

POLL TAX POEMS
from
Nottingham



This booklet comprises poetry by people of Nottinghamshire in the fight for the abolition of the Poll Tax.

It is dedicated to all those who are waging this fight.

In particular to those who have been or are in prison because of their opposition to this evil and unjust law.

Some have received sentences of weeks or months for non-payment, others years following the first mass demonstration in Trafalgar Square on March 31st 1990.

You can support these by writing to them, or by making donations to help their families visit them or provide them with items they need whilst inside.

Proceeds from this book will go to that cause.

For further information, or donations :

Nottingham Defence Fund
c/o 29 Wallan Street, Radford, Nottingham.
Tel 780557

Carry on the fight to abolish this medieval law.

DON'T PAY

Soroosh Ayandeh

I think no-one can object to the statement that Soroosh (Sam) is not only the best known, but the best loved of all Nottinghamshire's Anti-Poll Tax campaigners.

A tireless and imaginative fighter, it is little surprise that he was the first in Nottingham to be jailed for his beliefs. Nor that, following his statement to the court that he would rather lose his right arm than pay a tax which has brought misery to millions, he was given the maximum sentence of 3 months.

He was taken to Lincoln Prison on July 18th. As we go to press he is still there, still campaigning from his cell with ideas, information and encouragement.

He is due to be released on October 17th.

On October 19th he will be speaking at the Anti-Poll Tax rally in Trafalgar Square.

The fight goes on.

Soroosh, we salute you, and all those who are still imprisoned through fighting the Poll Tax.

'You're in there for us.
We're out here for you'.

Soroosh's Song

A stranger came from a far land
And made his home with us
Tall, dark and handsome and silver-tongued
He walked among our streets
And he saw the people who struggled,
The poor, the homeless and cold,
The lonely, the weary parents,
The children and the old.

And he worked with his strong brown hands
But he thought with his head and his heart
And he freely gave of his time and love
Asking nothing for his part.
And when the people suffered,
Attacked from every side,
He didn't turn away from them,
He didn't run and hide.

He stood up, brave and strong,
And said 'They'll have to take me too'
And willingly gave his freedom up
In defence of me and you.
He gave away his Summer days,
The green leaves and the sun,
For he wouldn't take what couldn't be
Enjoyed by everyone.

But though they take him from us
His spirit fuels our fight
We have his strength to warm us
His brightness in the night.
So we'll stand tall and stand together
And we'll fight on to the end
And will proudly tell our children :
Soroosh Ayandeh was our friend.

What A Fool I Was

(Dedicated to all those selfless miners
who taught us how to struggle)

As we arrived at the jail
At 3.30 on Thursday 18th,
As my eyes were scaling
All over the walls, windows and doors
To register everything
Which was new to me,
I was asked at the reception
'Were you here this morning?'
I replied 'What kind of question is that?
Who do you think I am?'
'Have you been here before?' he asked.
I looked at those around me,
I laughed and replied 'No'.

As I settled in my little cell
A few days later,
On one of my early morning walks
When I visited many hills and green valleys,
Many brooks, rivers and seas
Within my cell,
I said to myself
'Hang on a minute,
Think about it.
The question was right.
Have you been here before?
Of course I had.'

I arrived here
When the first man, Matt Lee,
On the 31st March in Trafalgar Square
Stood up and created a human shield
Against three Sherpa vans abreast
Ramming into the crowd
At 40 miles an hour,
Which were carrying within them
The tools of barbarity
To eliminate the last voice of defiance,
The last thunderous chants of
NO POLL TAX, NO POLL TAX,
Which shook the foundations of Whitehall (Black Hall)

Yes, Matt Lee,
Who saved many innocent lives,
And was jailed for 2½ years.
Yes, I had been here before.

I had been standing at this reception
As Bryan Wright,
Young and innocent labourer,
Shone like a mighty sun,
Strong, pure and clear
From behind huge, dark clouds,
And cried 'I would not pay'
And was jailed for three weeks.
Yes, I had been here before.

I had been here
When the unemployed father of three,
For refusing to starve his kids,
Rather than staying within the law
Was given 23 days in Reading.
Yes, I had been here before.

I had been here
When a 72 year old pensioner
With poorly eyes and
And an invalid wife,
By the name of Norman Laws,
Stood up and cried
'I will never pay.
And I'll be a Political Prisoner
If you jail me',
When he was jailed for 2 months.
Yes, I had been here before.

And I will continue to come here,
And live here,
Since there are millions of me
Who would follow my steps,
As I followed millions before me.

Anvil
Lincoln Prison

Bob Lee

Bob and his wife Elaine were expecting their first child in a few weeks at the time that he came before Nottingham Magistrate's Court for non-payment.

They had both been tireless and brave fighters in this campaign from the beginning.

Although it was expected that Bob would receive the maximum sentence of 3 months, neither he nor Elaine hesitated for a moment in their decision to refuse any payment; despite the fact that this would mean he would be in prison when the baby was born.

Although Bob 'wilfully refused' to pay, he was found guilty of 'culpable neglect'. We do not believe that this was due to compassion on the part of the Court or the Council, but was through their fear of the outrage that ordinary men and women would feel if Bob and Elaine were apart at this precious time. This finding allowed the court to pass a 'lesser' sentence.

Whilst Bob was in prison, Elaine continued to attend meetings and carry on the campaign.

Bob and Elaine, we salute you and your baby.

BOB LEE

(Poll Tax Prisoner 29.8.91 - 18.9.91)

The weather was warm on that August morn,
The day Bob went to court;
He went, a proud man, to learn his fate,
For 18 months he had fought.

The gallery was full, he had support,
He did not stand alone,
But as he stood in that wooden dock
He knew he would not be coming home.

He stood there tall, a man of his word,
And faced the bench with pride.
Council threats had failed, the bailiffs failed,
And God knows how they had tried.

He said from the start 'I will not pay,
This tax is so unjust;
And if to prison I have to go,
Then I'll go. In me you can trust'.

The Council said bailiffs attempted to levy distress,
But Bob obviously resisted;
For as far as he was concerned
The Poll Tax has never existed.

The money owed has not been paid,
Can you tell me why?
'I have been fighting the Poll Tax for 18 months'
Came the firm reply.

We find you guilty of culpable neglect,
Came the Magistrate's call.
Bob stood there proud, and said aloud
'I will pay nothing at all.'

To make him pay, the Magistrate tried,
But all efforts they were thwarted;
Twenty-one days about to face,
Handcuffed from court he was escorted.

Elaine Lee

I went to court on the 29th
To bat against the Poll Tax,
I took three fours off the council scum,
Two fours off the bench,
Only one off the clerk of the court,
And that was a bloody wrench.
Someone said he's got 21 days,
But the council thought it was 90,
I hadn't paid then, I wont pay now,
And said 'Thank you, that will do nicely'.

Bob Lee
Lincoln Prison
29.8.91

Dedicated to all Poll Tax Prisoners

Why you? You don't deserve this.
Why you? It isn't fair.
You could have done without this pain,
This cross so hard to bear.
But as your back's been chosen
To take this burden on,
You shoulder it as best you can
Until the day it's gone.

Is it a crime to be poor?

One Thursday morn I was summonsed to court
For the crime of being poor
Found liable by a kangaroo court
Amid shouts of NO POLL TAX HERE.

Next the bailiffs in their vans so new
We want your goods even though you're poor;
With windows barred, all nice and warm,
I told them NO POLL TAX HERE.

To prison you must go unless you pay,
Said a lory magistrate, without delay.
Jail me now, for I will not pay
Because I'm poor. NO POLL TAX HERE.

Anyday now I expect to go,
Fourteen days being the sentence.
With bags packed and head held high
This isn't defeat, for I have won.
NO POLL TAX HERE

Lesley Shaw

(Lesley had a committal hearing on 12.9.91.
Although she has no income of her own, she was
ordered to pay £5 a week or face 14 days in jail.
Lesley told the magistrate to jail her there and
then, as she had no intention of paying.
The Magistrate shied away from the honour of
sending the first woman in Nottingham to jail
and ordered her from the court to applause from
the public gallery.)

Colin Brett

Clifton Anti-Poll Tax Campaign.

Forget Byron, Colin Brett is Nottingham's best-known poet. (Who said D H Lawrence ? Wash your mouth out). Well, how many poems did Byron write about the Poll Tax?

At meetings throughout the city and boroughs Colin can be heard declaiming in his own dulcet tones (if nobody stops him). If he'd got a bike the whole country would have heard about him by now.

His poems, just some of which are recorded here for posterity, give blow by blow accounts of the Poll Tax. No doubt, in future years they will be compulsory 'A' level reading.

Well done Colin. You can stop now, the book's full.

Blight

A blight is sweeping this country,
A blight that is bitter and cruel,
It touches on every household,
A blight created by those that rule.

No-one is immune, it's deadly,
It spreads at a tremendous pace.
It attacks both young and elderly,
Contaminates all colours, creeds and race.

There is, however, a vaccine,
But it's only available to a few,
Lots of cash in the bank is the remedy,
Then, for some unknown reason, the blight misses you.

But the millions that are contaminated
Have seen a chance to destroy this blight,
Starve it of money, its life-blood,
It breaks down, withers, disappears from sight.

This alien virus Poll Tax, so evil,
Can and will be purged by our hand.
We've got it in retreat already,
We will smash it from this our England.

August 1990

We Are Sick

We're sick of fighting this Poll Tax
We're sick of taking this government on
We're sick of arguments with coppers
Arguing what's right, just or wrong.

We're sick of chasing the bailiffs
We're sick of arguing our case
We're sick of demanding justice
For the old and the poor of the human race.

We're sick of court room farces
We're sick of the newspaper lie
We're sick of intimidation
And not having the right to reply.

We're sick of holding meetings like this
We're sick of neglecting our wives
We're sick of leafletting and campaigning
We just want to get back to our normal lives.

We're sick of the sights of each other
We're sick of the words POLL TAX
We're sick of the way it's changed us
But we know we can never relax.

We're sick, yes, but we're winning
We're sick, yes, but we are assured
We're sick, yes, but the Poll Tax is crumbling
And then we will all be magically cured.

January 1991

Total Fail

Dear old Maggie's gone, and I'm glad to say
We wont see the likes of her for many a day.
She squeezed us dry, she put us all on the rack,
And tried to finish us off with the dreaded Poll Tax.

But people aren't daft, and folk aren't thick,
And over 12 million nationwide said simply 'Stuff it'.
Three million in Scotland are saying the same :
No Poll Tax, no Thatcherism, never again.

Most people can't pay, of this we are sure,
But they'll have to go to court; their crime is they're poor.
Young people, old age pensioners, they'll all have to go,
But to Thatcher's dreaded Poll Tax they say NO, NO, NO.

What a state we're in, this once land of hope and glory.
12 million in court, all because of a fanatical Tory.
I hope she's never allowed to forget what she's doing
to us all,

While she lives off her millions I hope she will recall
The misery and heartache, especially the N.H.S.,
The unemployed, the pit closures, cardboard cities,
My god, what a mess.

Goodbye Thatcher, we wont miss you one bit.
Your nightmare rule is over, and I thank god for it.
The students, mortgage repossessions, closure of homes
for the old and frail,
Yes, Thatcher, this is TOTAL, TOTAL FAIL.

February 1991

Private Sam

(For our older readers, with thanks and apologies to Stanley Holloway)

(It is sheer coincidence that Soroosh is known as Sam)

Sam, Sam, pay up your Poll Tax.

'Shan't' said Sam with voice so glum.

'Shan't ever pay it, Sarge, not till Kingdom come'.

Sam, Sam, pay it up, just for me lad.

'Can't' said Sam, and pulled his shoulders up straight.

'Can't pay it, Sarge, it's much too late'.

Now look here Sam lad, just do this one thing for me.

'Wont' uttered Sam, with eyes looking at the ground.

'Wont never pay it, Sarge, not even if I'm prison bound'.

Awe, come on Sam lad, dinna break your mammy's heart.

'I can't' said Sam, now with tears in his eyes.

'I can't you see, Sarge, or myself I'll always despise'.

Now look here Sam lad, I'm begging thee one more time,

Pay it up lad, and everything'll turn out fine.

'Shan't, can't, wont' shouted Sam.

And as they marched him off, the Sarge said :

Ee by gum, that's my kind of man.

August 1991

The Battle for Ruddington

(This is a true story, written in the style of, though surprisingly not by, Colin Brett.

It is dedicated to Calum, at 9 years old, the youngest of the arrestees)

It was Monday the 19th August,

A bright and sunny day,

When the message came that a bailiff van

Had ventured out this way.

Well, me and Chris were gossiping,

And were just in the thick of it,

But we leaped in the car, and headed out

To Ruddington damned quick.

We were joined by Colin and Calum,

And Little Col as well,

Who forsook their ink and their leaflets

And followed like bats out of hell.

We arrived at the victims' house

Where the bailiff scum had been,

And René and Ray and Mary

Appeared upon the scene.

We assessed the situation.

'Where's that bailiff scum?' we said.

He was cowering in a telephone box,

Wishing he was dead.

We soon had him surrounded

And told him what we thought.

Then a shopkeeper joined in the fun,

Things were getting fraught.

The bailiff he was shaking,

His face was turning green,

When round the corner two cop cars

Came racing to the scene.

The coppers stood and argued,

And us, we answered back,

All standing round the coppers' car

With the bailiff in the back.

Then we went to the victims' house
Where the sargeant laid down the law;
Which, according to him, was 'The bailiff wins,
You lose because you're poor'.

But Colin wasn't having this,
So he put on his Rumpole voice,
And the victims got their car keys back;
The sargeant had no choice.

But by now he was really angry,
He couldn't take a jest,
So he turned to me, Chris and Calum,
And said 'You're under arrest'.

For it seems that some sort of damage
Had occurred to the bailiff's van,
And the copper was so mad that he
Arrested us all, to a man.

And not only those of us
Who I've talked about so far,
But Simon, who was only passing by,
And Mike as he stepped out his car.

They took us all down the station,
It was just like a charabanc trip,
And kept us there for several hours,
Locked up in the nick.

But just as our spirits were flagging
We heard a mighty roar,
And half the people of Nottingham
Were banging on the door.

For they came by the bus and the carload
With banners and placards held high.
'Release the prisoners. No Poll Tax'
We heard their mighty cry.

What could the coppers do?
They knew we'd won the day.
'We're pressing no charges' they told us,
'Sod off, be on your way'.

So don't give in, keep fighting,
Solidarity wins the day.
And here's to the Bailiff Busters,
I've nothing more to say.