

LIFE AFTER THE POLL TAX

Below are the aims of the Stockbridge New Town Solidarity Network in Edinburgh adopted at a meeting called by Stockbridge New Town Anti-Poll Tax Group (SNTAPTG) on March 16, 1992.

The Network currently is very involved in anti-water privatisation activity, as well as Anti-Poll Tax work.

We are publishing this as part of our irregular feature *Life After the Poll Tax* which is aimed at stimulating the debate on where do we go after the Poll Tax's demise. Thanks to SNTSN for sending it to us. They can be contacted on 031-332 7547.

The Stockbridge New Town Solidarity Network

1) We believe in supporting and promoting solidarity, co-operation and mutual aid in the community and in a people's culture. We support local people's self-organisation. We work towards a free and equal society and oppose all forms of oppression and exploitation. We are an autonomous group, but we wish to co-operate with similar groups elsewhere.

We support activity that helps towards:

A) Fair and equal access to society's resources for all, with productive activity geared towards the needs of people and the environment. Some examples are - the anti poll tax movement, community resistance to sheriff officers, stopping evictions and fuel cut-offs, workers' efforts to gain better conditions, provision of community facilities, opposition to service cut-backs, local newspapers, self-help health groups, community music and arts, credit unions, self-build schemes, tenants control, education in the community, actions against pollution and environmental destruction.

B) Full rights, respect, and equality for all members of our community. Examples include resistance to racism and support for the women's movement.

C) Grass roots control by those directly concerned over the decisions that affect our lives - instead of control from above by Councils and Government, top bureaucrats, and big business.

D) A people's culture of participation and involvement, in which people can express themselves actively and creatively.

2) The full participation of SNTAPTG in this network. Initially at least the Stockbridge New Town Solidarity Network would be organised through a special section of the regular fortnightly SNTAPTG meeting.

3) That the SNTAPTG continue to meet regularly and organise as much activity as possible, with the major aims of • community self-defence against sheriff officers and all poll tax collection procedures • ensuring that all poll tax arrears are written off • solidarity with the anti poll tax prisoners.

UNITE STRUGGLES IN THE PUBLIC SERVICES AND COMMUNITIES!

All Britain Conference 6 and 7 February In Manchester. For details of venue etc phone Brian Patrick on 061-707 1584. The cost is £5 per delegate, cheques should be made payable to *February Conference* and sent to NWAPF, P.O. Box 9, Eccles Sq., Eccles, Salford M30 7FX.

Mass action and mass public opinion forced the Tory government to back off over its pits closure programme.

But the attack on the miners is only postponed - and only the first in a new wave of attacks which the government will be carrying out against the public services and all of Britain's communities.

The day following the first huge march in support of the miners, the closure of four major London teaching hospitals was recommended. Between them they account for hundreds of years of medical research and history. This government says they don't make money, so they must be smashed up - with the loss of at least 20,000 jobs.

The government plans to solve its currency and financial problems through public service and benefit cuts far greater than any we have yet seen.

Communities must be united and organised throughout Britain to resist and defeat the inevitable next round of attacks.

We are calling a two-day conference in Manchester to help the fight - to strengthen all the different struggles in the communities and the public services by linking them. We must discuss an alternative policy in order to fund the public services we need.

Hospital, transport, education, council and other workers are being

sacked in thousands. Those who are left do not have the equipment or resources to do their jobs. Hospital are closing, schools are being run into the ground, bus and train services are falling apart, and council services are being destroyed.

The financial crisis, the Poll Tax, the new Council Tax, and prolonged government cuts are driving councils towards bankruptcy.

Most Labour and Tory councillors react by trying to force even more money out of people with little or none.

Many public sector workers are fighting the devastation of their services, but unless we unite workers and the community, services will go.

We need to unite all workers, workers in the public sector, the families, the youth, pensioners, the gathering army of unemployed, those facing racist attacks.

The trade union leaders have led no fight against the government.

Their refusal to unite workers at the time of the miners' strike left the miners to fight on their own - with the results that the government felt free to close down those whole communities.

The TUC leaders now intend that every section of workers must fight on their own.

The increase in unemployment is being measured each week in tens of thousands, and the TUC wants unity only the government and business.

We are holding this conference, initiated by the North West Anti-Poll Tax Forum and the Crisis in London Campaign, in the interest of maximum unity to strengthen the attack on the government. We saw the first results of mass resistance with the poll tax, and now the pit closure programme.

CONFERENCE PLANNING MEETING

The next planning meeting for the All Britain anti-Cuts conference is in Manchester on Sunday 17 January at 1pm. For further details contact Brian on 061-707 1584. Or else, to make proposals, write to North West APT Forum, P.O. Box 9, Eccles Sq., Eccles, Salford M30 7FX.

The last planning meeting mainly discussed practical issues, proposals to put to the conference (a demo, day of action, building May Day) the importance of discussing organisation, fighting for control not just no cuts, finding a way to talk about attacks simply but without simplifying. Those who need creche, signer, translation etc., or who can supply them, please get in touch beforehand.

BRINGING THE STRUGGLE TOGETHER

A public meeting in Islington on December 14, part of a series organised by Crisis in London, brought together speakers from the NUM, Women Against Pit Closures (who held an occupation of Markham colliery the week before), University College Hospital (where an occupation stopped the closure of a ward), Clapton bus garage who fighting privatisation, Islington NALGO (still out), the Construction Safety Campaign and Action for Benefit Rights. We need more opportunities to come together, more time, and of course more ideas.

HALF TIME SCORES

According to government figures for the half year Poll Tax collection to September 1992, Inner London boroughs collected 41% of their annual budgeted yield on average, compared to 50% for England as a whole. Of course, these figures should be taken with a large pinch of salt.

Hackney did best, in London, with only 28.7% collected, followed by Southwark (36.9%) and Ealing (37.3%). Only Middlesborough managed to top Hackney in the England table with 27.7%.

At the other end Westminster scored 71.6%, the City of London 69.95 and Kingston-upon-Thames 59%. Again only one English borough managed to top Westminster, the Isles of Scilly on 79.4%.

Despite a general rise, collection figures for Westminster, the City, Ealing and Southwark were down on last year, while Newham seems to have leapt from 15.2% to 50%.

Collection of business rates averaged 50.5% for London, and 54% for England as a whole, and was also up on last year. 6 London boroughs were down on last year, and figures vary from 31.6% in Lewisham to 66.4% in the City.

LONDON

January 1993

Fight the Poll Tax!

Issue
24

THE CON TAX!

As the Poll Tax comes to the end of its official life span, the replacement Council Tax becomes more clearly a continuation of the same attack.

Central government capping and increasingly absurd spending assessments mean that cuts to our local services and to jobs will be even more severe than under the Poll Tax, while transitional relief means a subsidy to those who benefited most from the introduction of the Poll Tax in the first place.

Council Tax Axe (Mummy, what was a service?)

The savageness of the cuts has shocked even Tory run councils, with Tory councillors in Harrow, for example threatening to resign rather than vote for cuts that would severely damage the education service, their pride and joy. Across London the Association of London Authorities estimate cuts of £130 million, while NALGO are talking of the loss of 80,000 jobs across England.

Eight councils around England are faced with particularly savage cuts, finding themselves over 25% above their Standard Spending Assessment (SSA), the unlucky eight being, Basildon, Derwentside, Welwyn Hatfield, Adur, Elmbridge, Barrow in Furness, Harlow and Lanbaugh on Tees. For them, and many other communities around the country services will be cut to the bone, closed or contracted out to the lowest bidder. Which is what the government want - councils that provide only their statutory requirements (at the most) and that through competitive contracts with the private and 'voluntary' sectors. All the services that the poorest sectors of the community rely on are meant to be destroyed.

90% of councils are reported to be planning cuts to social services, while in areas where services have been taken over by the voluntary sector and charities on the basis that they could do it cheaper, further cuts will stretch them even more, and force them to use charitable contributions or other funding to keep services going, and to move towards a conscript unemployed workforce. Grants to the voluntary sector are being slashed, with a Tory councillor in Greenwich calling such grants 'handouts'. In Camden, for example, a 20% cut in voluntary sector grants means the total destruction of 38 organisations, including three advice centres, community centres and playgroups, with cuts for all the rest and community centres left with only their rent (which they pay back to the council) and nothing for costs or staff.

We Don't Need No Education?

The problems in Harrow, and other places come partly from a 'miscalculation' of the costs of further and higher education, being removed next year from local authority control. Harrow spend £10 million in this area, while the government have instead costed it at and reduced

the education budget by £17 million, threatening all under-5s classes, two teachers from each primary school and reductions in all other areas. Of course it is no coincidence that tertiary education, and this £7 million from Harrow alone, are being placed increasingly under the control of the private sector (employers know best what we should, and shouldn't learn) or that these cuts will force schools to opt out.

In Lewisham, like elsewhere, Community Education is being slashed, with all permanent full time staff who survived last year's purge getting their notice and all but two being closed. Basic services like literacy and numeracy will be destroyed, leaving classes in fencing and dress-making, as long as they bring in enough money.

In Camden, £1.4 million cuts are being directed at school meals, meaning no choice of meals, 150 jobs lost and reduction in hours for the remaining diner ladies making their already pathetic pay worthless.

The message is that no service is safe, that no amount of book balancing, crocodile tears, or attempts to save one service at the cost of others will keep this government from squeezing even harder next time. As the leader of the Tory group in Harrow said: 'We've done all the government asked for over the years.' At least if people stand up it is harder to kicked in the teeth. The government will not be finalising the funding situation for a couple of months, giving them time to watch councillors grovel.

Poll Tax +

If you liked the idea of banding - meaning that those in the most expensive properties pay only three times as much as those in the cheapest, you'll love 'transitional relief' which flattens out the differences even more. The relief is concentrated at the top end of the scale and relates to this year's Poll Tax levels, so continuing the benefits to the few.

(Continued overleaf)

COMMITTAL TIME LIMITS

The loss of the Mould appeal over time limits (sec 127 Magistrates Courts Act 1980) only applies in cases where a committal summons was obtained by way of an application.

The six month rule still applies in cases where the summons was obtained by way of a complaint. Nationally, there are 40 appeals due to be heard where a committal summons was issued by way way of a complaint after the expiry of the time limit.

In Hatfield, Herts., the council is now arguing in front of the magistrates that their committal summonses were in fact obtained by application and not complaint. The cases have been adjourned until January 19.

Councils will no doubt in future ensure that that their committal summonses are issued by means of an application.

FIGHT THE COUNCIL TAX?

London Fight the Poll Tax has organised a meeting at The Small Hall, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC1 at 7pm Tuesday 26th January 1993. There will be speakers on various aspects of the Council Tax - the mechanics, enforcement and cuts. There will be an opportunity to ask questions. There will be a discussion on what we are going to do about it and where does the movement and LFPT go from here.

MONTHLY MEETING

to publicise, discuss and co-ordinate the London APT struggle

at 7.00pm Sunday 10th January

At Fareshares Food Co-op, 56a Crampton St., Pullens Estate (off Walworth Rd.), SE17.

Elephant & Castle tube/BR

All APTUs are positively encouraged to turn up.

THE CON TAX (CONT)

In Camden, for example, a single person living in a property valued at over £320,000 will pay £556.34 (getting £343.66 relief), while a couple living in a £68-88,000 property pay £600. This top band is less than double the lowest single rate, and only £13 above the next band down. The extra paid if there are two people in a top rate property is the rate of this years Poll Tax! I thought poll tax was abolished.

Camden Council Tax (including transitional relief)

band	I person	2 people	more than 2
A	300	400	n/a
B	349.50	466	n/a
C	399.75	533	n/a
D	450	600	n/a
E	517.34	733	n
F	530.34	866	n/a
G	543.34	917.68	999
H	556.34	930.68	1200

The model will be similar for other boroughs, though the level of relief will vary.

According to Time Out, the Department of the Environment have suggested that there will be a time limit on those claiming the 25% single person reduction, presumably to encourage people to register by April.

Market Values

Market value of property is not a reasonable indication of ability to pay, particularly for those in social housing (council, co-op etc.) designed for those who wouldn't be able to afford market rates, and who are more likely to lose than gain if their area becomes 'desirable'. It is only the government's own market values that seek to ensure that people can only live where income and prices allow. That the valuation should be carried out by the cheapest roving estate agents and assume a reasonable state of repair will mean values are likely to be exaggerated, though some yuppies are expected to appeal for a higher valuation in the hope that this will also raise the selling price. A million appeals are expected against valuation, but can not be made until April when the final register is published, and as we've found in Poll Tax cases, we're meant to pay first on the current register or get a liability order. Basing valuations on 1991 values is, as the government say, irrelevant, as they could move the bands to make up for any general reduction in values. But by reminding home owners of how much they've lost in recent years, including their great hopes, the government have stirred up anger, and the recognition that for the vast majority market values do not work.

HELP US!

This newsletter is produced by a number of APTUs and individuals who consider that the provision of information is central to the success of our struggle. The only way we can put the information out is if you supply it. So, please, send all your news to us. It costs us £35 a month to produce and mailout this newsletter.

Contact London Fight The Poll Tax, c/o BM CRL, London WC1N 3XX Or phone John on 081-692 9181 weekday a.m. and week-ends.

It is better to phone rather than write.

INFO FUND: In our mailings we include leaflets etc. produced by other organisations. LFPT does not necessarily agree with their contents. If your organisation would like something included in the mailing, which goes to about 200 Anti Poll Tax groups in London and the regional APT contacts around Wales, Scotland and England, contact LFPT by the second Sunday in the month; the mailing is done on the Monday after the third Sunday. For Anti Poll Tax groups there is no charge. For other groups there is a charge based on a percentage of the mailout costs - the actual cost will depend on both the weight of the material and how many groups are putting stuff in. Groups are asked to provide people to help out with the mailout. Racist, sexist, homophobic material will not be allowed. Likewise material produced by political parties or sects will not be allowed.

The table below gives the Council Tax figures for each London borough. The figures have been produced by the Labour-controlled Association of London Authorities.

They are, in fact, an underestimate of what the final outcome will be. They are based on the unlikely assumption that councils will collect 98% of the Council Tax; increase spending by 3.1%; but, individually, stay within the Government's capping rules. The figures, also, assume an overall 0.75% pay 'rise' for council workers. They make no allowance for further increases in spending where councils currently spend less than the Government's Standard Spending Assessment. Most councils also are likely to make an allowance for successful appeals against valuation.

Camden and Haringey councils have released their own assessments of what they will charge. In both cases these are higher than the ALA figures - Camden: Band A £400; B £466; C £533; D £600; E £733; F £866; G £999 H £1,200. Haringey: A £469; B £546; C £623; D £700; E £854; F £1,008; G £1,169; H £1,400.

LONDON

AREA	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Camden	332	366	440	495	604	713	826	990
Greenwich	443	515	588	661	806	952	1,104	1,322
Hackney	372	433	494	555	677	799	927	1,110
Hammersmith and Fulham	329	363	437	491	600	708	821	983
Islington	409	476	544	611	745	880	1,020	1,222
Kensington and Chelsea	258	300	342	385	469	554	642	769
Lambeth	351	409	467	524	640	755	875	1,049
Lewisham	305	355	405	455	555	655	760	910
Southwark	378	439	501	563	687	811	941	1,127
Tower Hamlets	319	372	424	477	582	687	796	954
Wandsworth	62	70	82	92	113	133	154	185
Westminster	159	195	212	238	290	342	397	475
Barking and Dagenham	340	395	452	508	620	731	84	1,016
Barnet	358	417	475	534	652	769	892	1,068
Bexley	328	381	435	489	596	704	815	978
Brent	327	380	434	483	595	702	815	976
Bromley	325	378	432	485	592	699	810	970
Croydon	311	362	413	464	566	668	775	928
Ealing	371	432	493	554	676	798	926	1,109
Enfield	345	401	458	514	628	741	859	1,029
Haringey	433	501	575	647	789	931	1,080	1,293
Harrow	340	395	452	508	620	731	848	1,016
Havering	353	410	468	526	642	758	879	1,052
Hillingdon	352	410	468	526	641	757	878	1,052
Hounslow	376	438	500	562	686	809	938	1,124
Kingston Upon Thames	351	408	466	524	639	754	874	1,047
Merton	340	395	452	508	620	731	848	1,016
Newham	308	359	409	460	561	662	768	920
Redbridge	341	397	453	509	621	733	850	1,018
Richmond Upon Thames	361	420	480	539	658	776	900	1,078
Sutton	347	405	462	519	633	747	866	1,037
Waltham Forest	361	421	480	539	658	776	901	1,078
Average bill	328	382	436	490	598	706	818	980

HACKNEY HARASSES H.A.s

Hackney's Finance Department are sending officers to visit social landlords who have newly built/converted property, for what they say are 'community charge' purposes. Their questionnaire has a space for the tenants' names. Failure to get that, they start asking questions as to how many floors the flats have - hardly relevant for the Poll Tax!

LONDON APT CONTACT NUMBERS

These are public hotline/contact numbers for most London boroughs. Some boroughs are not listed, because we have not been informed of their hotline number.

Barking 081-590 0704 • Barnet 081-200 1585 • Bexley 081-856 7925 • Brent 071-624 1931 • Bromley 081-650 6715 • Camden 071-431 2760, 071-267 8725, 071-372 6063 • Croydon 081-653 9622 • Ealing 081-840 3445/2351 • Enfield 081-807 5239 • Hackney 081-533 3311 • Hammersmith & Fulham 071-731 1492 • Haringey 081-341 3372, 081-802 9804, 081-348 5399 • Harrow 081-422 3514 • Hillingdon 0923-827062 • Islington 071-704 8676 • Kensington & Chelsea 071-727 8763 • Lambeth 081-671 5318, 071-735 0024 • Lewisham 081-692 4219 • Merton 081-542 0836 • Newham 081-519 1474 • Redbridge 081-518 1987 • Richmond 081-948 6067 • Southwark 071-231 6963 • Sutton 081-640 4346 • Tower Hamlets 081-980 9855 • Waltham Forest 081-527 2187 • Wandsworth 081-672 9698

COMMITTAL NEWS

CAMDEN

Six people were given suspended sentences for non-payment of all or part of 1990/1's Poll Tax at committal hearings held on December 1 at Highbury Magistrates. A further 35 people had arrest warrants issued against them.

Kenneth Seymour was given a two month suspended for wilful refusal after he told the court it was against his principles to pay the Poll Tax. Kenneth who is unemployed was ordered to pay £10 a week. The magistrate said the money he spent on cigarettes and beer should be used to pay the Poll Tax.

Gordon Borthwick, a civil servant, said he couldn't pay because he had to repay credit card debts of more than £12,000 at £441 a month. He was given one month suspended and ordered to pay £150 a month leaving him with £241 a month to live on.

Victoria Fox and Kalmala Liock were given one month suspended. Victoria told the magistrate that after paying the rent and other bills the couple were only left with £7 a week. They also paid £30 a month for marriage counselling. The magistrate said this would be better spent on repaying the Poll Tax and ordered them to pay £120 a month.

Simone King who had been unemployed since October 1990. Her Poll Tax rebate had not been processed - the magistrate obviously ignored this as he gave a one month suspended and ordered her to pay £10 a week.

John Munroe, who is on invalidity benefit, was ordered to pay £85 a month on the grounds that his wife earns £500 a month and he had £800 life savings. He was given a one month suspended as an 'incentive' to pay.

EALING

At the start of December, Acton magistrates continued trying to impose their own strange version of 'justice' on commitment proceedings. Magistrate Mrs Fraser attempted to have barrister Hugo Charlton and the Reverend Paul Nicholson from Captive jailed for contempt of court. Fortunately, the clerk of the court informed her that it wasn't on.

HARINGEY

Halit Demirchi from Wood Green was jailed for 45 days on November 10 for an outstanding debt of £1451.28. He was taken to Pentonville but released the same day after the money was paid.

SUPPORT THE PRISONERS

Daryl Meikleham, from Leeds is spending the Yuletide period in jail for non-payment. He was given 42 days on December 3. Daryl Meikleham, JR3437, HMP/YOI Moorland, Bawtry Road, Hatfield Woodhouse, S. Yorks, DN7 6BW.

Birmingham Labour council jailed non-payer Alan Talley in mid-December. Another non-payer with a similar debt was not jailed. He was a policeman. Alan Talley, HMP Winson Green, Winson Green Road, Birmingham B18 4AS.

Also in jail for non-payment: John Rudge, HR2924, HMP Winson Green.

William Barford, HMP Hull, Hedon Road, Hull HU9 5LS. In jail for the Colchester demo: Graham Mann, NL 2861, Britannia Wing, HMP Norwich, Knox Road, Mousehold, Norwich, Norfolk.

BRISTOL

On December 3, Lord Justice Sharman instructed that unemployed Tony Hawkins be released from Horfield Prison immediately.

Tony Hawkins had been on Unemployment benefit for a year. This had run out but he had not been granted Income Support. At his committal on November 13 he had offered to pay £4 a week but the magistrate refused it.

Avon APTU intend to challenge magistrates who impose repayment orders above £2.15 (the statutory weekly amount for a single person) on the unemployed.

80 YEAR OLD STANDS FIRM

80-year old Doris Pulley, from Rainham, Kent, refused to allow the staff at Holloway to organise a whip-round to pay her bill. She was given 14 days on November 30. She said paying the Poll Tax would use up all her savings and anyway she objects to paying on principle. She owed £590.15: the cost to the state of keeping her in jail is around £920.

HATFIELD

A lot of people are getting their debts remitted by Hatfield, Herts., magistrates.

NO RIGHT OF SILENCE

Mr Justice Henry ruled on October 9 in R v Highbury Corner Magistrates ex parte Watkins that a person cannot rely on the privilege against self-incrimination (sec 14 Civil Evidence Act 1968) to justify refusing to answer questions as to their means and as to why they have not paid the Poll Tax at committal hearings.

In the same hearing the judge ruled that the magistrate was wrong to deny Phoebe Watkins the assistance of a McKenzie and that they were wrong to deny her the opportunity to cross-examine the council's principal recovery officer.

BAILIFF NEWS

BAILIFFS ARREST NON-PAYERS

In Hatfield, bailiffs from Drakes are turning up to non-payers' homes at 4 in the morning. When the non-payer answers the door, they serve the arrest warrant and take the person down to the police station where s/he is kept in the cells until their committal hearing which is held later the same day.

MADAGANS

In Haringey, Madagans are sending the neighbours of non-payers letters asking if the non-payer is still living there.

LEWISHAM

63% of cases passed on the bailiffs - Gaults and Madagans, have been returned to the council. The council says this is the result of the effectiveness of the 'anti-poll tax campaigns'.

MERTON

Merton are using Pete Wallis Today.

ABOLISH BAILIFFS

The National Association of Citizen's Advice Bureaux are calling for the abolition of the private bailiff.

The association says that there is mounting evidence that they 'threaten, intimidate and lie their way into people's homes,' seize goods illegally and 'put our clients through untold misery and distress.' Private bailiffs only have an implied right of entry to a person's home if collecting unpaid income tax. In other circumstances they are gaining entry in 'dubious' ways.

An advice bureau in West Yorkshire says local bailiffs ask people if they can use the toilet; a bureau in Cornwall says they broke a window to get into a house; and a bureau in North Yorkshire says they broke the glass in a front door.

Once they have gained entry, the association says, they may seize goods in an arbitrary way. A man in South Wales arrived home to find his television and video being taken away, his seven-year old son having let the bailiffs in. An elderly asthmatic in Cornwall had his ioniser taken and returned only when the police intervened.

Examples of excessive charges include a £106 debt faced by a client of an advice bureau in South London after one visit by bailiffs to collect a £16 parking fine, and £80 per visit levied on debtors by bailiffs based 60 miles from the local authority in Nottinghamshire that uses them.

Source: The Guardian December 15

THE FIGHT GOES ON

- December 23 marks the first anniversary of the start of the Newham dispute - NALGO members are still out.
- Brent council are forcing staff to undergo 'competence tests' as an excuse to get rid of those they claim don't come up to scratch.
- Camden council are threatening closure without notice and for unspecified periods of libraries and other leisure facilities to avoid a £1 million overspend this year.

BARNET NEWS

Barnet Council seems to have given up on the Poll Tax. There have been no liability order hearings, no reports of bailiff activity and no commitals for a long time. Barnet are a million pounds down on their collection of the Poll Tax.