

POLL-AXE!

NEWSLETTER OF THE FOREST FIELDS & HYSON GREEN ANTI-POLL TAX CAMPAIGN

FOREST FIELDS / HYSON GREEN



ANTI-POLL TAX CAMPAIGN

ISSUE 4

APRIL/MAY 1990

Patten accuses shires on poll tax

Alan Travis
Political Correspondent

THE Environment Secretary, Mr Chris Patten, yesterday claimed shire county councils were up this year's

"That is a county council electoral cycle which I do not like the look of and I still much hope that local spending will be cut."

Tory councils defy the Government

Tory poll tax rebels halve majority

Telegraph

Average poll tax bill to be £100 over target

£390

?!

THE GUARDIAN
Saturday February 17 1990

Council goes to court on poll tax grant

backlash over

The cost of the poll tax in Shire County districts

County districts	Poll tax
Elmbridge (Con)	£449
Epsom and Ewell (RPP)	£447
Guildford (Con)	£401
Mole Valley (Con/Ind)	£387
Wokingham (Con)	£440
Wokingham (Ind)	£324
Wokingham (Con)	£375
Wokingham (Ind)	£396
Wokingham (Con)	£382

24 The Guardian
Poll tax bills to be £100 above norm

Notts to pay £87 extra in poll tax?

POLL TAX

Councils to face carnage

Alan Travis
Political Correspondent

THE Prime Minister yesterday placed her authority behind the Government's intention to "cap" excessively spending councils as new estimates predicted that poll tax bills in England will average £380 a head, more than £100 higher than targets.

£87 on their first bill

£390 EACH !!

That's what Nottingham City Council are charging for the poll tax this year. £390. Each. We'll repeat it, since its so unbelievable that you probably need a moment to let it sink in.

For those people living in Forest Fields and Hyson Green who will actually be paying the poll tax, this is a massive increase compared to the rates.

Two members of our group live in a flat on Gregory Boulevard. Their rates bill was £330 last year. Now they'll be asked to pay £780.

A family living on Burford Road paid rates last year of £360. There are five of them: mum, dad, two children still at school- and grandma, who is too old and unwell to live alone. Their poll tax bill comes to £1,170.

A young woman with a 6 month old baby lives in a flat above a shop on Radford Road. She works five afternoons a week, and earns £90, so she doesn't get a poll tax rebate. She gives her mum £10 a week for minding her baby. Her rent is £35 a week and used to include rates, but since the poll tax came in her landlord hasn't reduced the rent to make allowance for the rates he doesn't have to pay any more. Now she has to pay an extra £7 poll tax out of the £45 a week she has left to feed and clothe herself and her child.

An Asian family living on Russell Road used to pay rates of £280. Traditionally, many Asian people live in extended families, and there are five adults in this house - mum and dad, two children aged 19 and 22, and grandfather. Their poll tax bill is an incredible £1,950.

Families will suffer as teenagers are forced to leave home because neither they nor their parents can afford to pay their poll tax bills when they reach 18.

Old people will suffer, as small savings they have put by during their lives to make their retirement a bit easier have to be spent on the poll tax.

People with mental handicaps, whose chances of finding reasonably well-paid work are limited by the prejudice of others, are expected to pay the poll tax in full - unless they can *fail a test* to determine the extent of their handicap. The only way that people with mental handicaps can gain exemption from the tax is by humiliating themselves.

We could go on. In Forest Fields and Hyson Green there are many, many people who are either out of work or in very low paid jobs. Many of these people couldn't really choose where they wanted to live, since a lot of the private rented accomodation in Nottingham is in this area. Other people did choose to live in this area, partly because it was cheaper than other parts of the city. Those people are all going to be worse off under the poll tax.

And doesn't it make you sick, the government wheeling out the same old stories every week, trying to get themselves off the hook. Yes, the rates were an unfair and

confusing system. Yes, the old lady living alone in the great big house on the corner will save money under the poll tax. And yes, we even agree that the poll tax will make councils think more carefully about their spending.

BUT:

- the poll tax is both less fair and more confusing than the rates, and it costs over twice as much to run as the rates did;

- in Nottingham, seven people in ten will be worse off under the poll tax: the other three are much more likely to be bank managers and company directors than lonely old ladies;

- all councils - Labour, Conservative or whatever - waste money simply because they have to try and please too many people too much of the time. They're large, and too remote from the many communities whose needs they are meant to serve. Far from solving this problem the poll tax makes it worse, since all it does is make councils even more dependent on the government in London.

And if you think £390 each is bad, you have to remember that this is only the start. Poll tax bills in Scotland, where they are a year ahead of us, went up by an average of 12% this year.

And think even further ahead. The only way to charge lower poll tax bills is to reduce council spending, but a lot of the money that councils spend simply can't be cut: without usable roads, street cleaning, waste collection, street lighting and other services, Nottingham would grind to a halt. So the cuts will all be made in other areas: education, social services, health services.

Those people who are going to save money under the poll tax wont mind: most of them can afford private education and private doctors, and don't need social workers to help them sort out their accomodation or other problems.

But those who are worse off - and that's the majority - can see that we're going to lose out both ways. We're getting bills that many of us simply can't afford to pay, and at the same time the services we most need from our council will be cut back each year as the budgets get tighter and tighter.

If you can't afford to pay £390 poll tax, make sure you get in touch with us. Its easier when you've got other people standing beside you.

If you've already decided that on principle you won't pay the poll tax, then the same thing goes - and if you've got any free time, we always need more people to get actively involved.

And if you could afford to pay, but aren't sure what to do, well - read the rest of this newsletter and think about it. There will be thousands of people unable to pay the poll tax, and thousands more refusing to pay. If you join us, for once you'll be on the winning side.

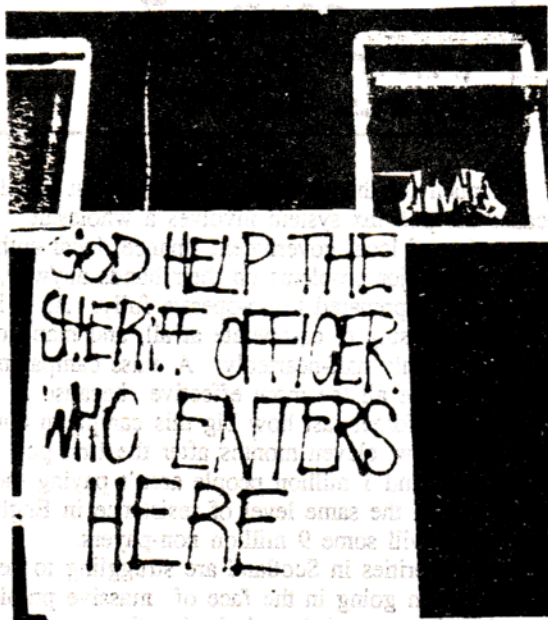
DON'T PAY THE POLL TAX !

NEWS FROM SCOTLAND

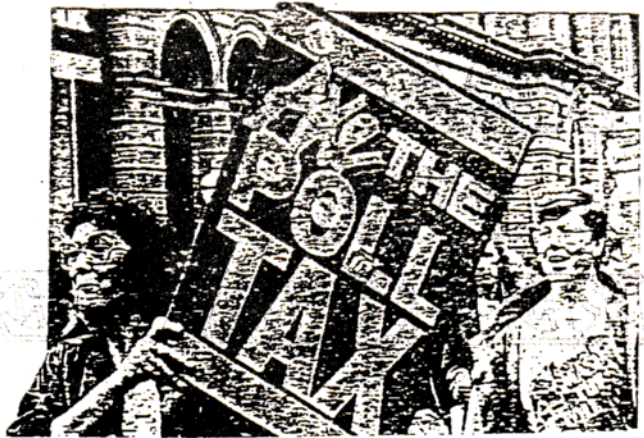
An update on the Scottish fight against the poll tax from our twin group, Prestonfields in Edinburgh

With only three weeks left for the Scottish authorities to prosecute all their non-payers before the next round of bills come out, you might expect them to be getting desperate. Yet they're pretending not to be bothered, whilst the entire poll tax system is falling down around them.

In Lothian region, which includes Edinburgh, warrants have been issued to all the non-payers - well, all the non-payers on the register, anyway! But this hasn't made any real difference to the number of people refusing to pay, and so far it hasn't resulted in anyone having their belongings impounded by sheriff officers for a "warrant sale" (the same idea as bailiffs, except that it involves selling off your possessions to your neighbours *in your own home*).



There are two reasons why no warrant sales have taken place yet. First of all, there are only a handful of sheriff officers in Lothian but over 70,000 non-payers. Second, each time sheriff officers turn up at someone's house (and they've only attempted it twice so far in the whole of Edinburgh), they are met by a crowd of angry anti-poll tax campaigners who stop them from getting in!



Lothian council are also trying to get poll tax from people by taking it straight from their bank accounts. They don't need the person's permission to do this, but there are some rules. The account has to be in credit, they aren't allowed to make anyone overdrawn, and they can only seize any money that's in the account on the day they freeze it.

Officially, bank staff have to co-operate with this system - its the law. Unofficially, they're helping people to avoid payment by letting them run their accounts on a permanent overdraft, without making any charges. Non-payers are being given help by their banks to juggle money from one account to another. If the council applies to freeze the account of someone who hasn't paid their poll tax, then on any one day it will only have a few pounds in it at most - and that's all they can take. And in many cases, people have had phone calls from their bank managers, telling them that an arrestment order has arrived and suggesting that they come in for a chat to sort something out!

The mood amongst anti-poll tax campaigners in Scotland at the moment is one of optimism. People in Scotland have been heartened by press reports of the many recent demonstrations in England and Wales. They feel less isolated in their fight against this government, now that people south of the Scottish border are waking up to the reality of the poll tax. Now that they can see a campaign really taking off here, they're even more determined to fight.

In fact, it's already clear that many people in Scotland who paid their poll tax last year will not bother this time round. After all, they've seen their friends and neighbours refuse to pay for a whole year without any problems, while they struggled and saved to pay the Lothian council's £392 poll tax. And remember that the majority of these people only paid reluctantly in the first place.

Our friends in Scotland are also optimistic because the extent of opposition to the tax is now clear for all to see. In the wake of the recent demonstrations in England and Wales, Scottish T.V. and papers have admitted for the first time that there is a mass campaign of non-payment of the poll tax in Scotland, involving at least a million people.

With not a single Scottish non-payer successfully prosecuted, and only three weeks before the next round of bills are due to appear, our fellow campaigners in Scotland are confident of victory. Let's match their achievements here in Nottingham, and show this government what people power really means!

REASONS FOR RESISTANCE

The poll tax is perhaps the single most unpopular measure that this government has adopted. It is clearly unfair. It strikes hardest at the poorest and most vulnerable people in our society.

We can't doubt the anger that the poll tax has generated amongst millions of people up and down Britain. We all know that its unfair. We all know that it will mean cuts in council services, as councils try to keep the tax levels down. But by itself, anger isn't enough. The bills arrive in April, and the question now is what do we do?

The position of the anti-poll tax group in Forest Fields & Hyson Green is a simple one. It is shared by similar groups in cities and towns all over the country. We say that the only way to stop this tax is to refuse to pay it.

For the most part, Thatcher's supposed opponents in parliament and in the local councils do not support the non-payment campaign. Councillors say that there's nothing that they can do and get on with implementing the tax. The Labour Party leadership in parliament say we should wait until the next election in 1992!

Which planet are these people from? For thousands of people, non-payment isn't even a choice. Even with rebates, people will be hit for money they simply can't afford. In any case, rebates will only cover those on exceptionally low incomes - the very low paid and the unemployed.

Not one council has made a stand and refused to implement the tax. Given that, there is no argument: the only way left to stop the poll tax is by a mass campaign of non-payment. But can we be confident that such a campaign will succeed? We believe that we can.

York	264.00	
NOTTINGHAMSHIRE		
Ashfield	318.00	212
Bassetlaw	370.97	253
Broxtowe	374.00	272
Gedling	370.55	275
Mansfield	378.00	241
Newark & Sherwood	375.52	259
Nottingham	390.00	254
Rushcliffe	393.00	281
CYBERBURNE		

POLL TAX
COMPARED TO
AVERAGE
RATES BILLS
"The Guardian",
12th March 1990

Look at the storms brewing in the Tory Party. Thatcher's credibility there is being eroded daily, splits are growing, and its members and the people who back and finance it are getting scared. The government has already backed down by extending rebates and introducing the so-called "safety net", largely in response to Tory fears of losing support. There is every chance of them backing

down again, and this time in a much bigger way.

The government has said that the average poll tax rate should only be £278 per person. Councils - including Tory-led councils - are setting rates on average at about £100 more than that. The government has said that if councils defy their guidelines they will be "capped" - they will be forced to reduce their spending. The government may be on course for a conflict with local councils far more widespread than the fights which took place over rate-capping. Then, only the council in Liverpool made any kind of stand. With the ridiculously tight budgets the government is trying to impose on local councils now, we can look forward to the same battle beginning all over again.

Will the Thatcher government, losing heart by the minute, have the stomach for such a battle? We doubt it.



So much for the government, what about locally? Because the poll tax system involves a wholesale restructuring of local government finance, local authorities would have major problems on their hands anyway, even if everyone were prepared to co-operate fully. As it is, some people are refusing to co-operate at all, and many others are doing so only half-heartedly. A mass campaign of non-payment will be all the more effective because of this.

Let's not forget just how big this campaign could be. In Scotland now, eleven months after the first poll tax bills came out, around 1 million people aren't paying their poll tax. If we get the same level of resistance in England and Wales, there will be some 9 million non-payers.

The authorities in Scotland are struggling to keep the poll tax system going in the face of massive problems, processing the paperwork and chasing the non-payers. They can't cope, and councils in England and Wales will find themselves in the same boat.

If the pressure is maintained, the government will be forced to act.

The poll tax is a blatant attack on all working class people. What we're saying is that we cannot, and will not, put up with it until 1992 and the next General Election. We can stop the poll tax with a mass campaign of non-payment. Its the only way, and already we know we're winning. The poll tax must be stopped - now. There is no alternative.

Bop AGAINST the TAX

Since our last newsletter we've had two fundraising events.

The first was at the Marcus Garvey Centre in the week before Christmas, and starred the punk poet(ess) Jools. A minor disaster, since publicity was very late in going out and the P.A. didn't turn up, yet we managed to cover our expenses and even made £40 for group funds.

The second was at the Boulevard Hotel on Friday 16th February. We were fearing a repeat of the last event because at 7.30 the P.A. hadn't turned up, and the singer of the first band was still in the bath!

But the evening began on time at 8.30. July Days, Matt Mark's Swinging Affair and Wholesome Fish gave their services free of charge for what turned out to be a really good bop. By 10 o'clock, we had so many people there that the pub's management made us lock the doors in case we exceeded the fire limit: so if you're one of the forty or so people we had turn away, we're sorry, and next time we'll get a bigger room!

By the end of the evening most people were dripping with sweat, as the temperature on the dance floor was hot enough to melt even Mrs. Thatcher's heart. After paying all the expenses we raised over £200 from the door takings and from the raffle.

Thanks to the bands, everyone who helped out, and extra special thanks to the many shops etc. who donated raffle prizes:

PAPPADUM RESTAURANT, Radford Road - a meal for two people at the hippest Indian restaurant this side of the Ganges
BASICS WHOLEFOODS, Foxhall Road - a bottle of brandy
ICE NINE, Hockley - a £10 gift voucher
MUSHROOM BOOKSHOP, Heathcoat Street - a book
GEORGE'S CHIPPY, Berridge Road - a fish-and-chips supper for two people
SELECTADISC, Market Street - a "De La Soul" album and some posters
PERSONS UNKNOWN: a wedge, used to block the door during the occupation of Sid Stares office earlier that week (Sid is our Poll Tax Registration Officer)
PLUS: some bottles of wine, a cauliflower, and a small bag of fruit

MAYBE

CAN'T PAY - WON'T PAY

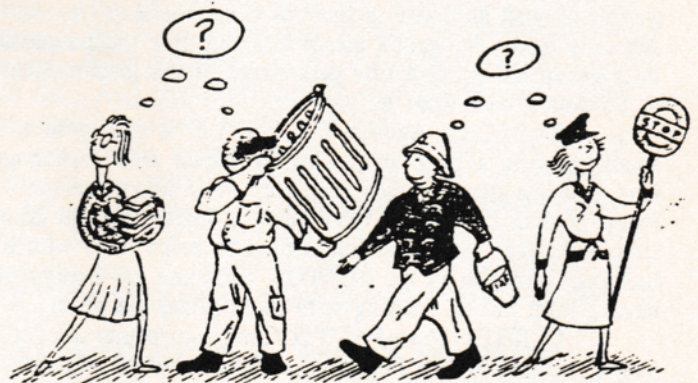
I don't know about you, but I often find myself surrounded by people with very definite political opinions and high principles. I usually find myself saying "I don't know" about subjects which seem so simple to other people.

Take the poll tax. When everyone was talking about not registering and being fined, I found myself telling worried friends just to register if it was giving them sleepless nights. That was okay, of course, because we were never running a non-registration campaign. But now the issue of non-payment is on the cards, and I find myself wondering what I'm going to say to those same people.

People seem to automatically assume that not paying means making some great political statement, they seem to think its about massive fines and martyrs and imprisonment. I don't quite see it that way myself.

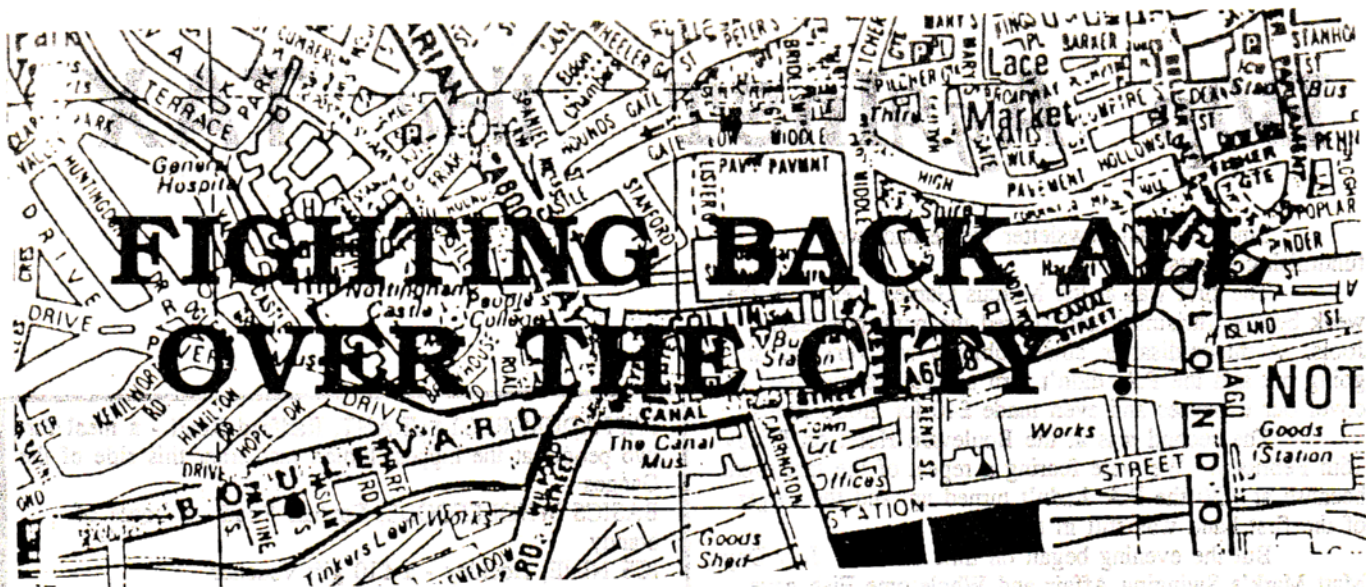
Looking at what's happened in Scotland encourages me. The basic fact is that there's going to be a lot of people who just can't afford to pay the poll tax. So many people can't or wont pay in Scotland that they've found it impossible to take them to court. When those people who had been paying saw they could get away with it, many of them stopped paying too.

In Nottingham, if you can't afford to pay then there are groups already set up to support you. If you can afford to pay, then maybe you should delay and see what happens?



Non-payment seems frightening if you see it in terms of "law-breaking", fines and imprisonment, but in truth its hardly likely to come to that. You can opt to pay by instalments and then delay payments by three, four or more months. You'll get some pretty threatening letters, like final gas bills, but little else is likely to happen to you.

If enough people refuse to pay there's not a lot they can do. As it is, many thousands can't afford to pay. The rest of us should be supporting those people, that's what its about.



There are now anti-poll tax groups in more than a dozen areas of Nottingham, and more are springing up all the time. There are at least four more new groups being set up at the moment, aided by the well-established groups who provide leaflets, posters, speakers, and lend their time and experience.

The community groups in and around Nottingham work together on a regular basis. We pool information, produce joint leaflets, and share bad experiences and good ideas so that we don't all end up making the same mistakes!

There is also a Nottingham Federation of Anti-Poll Tax Groups, which is meant to co-ordinate anti-poll tax activity across the city. The Federation organises events such as marches, rallies, fundraisers and demonstrations.

In SHERWOOD, the Sherwood & District Anti-Poll Tax Campaign has over 650 members, making it the biggest group in Nottingham. The Sherwood group are very active, and are extra busy at the moment helping the Clifton and Bestwood/Bestwood Park groups get off the ground.

The ST. ANN'S Anti-Poll Tax Union has around 300 members, and is growing steadily. They have been running a stall every Saturday at St. Peter's Gate in the city centre, collecting names and passing them on to other groups as well as boosting their own membership. Activists in the St. Ann's group feel sure that the people in their group are only a tiny percentage of the total number in St. Ann's who won't be paying.

RADFORD Against The Poll Tax is still quite a small group in a large and awkward-shaped area. Although it is growing steadily, they still need more people to get involved with nitty-gritty work such as leafletting and door-knocking. Yet they have found time to make links with a budding campaign in the LENTON area, and are hoping to have a joint public meeting with them sometime soon.

CLIFTON Anti-Poll Tax Campaign began after a public meeting late in February, and has over 60 members already. They've gotten off to a great start, with lots of enthusiasm shown by the many people who attended their first meeting. They have organised a public meeting for March 28th at Clifton Community Centre - so tell all of your friends in Clifton.

In BESTWOOD, too, a group started up in the last half of February. In the first street they canvassed they got 12 new active members - and more cups of tea than they could drink! They are holding a public meeting in the near future.

OTHER AREAS

There are also active groups in Bulwell, Aspley/Broxtowe, West Bridgford and Sneinton. New groups are emerging at the moment in Lenton, Old Basford, New Basford and Beeston. Further afield, we know of strong groups in Mansfield and Clipstone.

There are certainly more groups, especially outside of central Nottingham, that we don't know about. If you're involved with a group in your area, make sure they get in touch with the Nottingham Anti-Poll Tax Federation - phone Gary Freeman on [REDACTED]. And if you know people who want to fight the poll tax but live in areas where a group hasn't been set up yet, put them in touch with the Federation, and with their nearest established group. Here are all the contacts we have so far:

ANTI-POLL TAX GROUPS IN NOTTINGHAM -

This list was made at the beginning of March 1990, and some of it will be out of date by the time you read it, since new groups are appearing so rapidly at the moment. Phone one of these numbers for more information about what's happening in your area - now!

Aspley / Broxtowe: [REDACTED]

Basford: [REDACTED]

Beeston: [REDACTED]

Bestwood/

Bestwood Park

Bulwell: [REDACTED]

Clifton: [REDACTED]

Forest Fields: [REDACTED]

Hyson Green: [REDACTED]

Radford: [REDACTED]

Sherwood: [REDACTED]

Sneinton: [REDACTED]

St. Ann's: [REDACTED]

West Bridgford: [REDACTED]

Police hurt in wave of protests

IT'S ANTI-POLL TAX MAYHEM

Missiles hurled in new flare-up



VIOLENCE erupted across the country in a wave of anti-poll tax demonstrations. The protests - now spreading up to 2,000 people - disrupted council meetings in a number of areas and towns. There were more stones and eggs thrown at police and some damage to property. The police used tear gas and batons to clear the crowds.

MEDIA VIOLENCE

Recently, the anti-poll tax campaign has been big news. Groups like ours, it is said, have incited riots, assaulted councillors, and travelled around the country in coaches, fighting with the police. In the wake of these incidents, we'd like to make a few things clear:

We believe that the poll tax can be stopped by civil disobedience, by a mass campaign of non-payment. **We do not advocate or plan for the use of violence as a means of stopping the poll tax.**

We believe that the fighting outside town halls all over the country happened because people are genuinely angry with this government, over the poll tax and many other things. We believe that the police response was often heavy-handed (in Hackney, for example, trouble only began after police tried to divide a large and mostly peaceful demonstration in two) and that this made the situation even worse. **These incidents cannot be blamed on Left groups and "anarchists", even though some individuals from these groups were present.**

We do not deny that some members of our group are in the Socialist Worker's Party, that some belong to other Left groups, and that some would call themselves anarchists. But these people are involved simply because they live in this area and don't like the poll tax. **Their influence on the group depends on them persuading**

other people at meetings that their ideas are the best. **There's nothing sinister about this. Its called democracy.**

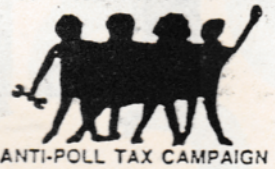
We do deny that groups like ours are simply "front" organisations for parties like the SWP or Militant. **The majority of our 300+ members are not members of any political party or group. They are just people who have decided to make a stand against the poll tax.**

Forest Fields & Hyson Green Anti-Poll Tax Campaign is not controlled by any political party or group. It is a genuine, community-based campaign to stop the poll tax by helping people to stand together and refuse to pay. No more, and no less.

Finally, just ask yourself a simple question: If the anti-poll tax campaign suffers bad publicity, over this or any other issue, **WHO GAINS ??**

FOREST FIELDS / HYSON GREEN

UPDATE



Its been a busy time for us over the last few months, and it doesn't look like getting any quieter. It would be impossible to list everything that we've done recently, but here's a broad selection that should give you a fair idea of what we're up to.

We've done public meetings locally, and given out thousands of leaflets, posters and newsletters about the poll tax.

We've helped new anti-poll tax groups get off the ground in many other parts of the city. Along with the Sherwood group, we organised a meeting after the anti-poll tax march in Nottingham in January which led to new groups starting up in Clifton and Bestwood. We've continued to work with the groups in Sherwood, Radford, St. Ann's, Sneinton and West Bridgford - helping them, and being helped back too!

Members of our group took part in the occupation of Sid Stares' office (Sid is our poll tax Registration Officer) in February, and also in the "Robin Hood"

invasion of the council meeting when the poll tax rate was being set. We were annoyed that this carefully planned and non-violent protest (even the "Evening Post" described it as both harmless and funny!) was described by some papers and TV programmes as part of a wave of organised violence sweeping the country. Two people (one from our group and one from Sherwood) are currently facing charges of assault for throwing custard pies at the Tory councillors. Two others face charges of obstruction because they objected loudly to the police's rough handling, kicking and hair-pulling.

Since then, some of the people involved have noticed strange figures in black trousers loitering outside their homes, and uniformed police burst into one person's house very early one morning, without showing any warrants. The charges against these people will probably be dropped, but we'll keep you informed of any further developments.

People from our group have spoken at public meetings all over Nottingham: Clifton, Radford, Basford, Lenton, Sneinton. We've also done some workplace anti-poll tax meetings, including one for the staff at the DSS office in David Lane who will be asked to deduct poll tax arrears from people's benefits.

Now, and over the next few months, we're concentrating on building up a network of reliable street contacts. Our aim is to have at least one person on every street actively involved in the campaign, acting as a contact between the group and their neighbours. In some areas, we've done this already. Then, when the threatening letters start to arrive, we'll be ready for them!

DON'T

PAY

THE

POLL

TAX

PLEASE PUT THIS POSTER IN YOUR WINDOW

Forest Fields / Hyson Green Anti-Poll Tax Campaign

Box 5, Basics, 42 Foxhall Road, Forest Fields: phone [REDACTED]

Box 5, Hyson Green Wholefoods, 72 Radford Road: phone [REDACTED]