forest Fields, Nottingham

Yorkshire: Ian c/o Leeds CAPT, Trades Council, Saville Mount, Leeds 7 ☎ 0532-623822

Northern: Linda c/o Middlesborough APT, 45 Athol St, Middlesborough

North West: Nick c/o Wythenshawe APTU, 20 Troutbeck Rd, Gatby, Stockport SK8 4RR

Scotland: c/o Refuse and Resist, 2/3 182 Ark Lane, Glasgow G31 2JS

NALGO AGAINST THE POLL TAX

Conference

Saturday 8th December, 11.00am-5.00pm

Hamden Community Centre, Ossulton Street, London NW1

Organised by Ealing Nalگو

For more details contact Nalگو APT, 4 Longfield Avenue, London W5 2UO

3D Activists Meeting

Saturday 15th December 1990

1.00pm - 5.00pm

Leeds Univerity Students Union

RH Evans Lecture Theatre

I Regional Round-up I Assesment of ABAPTF conference I Organising the network I Producing 3D I

If you share the aims of 3D please make sure someone from your APTU or workplace APTU attends. Please bring donations and articles for the newsletter and any money from sales. For information on accomodation, transport etc. contact the Leeds 3D group on % 0532 623822