

FOREST FIELDS PEACE GROUP

SEPTEMBER 88

20P



**DON'T LET'S GAMBLE
WITH OUR FUTURE!**

FACT FILE..



At the end of May the United Nations Third Special Session on Disarmament (SSD III) opened quietly in New York. So quietly, in fact, that it was difficult to find a reference to this important event in any newspaper. Of course, the disarmament spotlight was on the Gorbachev-Reagan summit at the time. Not that any real progress was made there, with President Reagan putting up a permanent smoke screen called 'human rights' to mask his complete deafness to Mikhail Gorbachev's latest initiative - to work towards a reduction of conventional forces in Europe. And this despite western governments' constant designation of the alleged lack of balance in this field as a major impediment to further steps in the dismantling of nuclear weaponry.

Nevertheless, it was understandable that the media should concentrate its attention on the leaders of the two superpowers. However worthy and sensible the proposals put forward at the United Nations, everyone knows that they depend on their acceptance by the major countries for their implementation.

This dependence was made crystal clear after the First Special Session (SSD I) held in 1978. Those deliberations not only affirmed the goal of general and complete disarmament, but proposed practical and imaginative routes for moving in that direction. After some fluttering in the major chancelleries of the world, all of this was forgotten and both East and West embarked on a major escalation in nuclear capacities, which brought us onto the streets all over Europe in the first half of the 80's.

This experience is chastening, but it should not lead us to write-off the United Nations as an irrelevance in the struggle for a peaceful world. Take SSD I itself. One of the more compelling imaginative ideas it propounded was for nuclear-free zones in different parts of the world, as confidence building measures and a stage on the way to a denuclearised world. Some were inspired by this to launch the appeal for a nuclear-free zone in the whole of Europe (the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation circulated this appeal widely in Europe and obtained thousands of signatories). It became the focal point for the European peace movements and the basis for the END conventions at which peace activists have gathered from all over Europe every year since 1982 (last year in Coventry, this year Lund, in Sweden). And many proposals for more limited nuclear-free zones were generated, including those for Scandinavia, the Balkans and the Iberian peninsula, which have entered the mainstream of political debate in those regions.

So the UN can become a focus for agitation and even a source of inspiration and hope. Certainly the non-aligned countries who have joined since 1945 in the wake of de-colonisation often use the General Assembly to debate such crucial issues for them as apartheid, which it regularly condemns. It is perhaps unsurprising that the UN's most powerful and committed founder member, the United States, feels alienated from this body now that

its own power and influence has declined. Unsurprising, but not defensible, since it has involved undermining UN work by the withholding of funds and defying its authority by boycotting the World Court, when this organ of the UN considered the charges of the Nicaraguan government against the US for mining its harbours.

Much more encouraging is the reverse attitude of the Soviet Union, which has become more supportive of the UN since Gorbachev's accession. Not only has it now paid its long-outstanding dues, but Gorbachev himself has made a strong commitment to give the UN a powerful role in a comprehensive international security system, and in the solution of the major problems of under-development and poverty.

As Gorbachev says, we live in an increasingly inter-related and inter-dependant world of great complexity and diversity. The challenges and crises this generates can only be tackled at a world level, and the only such comprehensive institution we possess is the UN.

So we have no alternative; if we want a secure and peaceful world where billions of those who are now poor are allowed to have sufficient food, shelter, education and medical facilities, we have to support, strengthen and reform the UN. Some people are beginning to discuss, with a sense of urgency, how this might be done (see, for example, *Perestroika: Global Challenge For Our Common Future*, published recently by Spokesman). It is a debate the peace movement cannot afford to ignore.



Ken Fleet is secretary of the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation, which has its offices in Gamble Street, Nottingham. He is a member of the Forest Fields Peace Group.

DISARMAMENT & DEVELOPMENT

THE ROLE OF THE U.N.



My visit to the USSR this year began in April, when Moscow was awakening from the frosts and snow of its heavy winter. The people were still in their dark clothes but the trees were breaking into leaf and gardeners were busy putting out the plants in the parks and along the road verges. Colourful stalls and sunshades were appearing, signs that Moscow must be a delightful city in the summer.

Our destination was Central Asia and we left Moscow in a slight feathering of snow, and got off the plane four hours later into a temperature of 33C (91F). Of the ancient architectural delights of Bukhara and Samarkand I could drool for hours, and also the modern buildings, tree-lined streets and parks of Tashkent, where the metro stations equal those of Moscow. But it was the preparations for May Day and Liberation Day which greatly impressed Betty and me.

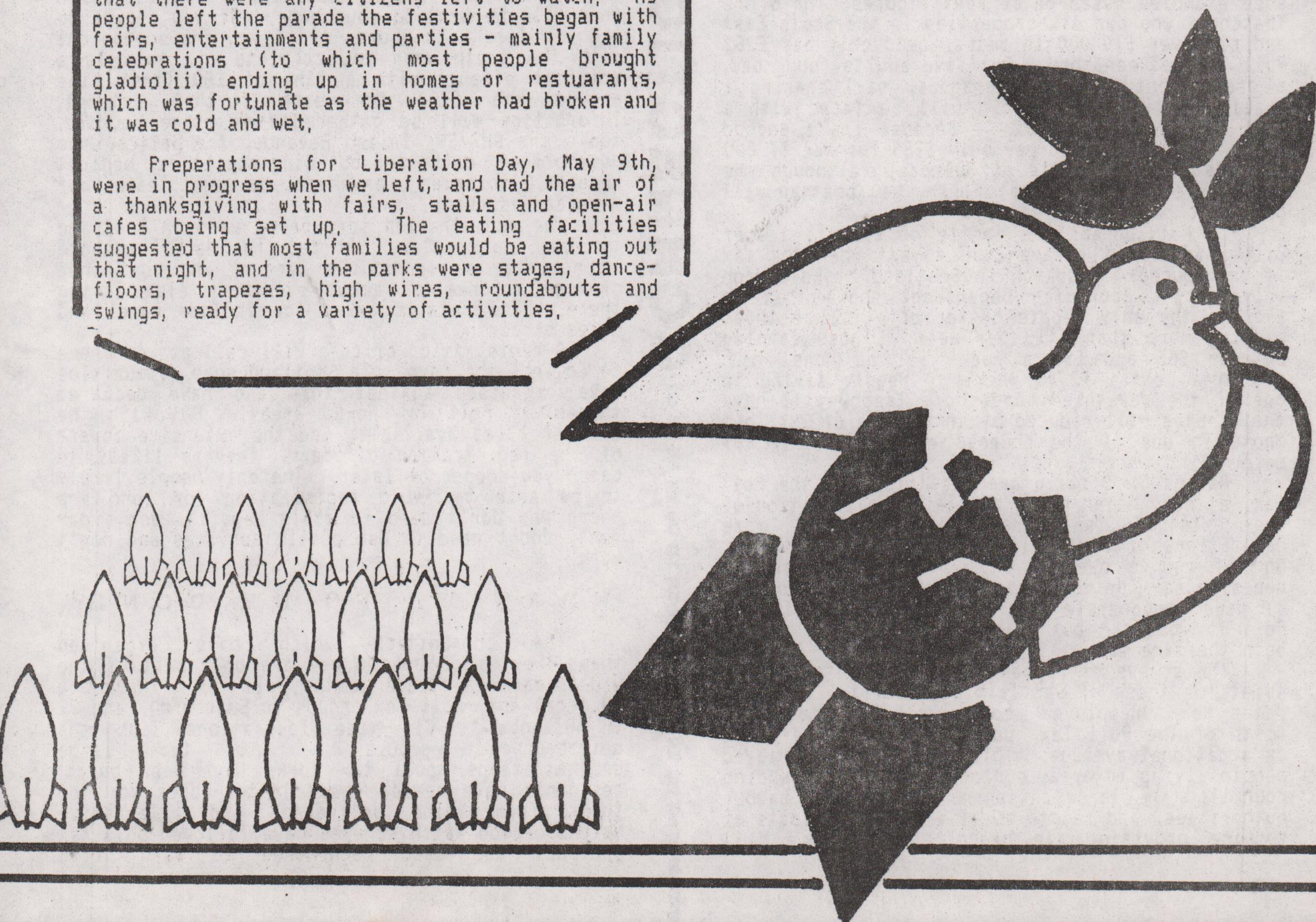
The May Day theme was PEACE and this was proclaimed with posters, banners and paintings in many languages hanging in every available space. The procession in Bukhara was like one of the better C.N.D. London demonstrations and included children from schools, pioneer corps, factory workers, trades unions and medical workers. The parade was colourful and easy-going with banners, balloons, doves, flowers and other world symbols. It contained so many persons that one wondered that there were any citizens left to watch. As people left the parade the festivities began with fairs, entertainments and parties - mainly family celebrations (to which most people brought gladioli) ending up in homes or restaurants, which was fortunate as the weather had broken and it was cold and wet.

Preparations for Liberation Day, May 9th, were in progress when we left, and had the air of a thanksgiving with fairs, stalls and open-air cafes being set up. The eating facilities suggested that most families would be eating out that night, and in the parks were stages, dance-floors, trapezes, high wires, roundabouts and swings, ready for a variety of activities.

We had taken wreaths and sprays of white poppies to lay at memorials in Moscow, Tashkent and Leningrad and these, particularly in Moscow, were received with interest, appreciation and personal thanks in English. However, we felt that we were taking peaceful intentions to a nation abounding with them, they don't want to rock the world boat.

In Central Asia we felt how easy and peaceful life was for a people not yet subjected to the strains and tensions of 'keeping up with the Joneses' and the constant bombardment of commercial advertising. Their history of living in a land short of hard timber has accustomed them to little furniture, and now that they have water and electricity supplies in their adobe houses they have the best of the new and the traditional and are happy that sufficient is enough. For general interest it would be good to get reliable figures of their present life expectancy and the rate of heart-related illnesses and high blood pressure in Central Asia.

Doreen Gower



CONNECTIONS

CONNECTIONS

The Poll Tax, or Community Charge, will replace the domestic rates as the system to make people pay for services provided by local government. People living in Scotland start paying the Poll Tax on April 1st next year, but it will be 1990 before we have to pay it in England and Wales.

The Poll Tax is completely different to the rates because it is a tax on people, not property. Instead of paying because we have somewhere to live, in the future we will pay simply for being alive.

The Poll Tax isn't linked to voting rights, although some people might leave the electoral register in their attempts to avoid payment. The Poll Tax is a tax per head (per 'poll', in old english). In each council area, all adults over 18 will pay the same flat rate of tax. The amount each person pays will be worked out so that the council can collect the same amount of money as they do using the existing domestic rates.

UNJUST

The Poll Tax is unjust because it isn't even superficially linked to the ability to pay. People on lower incomes are more likely to live in shared housing, and will almost certainly pay more Poll Tax than they currently pay rates. Here are some examples based on current figures: Mr & Mrs Thatcher, who own six properties in the South East and pay over £10 000 in rates, need only pay £262 Poll Tax between them. But five adults (mum, dad, a grandparent and two teenagers, say) sharing a small flat in Kentish Town will be faced with a Poll Tax bill of £4 682. Because it's a second home, the Queen would pay only £350 for her 17 000 acre estate and castle at Balmoral (although she actually pays no taxes at all); her postman will be due to pay £519.

In Nottingham, the family of council leader Bill Bradbury will save £600 a year when the tax is introduced. Research in Scotland by Edinburgh University's Economics Department shows that on average the only people better off will be those earning more than £419 per week. Those earning between £66 and £96 a week will be worst hit, paying an extra £2.48 weekly. People living in one of the wealthiest areas of Glasgow will have their rates bill reduced by an average of 29%, but those in one of the poorest areas will pay 48% more.

Asians in Britain are victimised by the Poll Tax, as many Asian homes maintain the tradition of the extended family and have two or more generations of adults living at the same address. And if you've been living with somebody of the opposite sex for more than a year, one of you will be made responsible for payment of both of your Poll Tax bills - but this won't happen if you're both the same sex.

The screws of oppression are given a further twist for those of us claiming benefit. Like the rates now, unemployed people will have to pay a fifth of the Poll Tax, but rebates will be based on a national average. This means that unemployed people living in areas controlled by high spending councils (the large cities and towns with Labour authorities, and remote rural areas where costs of service provision are higher) won't get a full

rebate, and will have to pay more than a fifth of the tax.

INEFFICIENT

So the Poll Tax is unjust, but because its payable per person its inefficient, too. The domestic rates system was based on buildings, which don't move around much, and its fairly obvious how many there are in each area. The Poll Tax will be more difficult and costlier to administer. The government Green Paper on the tax quoted a figure for Nottingham of £207 per person, but this doesn't take into account the extra cost of collection compared to the rates. In Glasgow the city's Director of Finance has estimated this at £79 per person.

To make the Poll Tax work, state surveillance and information gathering will have to be further centralised and extended. The tax might eventually provide the excuse to introduce compulsory national identity cards, which would have to be used for everything from taking out a library book to getting a job or renting a flat.

HOW IT WORKS

Poll Tax Registers, lists of people eligible to pay the tax, will be compiled. A registration form will be sent to your home. If you decide to light a fire with yours, or if you are economical with the truth when you complete it, this is a criminal offence with a fine of £50 first time around and £200 for each further attempt. Information will be gathered from other sources, too: the DH/SS, Inland Revenue, the police, the post office, banks and building societies, medical records, libraries, anywhere you might leave your name and address.

The registration form being used in Scotland is long and complex. It requires each household to nominate a responsible person, who must then provide information about everybody else living there. The details asked for include names and dates of birth.

A registration officer will call at your home to collect the form. In Scotland some communities have organised against this and have declared themselves Poll Tax No-Go Areas. But with the mass of files available, and the extensive powers of the registration officers, they're likely to catch you sooner or later. The only people likely to be able to avoid registration for long are those who don't need to claim benefit, don't pay rent, don't need to use public services and don't work.

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

The communities which have organised themselves into No-Go areas are only part of the widespread resistance to the Poll Tax. There are 23 local anti-Poll Tax groups in Edinburgh, and 31 in Glasgow. City-wide federations link the neighbourhood groups. At two large demonstrations, poll tax forms have been burnt; residents have sealed their letter-boxes to stop forms from being delivered, and alternative Neighbourhood Watch schemes have followed poll tax snoopers and used megaphones to warn local

CONNECTIONS

residents of their presence. Already, the debate in Scotland isn't for or against the Poll Tax, its about the best way to stop it. These are the options being discussed;

PARLIAMENTARY CAMPAIGNING

Neil Kinnock's strategy, to continue with routine political criticism and campaigning in an attempt to influence the legislation for England and Wales that's already in Parliament. If this was succesful, the Scottish legislation would be amended too. Now that the Poll Tax bill has passed through the Lords without amendment, the limited possibilities offered by this approach have already been exhausted.

NON-COLLECTION

The most effective way to fight the tax; persuade local government workers not to co-operate with its administration and collection. Potentially the most difficult, too, since it could cause a crisis in local government funding that put workers jobs at risk. Many workers would gamble their boring, unfulfilling jobs to inflict such a serious defeat on the government, but the unions will no doubt 'put their members interests first' and try to prevent any large-scale action of this type.

NON-REGISTRATION

Possibilities are almost endless. Forms can be left on the bus, or covered in baby sick. They can be returned with a query about question 1, then question 2, then question 3. We can say that our 'responsible persons' are dead persons, or non-existent persons, or real people we don't like very much. But we mustn't forget that the registration forms aren't their only source of information.

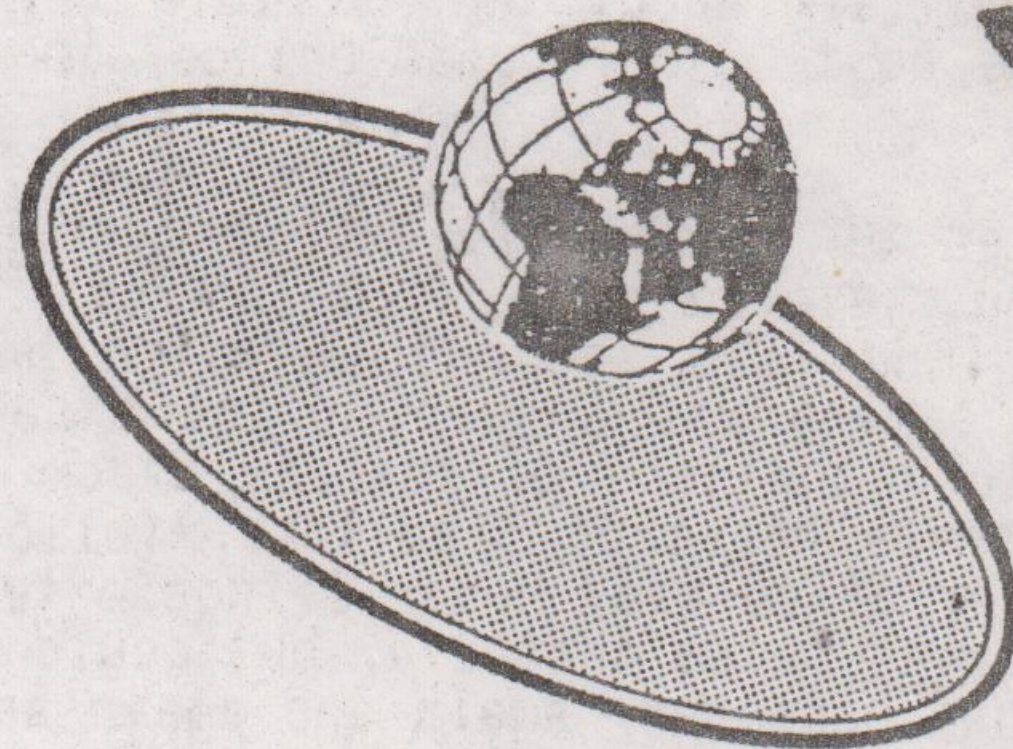
NON-PAYMENT

Non-payment is not a criminal offence, but a civil one, a debt, like not paying our gas or electricity bills. The council must initiate action through the courts, a lengthy process which is even slower if many of us are involved. The likely penalty is the payment of the debt plus costs, in instalments according to income. If we then refuse to pay the instalments, further legal action will follow.

FIGHTING BACK

The inefficiency built into the Poll Tax creates the space for a campaign of massive resistance. Registration would be difficult and complex even if people co-operated willingly, and imaginative resistance will make it even harder. But non-registration is a criminal offence so a mass campaign would be costly, and unsuccessful because they'll be able to find most of us without the forms. We should obstruct registration as much as we can, but without getting prosecuted because it isn't worth it.

The major focus of our campaign should be the refusal to pay. We should also speak to local authority workers, although the unions are likely to prevent mass non-implementation, because some workers might be angry enough to organise themselves against the tax. Besides, bundles of



registration forms can be mislaid or drenched in vending-machine coffee, computers can break down or accidentally erase data, flu epidemics can immobilise offices.

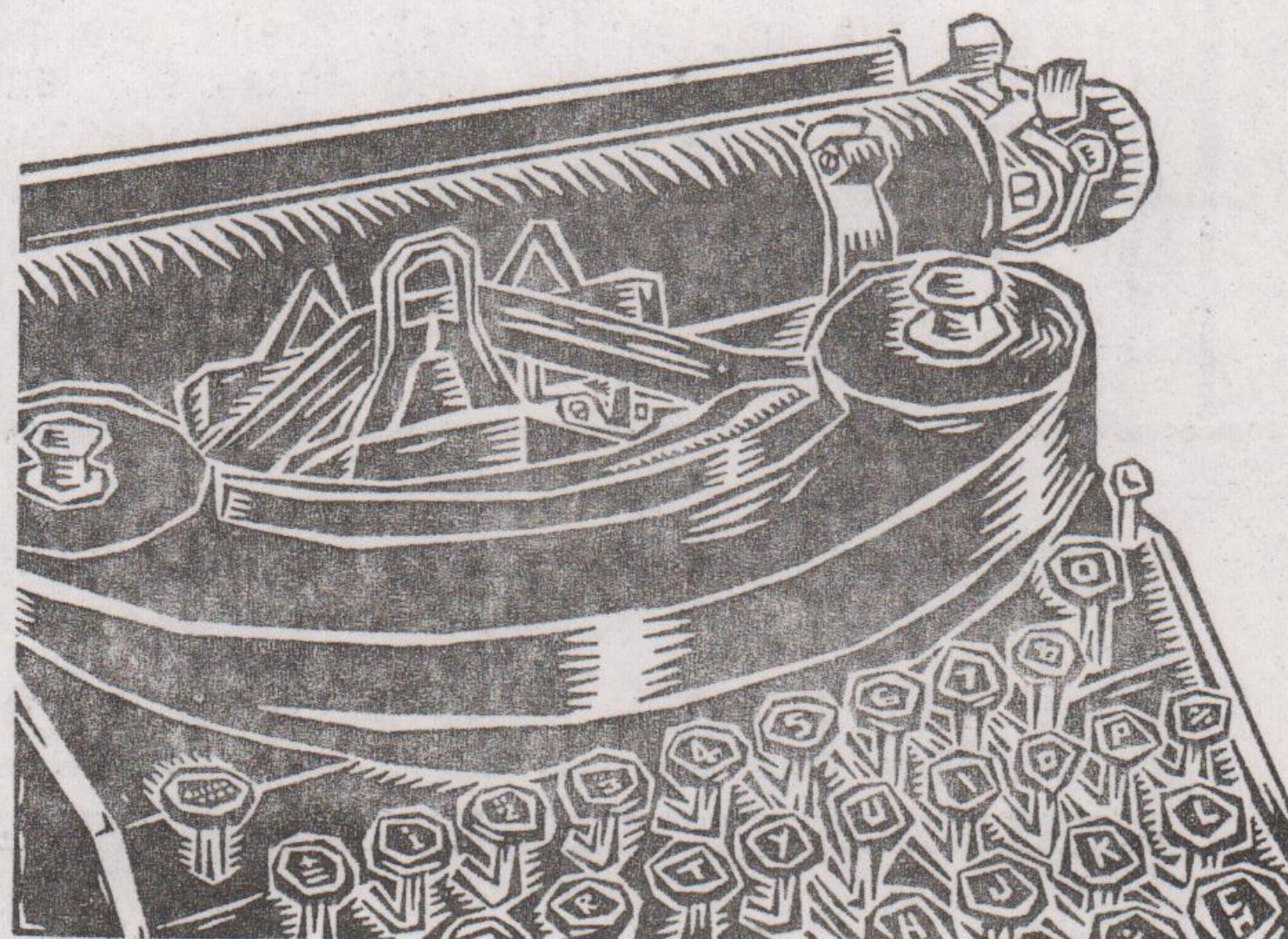
It is vital that resistance to the Poll Tax is organised within our communities, and spreads outside the narrow confines of the peace movement and the rainbow alliance. It will be a long slog, but we must start now; door-to-door leafleting, posters, meetings to establish local anti-Poll Tax groups and networks, benefits to raise money for megaphones and CB radios to stop snoopers.

The hardship caused by the Poll Tax will create a lot of anger. A mass campaign of non-payment can defeat the tax, and give people a taste of the power they have to collectively transform the obscene society we live in.

PUBLIC MEETING

Nottingham SMASH have organised a meeting at the ICC, 61b Mansfield Road Nottingham at 8.00 on September 14th, to begin organising for a campaign of resistance to the poll tax in Nottingham. The meeting is open to anybody who would like to get involved, or is just interested. Please come along.

David Basket-Weaver



CONNECTIONS

FROM THE BUNKER...

BY LES.



A few nights ago in a pub a friend talked of a story of mine he had read, about a short spell in prison incurred by refusing to pay fines imposed for protesting at nuclear bases. Soon we got on to talking about the violence and brutality in British prisons, and it was sickeningly natural to go on and talk about the terrible things that human beings do to other human beings, in the past and now.

Memories of prison made me shudder, and the conversation evoked a scene from "Shoah", Langmann's long film about the Jewish holocaust. In it, the camera was an eye moving steadily and silently along the line of railway track that led to the terrible heart of Treblinka, following the final journey of so many human beings exterminated there. I hated being that eye, but could not turn away. It had happened, again and again and again. Unstopped.

Prison, Protest, Nuclear bases. All of us alive today may be on a journey that will end in nuclear holocaust. And still we have not stopped the train.

Prison was a sliver of personal pain, and also a crying vision of what human beings sometimes do to other human beings. The horror! The horror!

My friend said that he despaired of the future. He felt that it was wrong, but he can feel no hope and cannot see how hope is possible. He wanted me to give him reasons to hope, but I did not know how or what to answer. I feel that not many people are hopeful for the future, though few can be as terrifyingly honest about it as my friend who believes, simply and terribly, that the human race will soon destroy itself.

Many people say they are hopeful for the future, but their words sound like slogans or pale prayers. Many show that they've lost hope when they insist that nuclear weapons are necessary; they clearly do not see beyond them, for nuclear weapons offer no future. Most, perhaps the majority, are just numb, burying themselves in their own daily lives because they are too frightened to see the world they are living in.

I told my friend that I found it hard to carry hope inside me in such a world, to really feel hope rather than pretend that I feel it. To hope, after all, is to believe that we can overcome the nuclear threat; end the poison of militarism that creates such threats; subdue the violent forces that cause the incessant rape, torture and slaughter of human life. Each fresh horror, each new brutality, crushes the soft face of hope. Hope, despair, hope, despair, hope, despair. I stared at my friend.

Driving home through snowy, wind-swept countryside, we came upon a car in a deep ditch beside the road. The tyre-marks were fresh in the still-falling snow. We stopped, walked back along the freezing road into the teeth of the howling wind, preparing ourselves to find somebody trapped in the car, injured or even dead. But when we got there it was just an empty, abandoned car in a snowy ditch.

The rest of the way home we were subdued, shaken. Approaching the car we had no idea what we would find, we only knew what we didn't want to find. Nothing would have been worse than finding another human being in that car, suffering or even dead.

In the same way, we can say that we feel hope for the future, or we can say that we feel despair. But we do not, we cannot, know what will happen.

If we look, we can see what terrible things have happened, and are still happening, in the world. And we can imagine what infinitely worse things could happen. What do we want to happen? What do we want to see when we look at the future? What do we feel we are moving towards? Is it unstoppable?

Les Parsons, February 1988



Hope And Despair

IN A DARK TIME...

B.C.

Victims of a nuclear strike in Bognor would be given a burial at sea, the town's Neighbourhood Council was told. A guest speaker from Felpham Neighbourhood Council said "We are very lucky here because we are by the sea, so all the dead people can be taken out in a rowing boat and buried".

Portsmouth Evening News, 1983

THE

"I sometimes believe, we're heading very fast for Armageddon right now," President Reagan

"We are absolutely adamant that there should be no question of the de-nuclearisation of Europe," Margaret Thatcher, 1987

If my soldiers began to think, not one would remain in the ranks.

FREDERICK THE GREAT.

THINGS

"G O T C H A"

Headline in the Sun after the sinking of the Argentinian battleship General Belgrano, with the loss of more than 300 lives

"The atomic bomb is a paper tiger which the US reactionaries use to scare people. It looks terrible, but in fact it isn't" Mao Tse-Tung, 1960

"It may be several weeks or even months before I shall ask you to drench Germany with poison gas, and let us do it with one hundred per cent, In the meanwhile, I want one matter studied in cold blood by sensible people and not by that particular set of psalm-singing and there," defeatists which one runs across here Winston Churchill, secret memo, 1944

"The neutron bomb is for Western Europe today what the English longbow was for Henry Vth and his army at Agincourt in 1415."

Daily Express, 1981

SAY

THE EYE BEGINS TO SEE...

B.C.





Sep 7: NCND monthly meeting with Jean Lambert, Green Party National Council. WEA 7.30

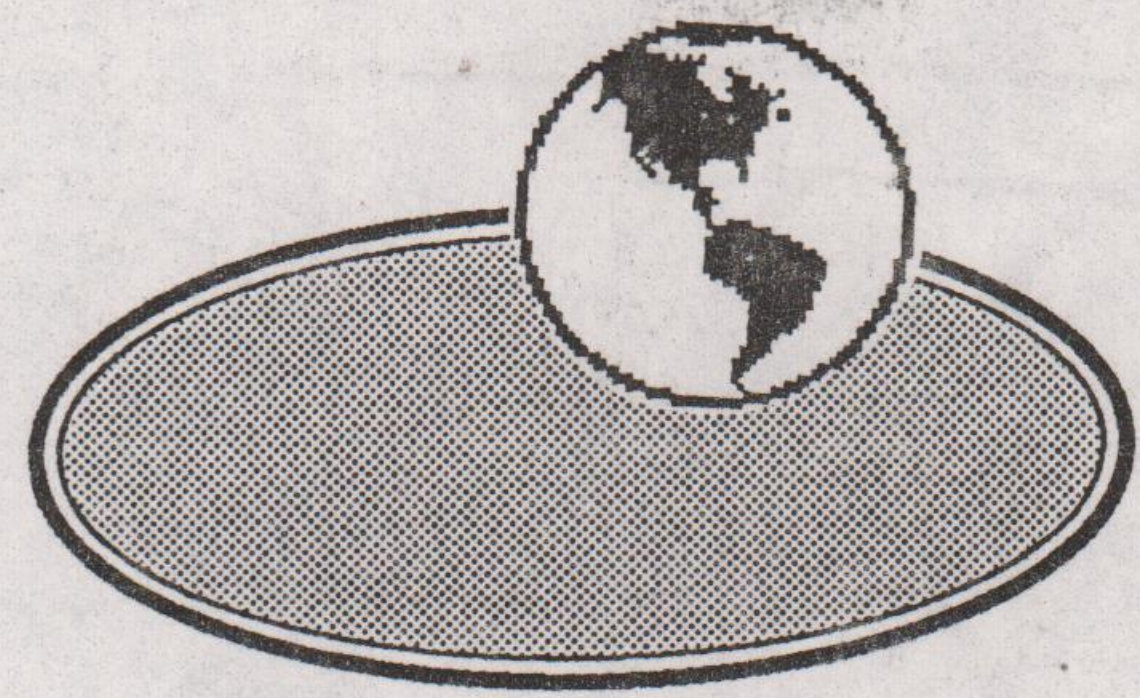
Sep 14: Smash the Poll Tax! First Nottingham meeting. ICC Mansfield Road, 8.00

Sep 15: Forest Fields Peace Group meeting. Forest Fields Neighbourhood Centre 7.30

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Sep 17: Forest Fields Neighbourhood Centre - OPEN DAY - 12.30 onwards - All Welcome. 69 Wiverton Road.
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Also:- Welfare Advice Centre:
Tuesdays - 10.00 am - 12.30 pm
Thursdays - 2.00 pm - 3.30 pm

Sep 21: NCND executive committee meeting 'The Way Ahead' WEA 7.30



Oct 13 NCND Annual General Meeting The Yorker, Mansfield Rd, 7.30

Oct 15 CND National Demonstration at USAF Upper Heyford. Coaches from Nottingham

Oct 20 Forest Fields Peace Group meeting. Forest Fields Neighbourhood Centre 7.30

FOREST FIELDS PEACE GROUP



JOIN US

I would like to join the Forest Fields Peace Group.


I enclose my membership fee of
£1.00 unwaged
£2.00 waged NCND member
£3.00 waged non-NCND member

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

.....TEL.....

Please make all cheques/postal orders payable to Forest Fields Peace Group. Return this form to the address below.



BOX 5
69, WIVERTON ROAD
FOREST FIELDS



625198

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

FOREST FIELD PEACE GROUP IS A NEIGHBOURHOOD GROUP OPEN TO EVERYBODY IN THE FOREST FIELDS AND HYSON GREEN AREAS OF NOTTINGHAM, AND TO ALL OTHERS WHO SHARE THE GROUPS' AIMS. THEY ARE-

1. TO OPPOSE NUCLEAR WEAPONS, AND ALL OTHER WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION.
2. TO WORK FOR UNILATERAL NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT IN BRITAIN.
3. TO SUPPORT CND AND ALL OTHER GROUPS ACTIVE IN THE STRUGGLE TO ACHIEVE A NUCLEAR WEAPONS-FREE AND PEACEFUL WORLD.
4. TO REJECT THE DANGEROUS MILITARIST POLICIES OF BOTH AMERICA AND RUSSIA, AND WORK FOR A NON-NUCLEAR BRITISH DEFENCE POLICY, OUTSIDE NATO.
5. TO SUPPORT ALL NON-VIOLENT PROTEST, INCLUDING CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE, IN THE BELIEF THAT THE THREAT TO USE NUCLEAR WEAPONS IS BOTH IMMORAL AND ILLEGAL.