

LEICESTERSHIRE ANTI POLL TAX NEWS

FIRST NON PAYER JAILED - AND RELEASED!

On December 7th Brian Wright, a 21 year old unemployed builder, was sent to prison for 21 days by Grantham Magistrates for refusing to pay his Poll Tax. He had been taken to court once and had a Liability Order issued against him and had turned away the baillifs so the Council took him back to court for a means inquiry. Given the choice of payment or prison Brian refused to pay.

South Kesteven Council immediately came under massive pressure and there was a large angry lobby of the council a few days later. The phone numbers of the scum responsible for jailing Brian were widely publicised and people like Percy Wilson, Tory leader of the council, found himself getting a large number of calls - some of them quite impolite and at rather inconvenient times!

On December 15th there was a 1000 strong demonstration in Grantham with about 40 people from Leicestershire, including a minibus from Leicester Troops Out Movement. This was followed by a strong picket of Lincoln Prison where Brian was being held.

In prison Brian was treated as a hero by the other prisoners and by the staff and received a flood of cards and letters supporting him - 500 xmas cards and 300 letters! Brian had £45.00 on him when he was taken to prison and he was told that if the council could have it he'd be released on Xmas eve - he refused and was strongly supported by his family.

On December 21st the council suddenly discovered that Brian was unemployed - something which had come out at the means inquiry a fortnight before - and said that as his circumstances had changed he was entitled to a rebate and could be released from prison. The truth is that the pressure made the council give in and Brian was released a week early still owing his Poll Tax but with the council not able to try to collect it. Brian says that he's glad he refused to pay and that he's willing to go to prison for not paying next years Poll Tax as well!

Any council looking at what happened in Grantham is going to think hard about asking for any non payers to be sent to prison. The movement was able to bring real effective pressure against the council and the individuals responsible.

CITY COUNCIL LOBBY

There will be a lobby of Leicester City Council on 31st of January from 5.00 pm in Town Hall Square to protest against their continued prosecution of non payers and their intention to use baillifs.

It is a disgrace that a Labour Council is continuing to implement the Tax when it is clear that even the Tories want to get rid of it and no one seriously defends it. By collecting the Poll Tax the City Council is sharing in the responsibility for it. The Council should stop the prosecutions, stop the baillifs and write off the debts of non payers. They must refuse to make cuts and demand that the Tories pay for the crisis brought on by the Tax.

Come to the lobby and keep up the pressure on the Council.



DEFENCE CAMPAIGN

On January 14th the Northampton 20 will appear in court charged with Public Order offences. They occupied the Borough Treasurers office to protest against the threat that Cyril Munda, 74 would be sent to prison for non payment. Several of the 20 are from Leicester and the rest are from around the East Midlands or are Peoples Marchers.

There will be a demonstration outside the Magistrate courts on the 14th at Campbell Square, Northampton from 9.00 am. There is also a defence fund and contributions are urgently needed to help the 20 defend themselves as they have been refused legal aid.

TRADE UNION CONFERENCE

Leicestershire Fed and the Trades Council are organising a Leicestershire Trade Union Conference against the Poll Tax on 24th of February from 10.30 am to 4.30 pm. The conference will consider fighting wage arrestments and cuts and how to build the struggle against the Poll Tax in the workplace.

The conference is open to all Trade Union bodies and workplace Anti Poll Tax Unions who can send a maximum of 3 delegates. The cost is £5.00 per delegate. There will be a creche and food.

Applications for credentials should be sent to:

Tony Church,
4, Bidford Close,
Braunstone,
Leicester LE3 3AF

Observers will be charged £5.00 waged and £2.00 unwaged. Cheques should be made payable to the Leicester Trade Union Organising Committee. The conference venue will be announced later.

The conference is a crucial part of our battle to fight the Tax in Leicestershire and needs maximum support. Raise the conference in your Union branch and get them to send a delegation. If any Trade Union branches want to make a bigger contribution then get them to make a donation to sponsor the conference.

COURT DATES

The court days that we know about so far are:

JAN 10th CASTLE 2.00pm - ANSTEY CASES
JAN 15th BISHOP ST 9.30am
JAN 23rd BISHOP ST 9.30am
JAN 24th BISHOP ST 9.30am
FEB 1st BISHOP ST 9.30am
FEB 13th BISHOP ST 9.30am

If you can get along to help please do!

POST STRIKE

In Newcastle Postal workers took action against the Poll Tax by walking out for the day after being asked to deliver summons' and reminders on the Saturday before Xmas.

CONTACTS

BOB JOHN: FED SECRETARY Tel Leicester 547903
MICK SHENTON: BAILLIF BUSTERS Tel Leicester 531012
PETE KENNY: NEWS SHEET Tel Leicester 553440
NICK JOHN: LEGAL DEFENCE FUND Tel Loughborough 237372

JUDICIAL REVIEW

On December 21st the High Court gave their judgement in the judicial review of Leicester City Magistrates refusal to allow McKenzies friends. They decided that people have no right to a McKenzies friend and upheld the Magistrates decision. This is now being taken to the Court of Appeal.

This was a blatantly political decision which was designed to help the Courts, the Councils and the Government in their attempts to collect the Poll Tax. The Judges said: "Increasingly, justices are being placed in the intolerable position of being faced with people ... who are either politically motivated or activists opposing some authority or other whose function it is to carry out the wishes of Parliament".

The implications of this decision are that non payers will have to face the courts alone, with all the dangers of injustice and harrassment that go with it. We have to continue to encourage people to turn up at court and to ask for McKenzies friends. When the Magistrates first refused people McKenzies friends we gave people lists of questions and advice outside the courts. This was quite successful and blocked up the courts on a couple of days.

We must have no illusions about the Appeal Court either - this is the system that has kept people like the Birmingham 6 in Prison all these years! If we get rights it will be because we win them ourselves.

WAGE ARRESTMENTS

In the Leicester Mercury on January 1st Keith Mansfield the Chair of the local small businesses association, opposed the use of wage arrestments. His fear was that the use of arrestments would lead to conflict between bosses and their workers. He said "It is a matter between the local authority the elector and the court". He also said that bosses should not have to act as "unpaid baillifs" for the council and that "one cannot work affably alongside someone if you are having to deduct their pay because they have chosen not to pay a tax with which they fundamentally disagree".

Mr Mansfield's fear of conflict has to be our hope. The bosses will obey the law and deduct wages unless faced by determined opposition from their workers. If wage arrestments are opposed by action then many employers would see the fines they face for non compliance as chicken feed next to their threatened profits. Fear of breaking the law has not stopped DIY stores opening on Sundays - or stopped many firms continuing with pollution or with unsafe working conditions!

The concern expressed by Mr Mansfield is put into sharp relief by the sheer numbers of wage arrestments which will be needed to collect the Tax - up to two million! A fight against wage arrestments on that scale could lead to a severe loss of "affability" between bosses and workers!