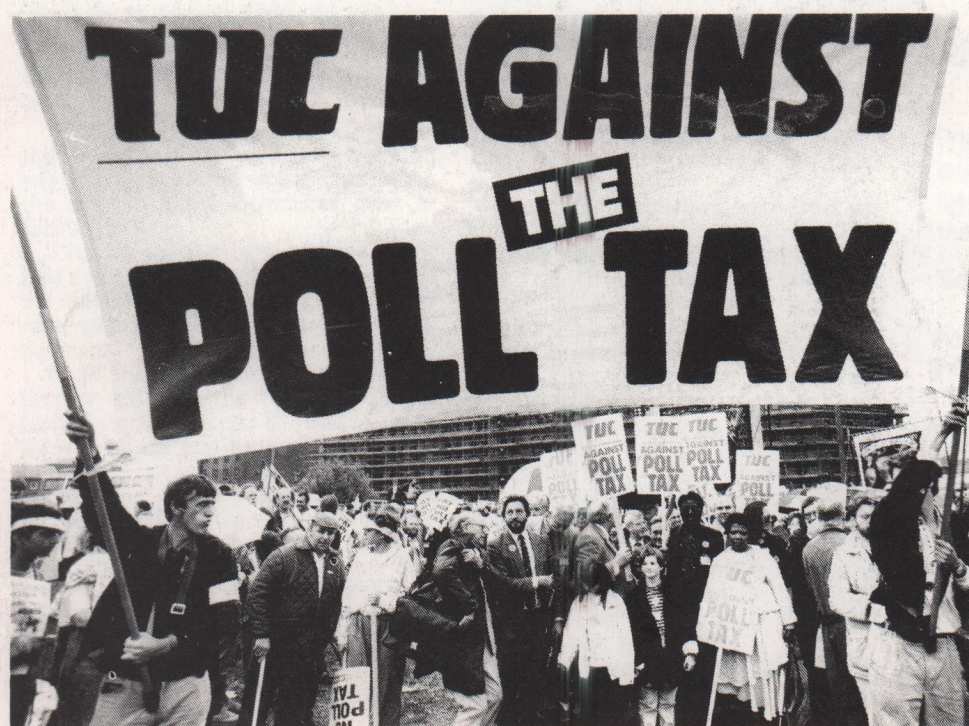


HOW TO BEAT THE POLL TAX



**A Socialist
Organiser
pamphlet
60 pence**



Don't pay, don't collect!

Eight million people in England and Wales say they won't pay the poll tax. In an opinion poll published in the *Sunday Correspondent* on 25 March 1990, 21 per cent of all those asked, and one-third of people under 34, said they wouldn't pay.

That's an even higher proportion than the 15 per cent who said they wouldn't pay at the same stage in Scotland, when the tax was being introduced there in spring 1989.

That 15 per cent was realistic. Over half a million people in Scotland, out of 3.7 million liable to poll tax, have so far received court orders because of non-payment.

If all those half-million stand firm, then it will take the councils' bailiffs (called sheriff officers) 88 years to catch up with all the non-payers!

The poll tax can be made unworkable. If you join a non-payment campaign and it is defeated, the worst that's likely to happen to you is that you will be forced to pay a ten per cent surcharge — between £15 and £50 — and maybe £15 in legal costs. If you're unemployed or a student, and paying 20 per cent rather than full poll tax, your surcharge will be £3 to £10.

So the risk is worth running. And at each stage when councils try to move against non-payers, we can resist.

The council can instruct your employer to deduct poll tax from your wages. Trade union action can force companies to refuse to make the deductions.

The council can get the Social Security to take the poll tax out of your income support (supplementary benefit) money. Civil service trade unionists can block this.

The council can have your bank account frozen and take the money from it. Bank workers can refuse to cooperate with this. Or the council can seize your belongings and sell them to pay your poll tax. This could be resisted with mass pickets to protect threatened houses.

The poll tax is also causing administrative chaos. To run the poll tax, councils need to keep an exact record of when people move home. They have discovered that there are millions of moves in Scotland each year. It will be even worse in some English cities like London.

Because of the administrative chaos, Scottish councils have so far done very little to get non-payers. Once they start, the chaos will get worse.

Defiance can be even stronger in England and Wales than in Scotland.

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Many poll tax rates in England are much higher than any in Scotland.

Lambeth's poll tax will be around £550. Haringey's is £572, Camden's is £534, Hackney's is £499 and Islington's is £498. Tory Kensington and Chelsea is levying a poll tax of £375, 48 per cent above the government's target for their area.

The highest rate in Scotland last year was Edinburgh's £392. Glasgow's was £306.

Nicholas Ridley, the Tory minister responsible for bringing in the tax, summed it up by saying: "Why should a Duke pay more than a dustman?"

Every one of the Scottish peers who turned up to the House of Lords in 1988 to vote the poll tax through stood to gain at least £1100 from it. An ordinary two-adult, working class household in a small flat in Haringey, Lambeth, Camden, Islington or Hackney will lose £10 a week. Households with three or four over-18s will lose more. Private tenants are likely to lose even more, because their landlords won't cut the rent to compensate for the fact they no longer pay rates.

The poll tax takes from the poor to give to the rich.

The Tories' concessions are little more than fiddles. The Tory council in Wandsworth has proudly announced a poll tax of £148. But Labour-run Lewisham, also in South London, will spend almost exactly the same amount per head of population as Wandsworth, yet have to levy a poll tax twice as high, at £297.

Why? Because Wandsworth has been helped by the Tory government with all sorts of special pay-outs. The government paid one grant to Wandsworth, for example, then said it had miscalculated and paid too much, but it would be too much trouble to make a correction, so Wandsworth should keep the cash!

"Transitional relief" is supposed to save you from being more than £3 a week worse off than you were paying rates. But you get "relief" only on the difference between your old rates bill and the government's poll tax target for your council. If the target is unrealistic — and some are £4 or £5 a week below the level the council needs to avoid severe cuts — then you pay the difference.

John Major claimed a great "concession" in his Budget when he said that people with between £8,000 and £16,000 in savings would not automatically be disqualified from poll tax rebates. But they still lose 15p a week in benefit for

each £250 of savings above £3,000. A single pensioner, living on the state pension, with £11,000 savings and a poll tax of £360, will now be able to claim the great sum of 98p per week rebate. The great majority of people have nowhere near £8,000 in savings anyway.

If we don't organise well enough in the trade unions and in the communities, then councils will eventually grind down non-payers one by one. But a strong anti-poll tax campaign can make it so difficult, so laborious, and so embarrassing for councils to move against non-payers that the poll tax would become unworkable.

The risk is certainly worth taking. Theoretically, in England or Wales (but not Scotland) you can be jailed if you don't pay and the council can't seize the money from you. But that's the end of a very long legal road. Don't let it scare you.

Where we have Labour councils, we can and should force them not to try to get people sent to jail, and not to try to get non-payers' wages, benefit or possessions seized.

The Labour group on Tower Hamlets council, which may have a majority there after the May elections, has promised not to prosecute non-payers.

The Tory tax

What is the poll tax? It is a new tax introduced by the Tory government to replace rates.

Instead of rates, which were a tax on property, so that people with big houses paid more than people with small houses, the poll tax is a tax on every individual, just for existing. With few exceptions, everyone must pay the same amount, Dukes and dustmen, millionaires and pensioners.

WHO IS REponsible FOR IT?

The Tory government. Like rates, the poll tax is collected by local councils; but the Tory government at Westminster, not the councils, has decided that councils must collect it.

WHO PAYS?

Almost everyone. Rates had to be paid by each household, but poll tax must be paid by each individual. Pensioners have to pay. Unemployed people have to pay. Housewives with no income have to pay. People on low wages have to pay.

Only a few people are exempt — people under 18, the severely mentally impaired...and the Queen.

HOW MUCH IS IT?

That varies from area to area — £114 in Shetland, £572 in Haringey.

The Tories say the variations reflect how spendthrift the council is. In fact many Tory councils have had to set high rates of poll tax.

Poll tax, on average, is only 20 per cent of councils' income. The rest is central government grant and business rates

Lambeth Labour council briefly took a similar stand.

The Labour Party and trade unions should be leading the fight against the poll tax — not implementing the tax, refusing to call even a national protest demonstration, and waiting until Thatcher chooses to call a general election.

For Labour councils to refuse to implement the tax is not a mad ultra-left fantasy. Millions can't pay and won't pay. If even a couple of Labour councils put themselves at the head of the movement, it can become unbeatable. Otherwise Labour councils will put themselves at the spearhead of enforcing the poll tax.

Against non-implementation — or against a policy of refusing to pursue non-payers — Labour councillors say that if they don't collect poll tax then they will immediately go bust and council services will collapse overnight. But the poll tax will only be 20% of a council's income. To lose this would cause difficulties, but they are difficulties that could be managed in the short term, if a real fight is being built up on the basis of a grass-roots campaign.

The alarmist arguments about immediate Armageddon are simply an excuse not to organise that fight.

distributed by central government. So your poll tax depends much more on how much grant central government chooses to give your council than on the council's policy.

CAN YOU GET REBATES? If you are on Income Support or a full-time student in higher education, you get an 80 per cent rebate. No-one can get more than 80 per cent rebate. Some low-waged people will be able to get rebate in the same way as they get Housing Benefit. A single person aged 25 to 59, for example, can get some rebate (perhaps not much) if they earn less than £74.90 a week.

HOW ARE THE UNEMPLOYED SUPPOSED TO BE ABLE TO PAY?

The government says it is increasing Income Support to compensate. But it is increasing Income Support only by an amount to cover what it reckons should have been the national average poll tax (£278). Most unemployed people will lose out.

WHAT HAPPENS TO BUSINESS

RATES? Businesses continue to pay rates, but the government, not local councils, will set the level, collect the money, and redistribute it to councils. Together with this new system the government has also done a general recalculation of the "rateable values" of business properties.

This means some businesses pay a lot more. Harrods has made a great fuss about paying £8 million rather than £1 million, but they can afford it. Many small shopkeepers will have huge bills they can't afford.

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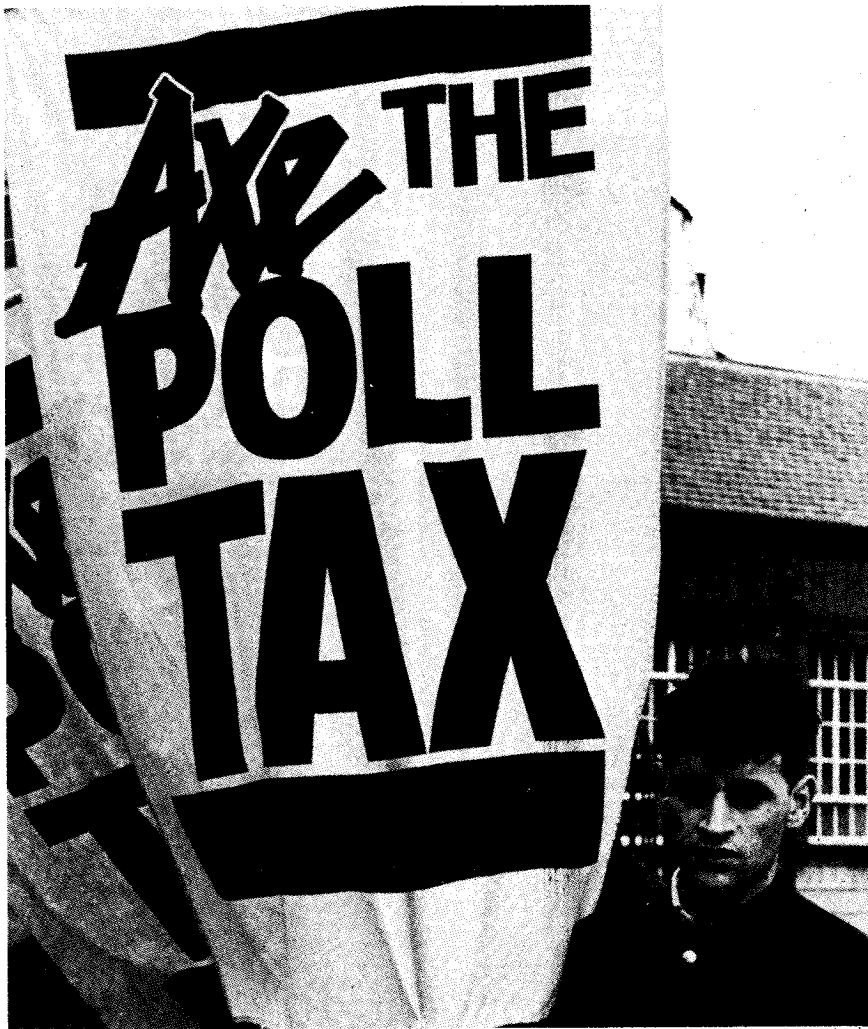


Photo: John Harris (Report)

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“dwelling house”?).

The important point, again, is that such action should be collective. Duplicated letters asking such questions should be available for people to pick up, sign and send to the registration officer.

Such action will not, of course, stop the poll tax and this should be made clear to people. But what it can do is build up local solidarity, buy time for further campaigning, increase the pressure on the council and affirm the level of the opposition.

We should point out that calls for outright “non-registration” are futile. The only way to really avoid being on the poll tax register is to become a non-person — not pay rates, not pay rent, not be on the electoral register, never claim housing benefit or social security, never be ill, never go to a public library or swimming bath. Non-registration is therefore a non-starter and we should not mislead people about this.

A successful campaign around obstruction of the registration process will encourage the mass non-payment campaign. Here again, the emphasis must be on collective action. People should be encouraged to display posters in their windows and local advice points should be established.

We must be honest about the risks: a surcharge of about £50 on those paying full poll tax and about £10 for those paying the 20% minimum, are the likely penalties for non-payment — if we lose the battle.

In England and Wales, July and August 1990 (July 1989 in Scotland) will be crucial: after three months of non-payment, councils are required by central government to begin legal action to get the money. This time-lag must be used to lobby councillors and campaign within the local government unions.

Mass community-based action around obstruction of the register and non-payment will be essential for building up the overall campaign. But we must be clear: *mass non-payment alone will not beat the poll tax*. Community action must be used to turn the campaign into the labour movement and demand non-implementation by councils and non-cooperation from the unions.

At the moment, the official Labour Party and TUC position is pathetic. They haven't even organised a national demonstration on the issue, despite being instructed to at the last TUC Con-

Build anti-poll-tax unions!

The battle against the poll tax must be waged on two fronts: mass non-payment campaigns in the community and the call for non-implementation by Labour councils and the trade unions. Both are equally important: in fact, you won't get one without the other.

In Scotland, where the poll tax is being introduced a year ahead of England and Wales, local anti-poll tax unions have been organising for over a year. The Scottish experience contains many useful lessons — and some important warnings — for the rest of us.

In Strathclyde, Lothian and elsewhere in Scotland anti-poll tax groups have had considerable success in mobilising local residents.

The main value of such community-

based groups is in emphasising the *collective* nature of the opposition: by its very nature the poll tax affects people first and foremost as individuals, isolated in their homes. Local groups must constantly stress the need for collective action and solidarity.

Initially, petitions, street meetings, telephone trees and so forth, can be used to break down this isolation. The first stage of such a campaign must be frustration and obstruction of the registration process.

This means things like delaying sending back registration forms until the last possible moment (you have 21 days to return the form — wait 19 days before sending it); writing for a new form because the first one was “lost”; sending the form back incomplete with questions for clarification (What is a “responsible person”? What is a

ference. The national Labour Party, the Labour-controlled Association of Metropolitan Authorities and the entire trade union leadership have urged compliance with the law.

The Scottish Labour Party conference voted down resolutions supporting people who refused to pay the poll tax, and calling upon Labour-controlled authorities not to seize the wages of those who refuse to pay.

This can be changed. Lothian NALGO has pledged non-cooperation with attempts to recover fines for non-payment. CPSA branches have pledged that their members will not deduct money from claimants' giro to pay the poll tax.

Unfortunately, the adoption of such resolutions is the exception rather than the rule. But successful community-based campaigns can encourage more opposition by the rank and file of the trade union movement.

In every town and city anti-poll tax coordinating committees must be formed, bringing together delegates from the local groups, union branches, shop stewards' committees, trades councils and local Labour Parties. Women's organisations, tenants associations, pensioners and Black groups should also be encouraged to participate.

Dissident Labour councillors, MPs and union leaders willing to pledge themselves to non-payment can be used to build support for mass non-payment and to increase the pressure for non-implementation by councils.

An activist from Scotland told us, "If there's one lesson people need to learn from our experience, it's the need to combine community-based resistance with the demand for non-implementation by councils.

"Because our campaigns have tended to be dominated by anarchists and apolitical community activists, we've had a great campaign on the ground in the localities but little orientation towards the councils and the unions.

"We should have been demanding non-implementation from the start, instead of which we misled ourselves and a lot of working class people into believing that community action alone would be sufficient to defeat the poll tax."

The rest of us need to draw inspiration from the Scottish experience but also learn the lessons: community action and an orientation towards Labour councils and the trade unions must go hand in hand if we are to succeed.

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"Well, we need the money, yah?"

Photo: John Harris

The poor lose, the rich gain

Lynn Ferguson explains how her household stands to lose £24 a week under the poll tax, while the Thatchers will gain £45.

Thatcher's friends will do very nicely thank-you out of the poll tax. Lord Vesty will gain £100 a week as a result of the change-over.

Rates on Maggie and Denis's bijou retirement home in leafy Dulwich are £62 a week. They will pay £17 a week poll tax — a gain of £45 a week.

Just down the road, in Peckham, where many have to live on less than £45 a week things are quite different. The average weekly rate bill per household in the borough of Southwark (which includes Peckham) is £95 per household.

Poll tax is likely to be around £11 per person per week.

Take my household as an example. Six of us share a flat — two children, two working adults, and two claiming benefit. Our weekly poll tax will be £26.40 — the two on the dole will have to pay 20% of the full poll tax out of their benefit. 20% of £11 is £2.20.

Benefit will rise to compensate by the

princely sum of 95p a week.

At present we don't pay rates separately. The landlords include them in our rent. Will they cut our rent when they no longer have to pay rates? I doubt it.

If they do cut the rent, we'll be about £15.50 a week worse off. If they don't we'll be £24.50 worse off under the poll tax.

It could be worse. If we were two couples rather than four single adults, with one person in each couple unemployed, then we wouldn't get any poll tax rebate at all. Rebates are calculated on the combined income of couples. We'd be paying an extra £44 a week. Our loss would be tidily equal to the Thatchers' gain.

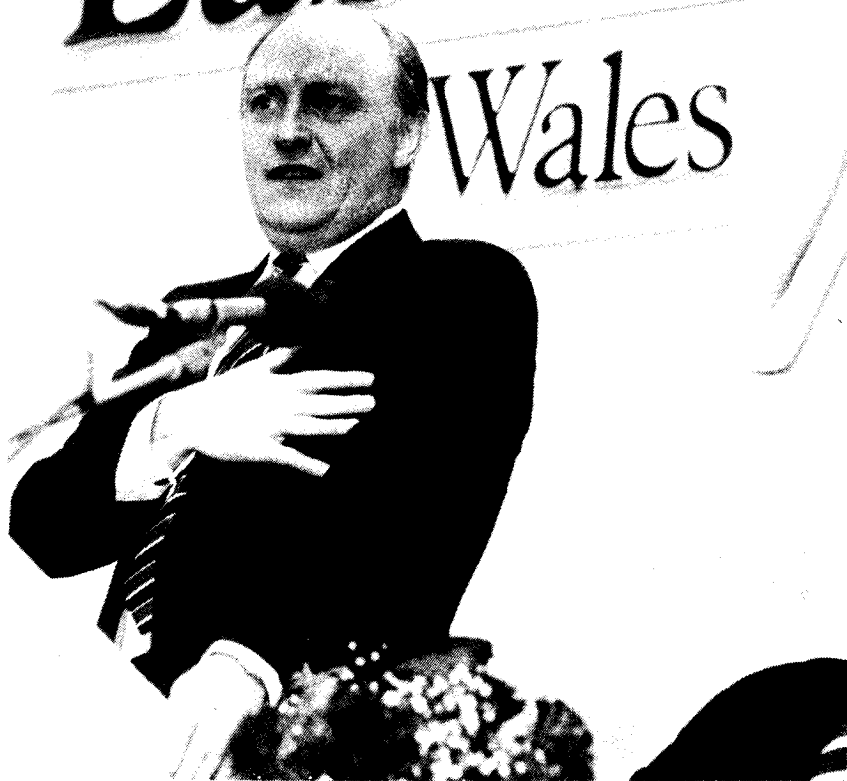
There has been much talk of the north-south divide, of Thatcher creating two nations. There are two nations in Britain today — the rich and the poor. The effects of the Tories policies has been to massively widen the gap between the rich and poor.

Tax cuts gave the richest 1% in Britain an extra £100,000 each last year. The poorest 2.5 million taxpayers gained just 92p a week. Meanwhile benefits have been slashed, child benefit frozen.

The poll tax is yet another case of the Tories stealing from the poor to give to the rich.

Labour

Wales



Resist the poll tax!

An open letter to Neil Kinnock, leader of the Labour Party

Dear Neil Kinnock, You have expressed anger and hostility to those who got violent during the anti-poll-tax demonstrations outside council chambers up and down the country.

You accuse them of helping the Tories get themselves off the hook.

Now, that is a fair enough comment to make about any political organisation which deliberately creates an incident

which the Tories can exploit to deflect attention from the big political question, the poll tax. But it comes very badly from you. And it is a shameful thing to say about the recent protests.

What happened outside Hackney Town Hall, for example, was plainly not something stirred up by "outsiders" and "agitators", but an angry revolt by young people, many of them black, who face an intolerable worsening of the quality of their lives when Mrs Thatcher's poll tax takes effect.

Homes will be broken up, and

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numbers of young people even larger than now will be thrown out on to the streets, as a consequence of the poll tax. Those young people have good reason to be angry and impatient of political palaver!

If anarchists — and semi-anarchists like the SWP — *who reject politics* were able to take the lead in those angry demonstrations and create "incidents" the Tories could exploit, then a large part of the blame for it belongs to you. To no-one else but you, comrade Kinnock!

It's one of the oldest patterns in the international labour movement that anarchists and semi-anarchists come to the fore when the official leadership of the movement is timid, and trims instead of fighting.

Your entire posture on the poll tax is hard to understand. The poll tax is a vastly unpopular measure, and it will have an immense effect on the lives of millions of people. If the British people were allowed a democratic vote on it, then it would for certain be rejected.

It has been pushed through Parliament by a government elected by far less than half of those who voted in the 1987 election. Even large numbers of those who voted for Mrs Thatcher have taken to the streets against it.

Not in living memory has such a widespread revolt been seen among the rank and file of the Tory party. Beside this, the early '70s rank and file Tory dissatisfaction with the Heath government's immigration policy was a minor uproar.

Mrs Thatcher would lose a general election now. But she doesn't have to call one for two years or more.

If we had a parliament with annual elections, such as the early labour movement (the Chartists) set out to win over a hundred and fifty years ago, then Mrs Thatcher would be driven from office.

But of course we have nothing like that. We have a system whose need of reform could not be more glaringly illustrated than it is now.

This minority government, with its arbitrary and non-representative majority in the House of Commons, is pushing through the latest piece of savage class legislation — legislation to benefit the haves and penalise the have-nots — against the manifest opposition of a big majority of the electorate. No wonder there is widespread and growing dissatisfaction with the government and the system of election under which it was chosen.

No wonder there is a vast rolling wave of civil disobedience by people refusing to pay the poll tax — up to one million in Scotland.

And what do you say to those people? You tell them to obey the law! In effect you say to Thatcher, "I disagree with everything you do, but the Labour Party under my leadership will defend to the death your right to do it"!

Thatcher and the Thatcherite press create a great hue and cry about "violence" to distract from the real issue, and what do you do? You join in the condemnation. You don't even have the decency to make a distinction between the angry young people outside Hackney Town Hall and the few political boneheads who may have wanted rough-housing demonstrations outside Town Halls because they aren't interested in the broader political processes.

Your calculations here are obvious. Don't let Thatcher do what she wants to do, and "blame" Labour for the violence. But you also tell the millions of potential non-payers of the poll tax to obey the law. You turn yourself into Mrs Thatcher's political outrider and trouble-shooter over the poll tax.

Why, Mr Kinnock? You say democracy demands it. The law is the law. We must bow down before the law, even rapacious class-law enshrining inequalities and breeding a vast crop of injustice.

Your idea of democracy, Mr Kinnock, is, I submit, not one that those who fought for and won the democratic system you support would recognise.

Any notion of democracy which does not recognise the right of resistance to bad laws and to tyrannical governments — and how would you go about arguing that Mrs Thatcher's government is not now behaving tyrannically? — is a recipe for passive submission to any indignity inflicted by an ephemeral majority — or, in this case, by a government which is far from being elected or supported by a majority of the electorate.

Any living democracy — even one as shallow and "bourgeois" as the one we have, which combines civil liberties and the vote with a system of grinding tyranny of the rich in industry — will include *struggle and conflict*. What a government can and cannot do will often have to be determined by *resistance to government decrees*.

The democratic system we have now, inadequate though it is, was shaped and expanded by decades and centuries of

such struggles by our class and political ancestors, Mr Kinnock. So what has changed?

Is the present system so perfect a democratic mechanism that the example of all our long history of struggle becomes invalid? That is the only possible argument you and your supporters could bring in here. It is plainly absurd!

A system that allows a government with only minority backing to ram through what Thatcher has rammed through over the last ten years is patently imperfect, if not positively malign.

The truth, Mr Kinnock, is that your notion of democratic propriety is a central reason why Mrs Thatcher has been able to abuse democracy in the way she has and does. She has met with only feeble resistance and has thus pushed ahead, getting bolder and bolder. Yet she could have been stopped and prevented from doing much of the evil she has imposed on the working people of Britain if the labour movement's leaders had been less supine, less willing to accept and to champion her "democratic right" to wreak havoc against the majority on behalf of a minority of the minority who elected her.

Is this just "the usual totalitarian claptrap"? Mr Kinnock, it is your idea of democracy which corresponds most closely with that of the totalitarians in the labour movement. It is you who preach the divine right of an elected government to do what it likes and deny the democratic right of resistance to injustice and tyranny. It is you who defend Mrs Thatcher's "elected dictatorship".

More than that, though. One reason why some people who wanted to be socialists feel for the Stalinist totalitarian claptrap and undervalued and rejected democracy was because they understood democracy as you understand it — a matter of passive submission to rigged parliaments and manipulated majorities. Like you they didn't understand democracy as a matter of struggle.

Where you worship the bourgeois version of democracy and make a god of it, they rejected it and made a devil of it. The basic attitudes about what it is have much in common, though.

I repeat: those who fought for, won and built the modern limited parliamentary democracies — what Marxists call bourgeois democracies — had a radically different notion of what it was all about. Democracy to them was something alive and real.

This, for example, is what the American Declaration of Independence of 1776 says about it.

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal: that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among them are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

"That, to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that, whenever any form of government becomes destructive of

these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it, and to institute a new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organising its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.

"... When a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government and to provide new guards for their future security".

In principle one could make a plausible case for full-scale insurrection against the poll tax and still be completely in step with the real spirit of even bourgeois democracy! In fact a vigorous political campaign centred on civil disobedience would be enough to defeat Mrs Thatcher's tyrannous poll tax.

Labour should advocate such a campaign, and you should lead it, Mr Kinnock.

Right now you hope to sail calmly towards an election victory in two years time. You want no upsets, no risks. Your strategy is one of half-passive speculation and hope that the tides and waves of politics will see Labour horrid and dry in 1991 or 1992.

But what if you miscalculate? What if the tides change? Better than hoping and speculating would be a vigorous Labour campaign to harry the Tories by organising the opposition that is now seething and steaming under the Tories.

Nine years ago Michael Foot was elected leader of the Labour Party. Thatcher was very unpopular in the opinion polls. Unemployment had begun to bite into the sinews of the labour movement, but the movement still had the heart and morale for a fight.

Michael Foot promised to raise a storm of indignation against the Tories and to drive them from office. He never did it, never even tried to do it. The result of that failure was that Thatcher thrived and the '80s were terrible years for the labour movement and for large sections of the working class.

The mass revulsion now against Thatcher — which is even convulsing the Tory party itself — gives Labour the chance to organise a new "storm of indignation" and make sure that the Tories are kicked out. Labour should do that. It should side with and defend the youth, such as those who got out of control outside Hackney Town Hall, against the Tories who would grind them down further.

Labour should dare to seize the chance to rouse and organise the storm of indignation which Michael Foot talked about at the beginning of the Thatcher years.

Labour should not say: "We disagree with Thatcher, but we'll defend her democratic right to do injustice". Labour should say: "We disagree with Thatcher, and we'll support the right of the people to oppose her, lead their fight and resist her".

John O'Mahony

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Photo: John Harris (Report)

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Most people can't avoid the poll tax register anyway. But some can — if they give up their right to vote. And some will.

Lie no.2: claimants will receive extra benefits to cover the poll tax.

The Tories say that income support will be increased so that claimants can pay 20% of the poll tax from their fortnightly giro. But the increase will be 20% of the *average* poll tax nationally. So claimants in areas with above average poll tax (mainly inner-city, Labour-voting areas) will automatically lose out.

You'll get about 90p a week increase on income support — and you may have to pay £2.50 a week in poll tax. Besides, what's 90p a week against the millions the Tories have cut, and are still cutting, from benefits?

Lie no.3: Councils are spending too much, and poll tax will stop them.

In reality, councils everywhere have been forced into damaging cuts by the Tories chopping back central government grants. If the Tories gave back all the cuts they've made since 1979 in money for local councils, then the entire population could be given a year free of rates.

Meanwhile, the Tories are spending enough on Trident nuclear weapons to build 300,000 new council houses. And they have given £3 billion a year in tax cuts to the rich.

Lie no.4: The poll tax is better than rates.

Under the rates system there is at least a rough relationship between income and what you pay: poor people live in smaller flats or houses, with lower rates, and rich people live in bigger houses, with higher rates. Under the poll tax, there is no relationship between income and the poll tax to be paid.

Rates are easier to collect than the poll tax. They are a tax on property, and property doesn't move. The poll tax is a tax on people, and they move — a lot. 800,000 people move home in Scotland every year. 34% of 18-24 year olds in Scotland have at least three addresses during those years. Difficulties in collecting the poll tax will mean a higher poll tax which will mean a still bigger burden on the less well-off.

Lies the Tories tell

Lie no.1: The poll tax will make councils more accountable.

• Central government will decide, not local voters.

Under the poll tax, 20% of councils' money will come from poll tax. Poll tax means more control over councils by Whitehall, not by local voters.

Local voters will be asked to choose between high council spending and high poll tax, and low council spending and low poll tax. Very democratic, the Tories say. But it won't be like that.

The money councils get from Whitehall will be decided by what the government reckons are the needs of the area. And if the government reckons wrong? Too bad.

On current calculations, the poll tax in Labour Islington will be more than twice the rate in Tory Aylesbury Vale. So Islington is twice as spendthrift as Aylesbury Vale? Maybe not. If the Tories' assessment of Islington's needs were 14% higher, and their assessment of Aylesbury Vale's needs just 14% lower, then Islington's poll tax would be

lower than Aylesbury Vale's. In other words, your local poll tax measures what the government thinks of your area much more than it measures how spendthrift or stingy your council is.

• The system is biased against inner-city Labour areas.

Inner-city councils with a lot of poverty and a rapidly shifting population, like Islington, will find it much more difficult to collect poll tax than stable, prosperous Tory areas. They'll have to spend more on collecting the tax, and to write off more of it as irrecoverable. Yet they'll get no compensation for that from central government.

• The system is biased towards cuts.

Since poll tax will be only one-fifth of council's income, to increase spending by 10% a council will have to increase poll tax by 50%. If it cuts spending by 10% it can cut poll tax by 50%. *In any case, the government will still have the power to order councils to cut poll tax whatever local voters want.*

• Poll tax is a tax on voting.

If your name is on the electoral register, it's on the poll tax register too.

Community-based struggles — against the poll tax or against rent rises — are more difficult to organise and to win than workplace battles.

But they can be won. The victory of Glasgow tenants against rent rises in 1915 shows how. Crucial was the linking of rent strikes with workplace action.

Housing in early twentieth century Glasgow was among the worst in Britain. 36,000 families lived in one room "single ends". 70,000 families carried on family life in two-room apartments.

By 1915 well over 70% of Glasgow housing consisted of one or two rooms. Under 1% of housing in the working-class areas was unlet. In some areas only one fifth of 1% was unlet, and this included uninhabitable houses.

The rent strikes of 1915 centred not on the slums of Anderston but on the — relatively speaking — better quality working class burghs of Partick and Govan. Both Govan and Partick had a particularly high number of spacious tenements inhabited by skilled workers.

Within a few months of the outbreak of the war Partick and Govan, like any district in Glasgow which possessed a large engineering, shipbuilding, or steel works, faced an acute housing shortage. Factors — the landlords' agents — were quick to exploit the situation by attempting to push up rents and to evict tenants who fell behind with their inflated rents.

In Govan and neighbouring Fairfield the average increase was between 11% and 23%.

The first chapter in the history of the rent strikes occurred in April and May of 1915 when a new round of rent rises were announced in Govan. 260 out of the 264 houses affected by the increase — better quality tenements and cottages — pledged themselves not to pay the increases, and received active support from the well-established local

Glasgow 1915: how tenants' struggle can win

tenants organisations. By June the factors had been forced to withdraw the increase, after having unsuccessfully threatened eviction.

During the ensuing summer months the struggle escalated and spread to other parts of Glasgow.

In June it spread to Shettleston, where local tenants prevented the

"The major force in the rents struggle was the working class women who lived in the areas...Support for the rents campaign came from the mainstream trade union movement, and workplace industrial action...was decisive in the victory"

eviction of a mother and her five children, and to Richmond Park. In July and August fresh rent strikes broke out again in Govan and Partick. In September a massive rent strike against increases was unleashed in Ibrox, and there was a further upsurge of unrest in Shettleston.

The autobiography of the future Communist MP Willie Gallacher, describes a flavour of the atmosphere of the rent-strikes at this time:

"Street meetings, back-court meetings, drums, bells, trumpets — every method was used to bring the women out and organise them for the struggle. Notices were printed by the thousand and put up in the windows, wherever you could see them.

In street after street scarcely a window without one: 'We Are Not Paying Increased Rent'.

"Before they got anywhere near their destination, the sheriff's officer and his men would be met by an army of furious women who drove them back in a hurried scramble for safety. Attempt after attempt was made to secure evictions, all of which ended in futility."

In early October the rents campaign entered a new stage, with a series of large demonstrations to the City Chambers. Over a thousand women participated in the first one, on October 7th, described in the local press as a demonstration of "women and children of the respectable working class".

At the same time the rents struggle became increasingly enmeshed with the continuing workplace-based industrial disputes on Clydeside. Threats of strike action in the event of eviction became increasingly common. By early November "emergency committees" had been established in the various shipyards and workshops around Partick in support of the rent strikes.

Glasgow factors continued to push ahead with more rent increases and more court cases to secure warrants for evictions.

The rent strikes continued to spread. By late October they had firmly taken root in the Whiteinch, Cambuslang, and Maryhill districts. Partick, Govan and Shettleston remained centres of the storm.

The climax of the rent strikes came in November 17th, by which time some 20,000 tenants were on strike in and around Glasgow. A Partick factor took eighteen tenants on rent strike to the small debts court to get rent arrears deducted directly from their wage packets.

At least five major shipyards and one armaments work struck in support of the tenants (many of whom were shipyard workers in Dalmar) and a number of other large plants

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sent deputations on the massive demonstration which converged on the court. Gallacher's autobiography conveys the atmosphere of the demonstration and rally outside the court:

"From far away Dalmuir in the West, from Parkhead in the east, from Cathcart in the South and Hyde Park in the North, the dungareed army of the proletariat invaded the centre of the city...Into the streets around the Sheriff's Court the workers marched from all sides. All the streets were packed. Traffic was completely stopped."

"Roar after roar of rage went up as incidents were related showing the robbery of mother and wives whose sons and husbands were at the front. Roar followed roar as we pictured what would happen if we allowed the attack on our wages."

The prosecuting solicitor agreed to drop the cases.

A week later legislation was introduced into Parliament. It was rushed onto the statute books by Christmas.

The Rent Restriction Act restricted rents and mortgage in-

terest on all housing in which tenants paid £30 a year or less in rent, such restrictions to remain in force for at least six months beyond the end of the war.

Glasgow mostly accepted the legislation (Gallacher simply calls it "a victory") and the rent strike notices began to disappear from tenement windows, the legislation had many shortcomings: there was to be no restoration of increases already imposed, and no restrictions on the legal powers of landlords and factors to secure evictions, which continued on a massive scale throughout Scotland for the remainder of the war.

The major force in the rents struggle was the working class women who lived in the areas from which the campaign emerged.

Well before the outbreak of the rent strikes working class women had already established a leading role in the local tenants' movement and taken the lead in creating such organisations as the Tenants' Defence Association, the Govan Women's Housing Association and the Glasgow Women's Housing

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Association, the founding member and first president of which was Mary Laird.

It was women who organised many of the public meetings. And it was also women who were chiefly involved in the physical confrontations with factors and sheriff's officers, occurring during working hours while the men were away at work.

In party political terms the main forces involved were the Labour Party and the ILP.

Support for the rents campaign also came from the mainstream trade union movement, and workplace industrial action and the threat of such action was decisive in the victory.



John Wheatley of the Independent Labour Party addressing a May Day rally in Glasgow, 1915.

Lessons from Scotland

As the first anniversary of the poll tax approaches in Scotland, somewhere in the region of one million people are not paying Thatcher's tax.

The campaign against the poll tax has been going on in Scotland for nearly two years. At its conception, the Labour leadership in Scotland derided the idea of building a campaign of mass non-payment, dismissing it as a utopian impossibility. One million non-payers is now a reality in Scotland.

Regional councils have been overwhelmed by the consistent levels of mass non-payment. In the last couple of months Strathclyde regional council alone has issued over 330,000 summary warrants, ie. they are serving notice that the sheriff's office is in charge of collecting your unpaid poll tax, by, for example, deducting it from wages or income support, or instituting a warrant sale.

The willingness of regional councils throughout Scotland to actually unleash the sheriff's office has varied from region to region. In Lothian region, for example, seizure of wages and earnings has already taken place for non-payment, though it must be said that the latter is rather unsuccessful due to the intervention of local anti-poll tax campaigners. But even in those regions where the councils have been more aggressive in their collection policy, the levels of non-payment have remained constant.

In Strathclyde region, by far the biggest in Scotland, the story is slightly different. In Glasgow, for example, it is reliably estimated that somewhere in the region of 30-40% have not paid a single penny of the poll tax. The Labour leadership of Strathclyde region have not yet decided what to do. Apart from running to the press with warnings of doom and destitution for non payers, they are lost for a solution and are hoping to ride out the storm until after the regional council elections on 3 May.

The Labour leaders on the council know that a rash of warrant sales in the near future would do their image no good whatsoever with the working class voters who will be voting Labour on 3 May. However, after the regional council elections the Scottish office will

unleash the sheriff's officers in Strathclyde, and the Labour group leadership in Strathclyde will gladly comply.

The task facing the sheriff's office is enormous, but we should not be complacent. They will do their utmost, using all the punitive measures available to them and the law, to pursue non-payers. Therefore it is obvious that the next few months will be absolutely crucial for the fight against the poll tax in Scotland.

The time has now come to renew our efforts to bring the campaign against the poll tax into the labour movement in both its wings, the Labour Party and the unions. With mass non-payment now a reality, and in the run up to the regional elections, we have an excellent opportunity to put the heat on the Labour councillors.

In terms of the trade unions very little has been organised so far to use the collective strength of the working class in the fight, whether it be in finance departments of the regional councils, who are responsible for collecting the

poll tax, and whose workers are almost all in NALGO, or in the DSS, who will be responsible for deducting money from non-payers' income support, and who are mostly organised in the CPSA. With mass non-payment, industrial action becomes more of a possibility.

With the threat of warrant sales, deductions from benefits, seizure of bank accounts becoming a reality, so the opportunity arises for workers to take industrial action, and make sure the campaign is rooted in the labour movement.

When the campaign in Scotland was initiated, it was envisaged that labour movement action was as central to defeating the poll tax as was mass non-payment. That position, first adopted by the Strathclyde Federation at its founding conference in July 1988, is as correct now as it was then. Mass non-payment is now a reality. We must now take the campaign into the labour movement and make non-implementation a reality also.

Where we stand

Socialist Organiser stands for workers' liberty East and West. We aim to help organise the left wing in the Labour Party and trade unions to fight to replace capitalism with working class socialism.

We want public ownership of the major enterprises and a planned economy under workers' control. We want democracy much fuller than the present Westminster system — a workers' democracy, with elected representatives recallable at any time, and an end to bureaucrats' and managers' privileges.

Socialism can never be built in one country alone. The workers in every country have more in common with workers in other countries than with their own capitalist or Stalinist rulers. We support national liberation struggles and workers' struggles worldwide, including the struggle of workers and oppressed nationalities in the Stalinist states against their own anti-socialist bureaucracies.

We stand:

For full equality for women, and social provision to free women from the burden of housework. For a mass working class-based women's movement.

Against racism, and against deportations and all immigration controls.

For equality for lesbians and gays.

For a united and free Ireland, with

some federal system to protect the rights of the Protestant minority.

For left unity in action; clarity in debate and discussion.

For a labour movement accessible to the most oppressed, accountable to its rank and file, and militant against capitalism.

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**HOW TO
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A message from 1381

The last time a government in England decided to levy a Poll Tax, it caused a great revolt of the people — the so-called “Peasants’ Revolt” of summer 1381.

That rebellion was so deep and powerful that it spread over large parts of England, and the rebels captured London itself.

The usual state taxes then mainly affected the rich. It became necessary to find money to pay for

English wars in France, part of which was then under English control. So in 1380 the House of Commons resorted to a Poll Tax which would hit everyone.

In practice, then as now, that meant that it would hit the poorest hardest of all, that is, the poor peasant farmers.

For the people, the Poll Tax was the spark to a bonfire of grievances. For decades the ruling class had applied a policy of repression against

Poplar: the Labour council that dared to fight

What would happen if Labour councils refused to act as local administrators of the poll tax? At worst, some might go to jail. But councillors willing to go to jail on such a question would become the centre of a tremendous mass agitation.

An example from history shows us what a force for anti-Tory agitation such a stand by a Labour council could be — Poplar.

In those days ‘Boards of Guardians’ administered ‘relief’ to the impoverished, and rates and scales of ‘relief’ varied with the political colour of the Guardians and the local council. Wal Hannington, a communist, organised the National Unemployed Movement. Here he tells what happened in Poplar in 1922.

Under the pressure of our agitations the scales of relief administered by the boards of guardians were being raised almost every week. The capitalist press were calling attention to what they described as the “extravagant” scales. Poplar Borough Council, which had an overwhelming Labour majority and which sided openly with the guardians, was particularly singled out for attack.

The council and the guardians denied

that their scales were extravagant and claimed that they were only doing their duty in endeavouring to relieve adequately the distress in their locality.

The borough council, in fact, took the offensive, and as a protest against the failure of the government to come to the aid of the poorer localities they refused to pay sums of money which were required from their Council by the London County Council and other authorities in respect of services administered by them.

This became the subject of legal proceedings, but the Poplar councillors stood firm. The court ultimately ordered the arrest of the Poplar councillors on 1st September 1921. The women councillors were put in Holloway goal, and the men, headed by George Lansbury, in Brixton. They remained in prison for six weeks, until the government rushed through a temporary Act whereby, through the agency of the Metropolitan Common Poor Law Fund, the burden of relief was more evenly distributed between the richer and poorer districts throughout London.

The courageous stand of these councillors aroused the admiration of the whole working class, and great demonstrations from the East End of London to Brixton and Holloway goals were almost a nightly occurrence.

*From ‘Unemployed Struggle 1919-36’
by Wal Hannington.*

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the people.

For example: wages for day labourers had risen when labour was made scarce by the famine known as the “Black Death” in mid-century. But then the government had stepped in to keep wages artificially low by state decree. That was one of the sources of the bitter feeling which welled up in 1381.

The revolt was often led by lower-rank priests, who had grown to hate the riches and corruption of the hierarchy of the then powerful and dominant pre-Reformation Catholic Church. Some of them preached a sort of primitive socialism which challenged the right of the rich to exploit the poor. A well-known rhyme of the time put it like this:

*When Adam delved [dug the earth]
And Eve span,*

Who then was the gentleman?

That verse was attributed to John Ball, a priest who was a leader of the revolt. The other known leader was Wat Tyler.

The Peasants’ Revolt defeated the attempt to impose a Poll Tax. It remained unheard of again in Britain until the coming of Margaret Thatcher. But the rebellion was broken and destroyed, mainly by treachery.

The rebels had taken London, and the young king Richard II, who was aged 17, went out to meet them. Like peasant rebels usually have done, they continued to believe in the king and to accept him.

He promised to agree to their charter of demands, and they dispersed.

But once the peasants had dispersed and disarmed, the ruling class recovered its nerve and went on the offensive against them, reimposing and restoring the old conditions of servitude. It would be a long time before the peasants won their liberty.

But in 1381 they did put an end to the Poll Tax. Across six centuries, those heroic English peasants send us a timely message: the Poll Tax can be beaten!

Women lose out

Women will lose out under the poll tax. In several ways the poll tax will hit women harder than men.

- *Poll tax hits the low paid, and more women are low paid.*

£10 a week poll tax is a bigger burden for a woman worker on £70 a week than for a man on £100 a week.

Three quarters of low paid workers in Britain are women, either as main or secondary household earners. Part-time work is almost entirely the province of women: in 1987, 43% of women workers worked part-time, and three quarters of these earned less than £3.50 an hour — below the low pay threshold.

Many of these low paid women — as well as women without earnings at all — will be billed for local taxes for the first time. Consequently, more women will face increased hardship and poverty.

- *Poll tax hits women working as nannies, au pairs, etc.*

The majority of workers living in tied accommodation as part of their job, and therefore not currently liable to pay rates, are also women. There are currently some 177,000 nannies, au pairs and housekeepers in Britain, plus 20,500 workers in residential establishments such as hotels, children's and old people's homes. 79% of these staff are women — on low pay. In addition, student nurses, unlike other students, are liable for the *entire* poll tax, rather than just 20%.

- *Poll tax hits women who are at home caring for children or elderly relatives.*

Ninety per cent of single-parent families are headed by a woman. 70% of single parents dependent on income sup-

port (formerly supplementary benefit) are women. And income support will not fully cover the poll tax.

When children in these families reach the age of 18, they'll have to pay the poll tax themselves. Either the family will be plunged even deeper into poverty, or the 18 year old will be forced to leave home.

One quarter of women aged 45 to 64 stay at home to look after sick, disabled or elderly relatives — parents, husbands, sisters, brothers. Nearly one in three of widowed women or single women over



The poll tax will hit especially hard at Black, Asian, low-paid and elderly women

the age of 80 live with relatives. All these households will face higher bills with the poll tax, save for the wealthiest few living in properties of high rateable value.

Instead of one rates bill, they will have several poll tax bills. Look after Granny at home, and it costs you maybe £10 a week in poll tax. Families will be forced to put elderly or sick relatives into homes, or suffer even worse poverty.

- *Poll tax hits elderly women.*

By the Tories' own admission, the majority of pensioners will be at least £5 a week worse off under the poll tax. And 70 per cent of old age pensioners are women.

- *Poll tax hits Black and Asian women.*

The poll tax poses a particular threat to Black and Asian women, who are more likely to live in larger households. Only 6% of white households include three or more adults, but 17% of West Indian and 22% of Asian households do. Black and Asian families are already under threat from the Tories' immigration laws: the poll tax is a further attack on their rights.

- *Women will be responsible for their husbands' poll tax. And the sex snoopers will go into action.*

Each person in a married couple will be responsible for the couple's poll tax. If you're a housewife with no independent income, you're legally liable to pay maybe £20 a week for the pair of you. If your husband quits home halfway through the year leaving poll tax arrears, the council may try to make you pay those arrears.

There'll be a new twist to 'cohabitation' rules and the work of 'sex snoopers'. Already a woman on income support stands to lose her benefit if the Social Security reckons she's living with a wage-earning man. Now she may have to pay full poll tax, too.

When councils compile the register, they're supposed to find out if you're living with a man. They are supposed to ask you — and your neighbours! — such questions as: Do they have a sexual relationship? Is their relationship stable? Have they had children together? Are they known by neighbours and friends as a married couple?

Asked in a radio interview whether snoopers would be coming round to see who was living where, Nicholas Ridley, then the Minister with responsibility for implementation of the poll tax, replied: "If you like to use that pejorative term, yes."

Couples will be entitled to see each other's entry in the poll tax register. This means that a violent husband will be aided and abetted in tracking down his wife until she has obtained a legal separation — and, at the same time, she continues to remain liable for paying his poll tax!

- *Poll tax means cuts in council services which women depend on.*

Poll tax means less money for the council, and more cuts in services. Since women are particularly dependent on council services — nurseries, day care centres, home helps, old people's homes, etc. — again, they will suffer most.

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Students should link up with anti-poll tax unions

Students, young people and the poll tax

The Government is determined that everyone over 18, with very few exceptions, will register for and pay the poll tax. People who clearly cannot pay the full amount will still have to pay at least 20% of their poll tax bills.

For most people there will be a rebate system similar to rates rebates. If you're unemployed and on income support you have to pay 20% of poll tax — between about 80p a week and £2.50 a week, depending on where you live.

The Government says it will increase income support to cover this. But the increase will be the national average poll tax — about £1 a week. If you live in an inner-city area where poll tax is much higher, bad luck!

The rebate dwindles fast for incomes above income support level. All but the very lowest-paid workers will pay full poll tax of between about £4 and £13 a week.

If you're over 19 and still at school, you'll have to pay 20 per cent poll tax even though you have no income at all. If you're on YTS, or a student nurse, you'll depend on the rebates system.

Because income support is now lower for people under 25, you'll get less rebate under age 25 than above age 25. A single person under 25 facing poll tax of about £5 a week will lose all rebates and have to pay the lot as soon as their take-home pay reaches £53 a week. At

25 or over, you continue to get some rebate up to £60 a week.

Full-time students get a special status under the poll tax law.

Instead of being individually assessed for rebates, they will all have to pay a flat rate of 20 per cent of poll tax. They will be billed at their term-time address, and not at their address during college vacations.

The Government is unlikely to increase student grants to meet the extra expense: they have already turned down calls for an increase in the 1989 grants of students in Scotland who will pay poll tax from April: an expense other UK students do not have to meet this year.

Overseas students, who already pay exorbitant tuition fees, will likewise pay 20% of the poll tax. And husbands or wives accompanying them may well have to pay the full 100% without any rebate. Of course, they will be ineligible to vote, the only real way of having a say in how local authorities spend their money. This helps to disprove the Government's claim that poll tax will increase local authority accountability.

As if all that wasn't bad enough the proportion of poll tax students have to pay can be increased by the Secretary of State, using powers given to him/her by the poll tax legislation.

Young people, like anyone, in private rented accommodation are unlikely to find landlords decreasing the rents by the amount currently paid as a contribution

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to rates: private tenants will pay twice over.

Students will have to register for poll tax at their term-time address. Since they often change address they will be especially hard to register and assess for poll tax. The Government's solution to this problem is to place much of the responsibility for registering students on their college authorities. This has a number of worrying implications for students' civil liberties.

Colleges will appoint 'certification officers' whose job will be to gather and pass on hitherto confidential information, like course details and addresses, to local authority poll tax registers.

Colleges may have to discipline students who fail to inform them of a change of address. At the same time, students may try to withhold information afraid that college authorities will use it for internal disciplinary matters. The legislation is bound to breed distrust and resentment between students and college authorities.

Once students have provided information to the college, they will be issued with a certificate, much like an identity card to prove their status to the local authority. Thus they might be the first victims in a move towards universal ID cards.

On the public register of poll tax payees, students will be the only group who have to state their occupation, an infringement of privacy. The register, which contains people's addresses could also prove dangerous to some overseas students vulnerable to embassy harassment.

Ironically, whilst students' civil liberties will be especially threatened they are also in a good position to fight the poll tax. They should begin now to talk to campus trade unions about the 'certification' process: will it involve college staff in additional duties? Will the process infringe existing rules regarding confidentiality?

Students can probably find more good excuses than most people to delay the registration process: many live in multi-occupancy accommodation, where it will be difficult to determine who should take responsibility for completing the register.

Students can link resisting the poll tax to the fight against loans, and for an adequate grant.

Students can link up with anti-poll tax campaigns in the area where they live. It is in everyone's interest to help students win the battle for their civil liberties. And student unionists can bring valuable experience to campaigns for the whole community.

Dictatorship from Whitehall



Photo: John Harris (Report)

According to the Tories' rhetoric, they are taking powers away from the state and giving them back to the individual.

Tory Minister Nicholas Ridley says: "Local services, provided by the local authorities for the local community, benefit everyone in that community.

"Everyone benefits, so everyone should contribute. Everyone should have the right, through the ballot box, to influence the level of service that is provided and the price that they must pay through their taxes.

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"That is the essence of accountability and of responsible democratic control of the services provided by local authorities."

In fact, the government is taking power away from local authorities and local voters, and concentrating power in Whitehall.

Since 1979 there has been a steady dilution of the powers of local councils, and even tighter controls over them by central government. The Greater London Council and the six Metropolitan County Councils have been scrapped altogether. Many other councils have been 'rate-capped' — forced to cut their rates and their expenditure regardless of what local voters wanted.

The Tories have now ordered local authorities to privatise refuse collection, cleaning, catering and garden and vehicle maintenance.

They have outlawed most of the policies worked out by Labour councils to try to ensure that council contracts go only to companies which don't discriminate against

women or black workers. They have stopped councils producing 'political' publicity to explain and justify their policies. They have imposed Section 28, which makes it illegal for councils to do anything to present 'positive images' of homosexuality.

The poll tax is part of a trend towards dictatorship from Whitehall.

The government will have poll tax-capping powers, just as at present it has rate-capping powers. If a local authority sets a poll tax which the Secretary of State considers too high, he can order the council to reduce it, whatever the mandate from local voters.

The poll tax legislation gives the government *increased* control over local authority spending. Rates for businesses, currently set by the council, will be scrapped and replaced by a National Business Rate, set and collected by the government, and then distributed to local authorities in proportion to the size of the population.

At present 40-odd per cent of local authority money is raised through the rates and 50-odd per cent comes from government grants. Under the new system only 20% of income will be raised by the authority itself, through the poll tax, and the remaining 80% will be under central government control.

This is the Tory future: council services will be hived off, schools will be allowed to 'opt out', entire housing estates will be privatised, the bulk of council spending will be directly controlled by the central government and the remainder indirectly controlled.

The *Financial Times* has summed up the future for local government which the Tories have mapped out: "Plans for the destruction of local democracy are now complete. The government's tanks are moving into place around every town hall.

"Battle will commence in the autumn. From then on local government is likely to suffer a series of blows from which it will be extremely fortunate to recover. Britain will be more than ever a centrally managed state, with power concentrated in Whitehall."

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tax takes us a big step nearer national identity cards.

Under the law in Scotland, the registration officer has a duty to "take all reasonable steps to obtain such information as is reasonably required by him". This means that he or she can get information from the electoral register, other government or local government departments, or whatever else may be necessary.

The Tories have been unwilling to say what sources of information will not be included. British Telecom have already said that they will supply information for poll tax registers.

One of the most Orwellian aspects of the poll tax will be the category of "responsible person" chosen in each household whose job will be to collect information on everyone else. The "responsible person" will be liable for a fine if he or she fails to collect the information.

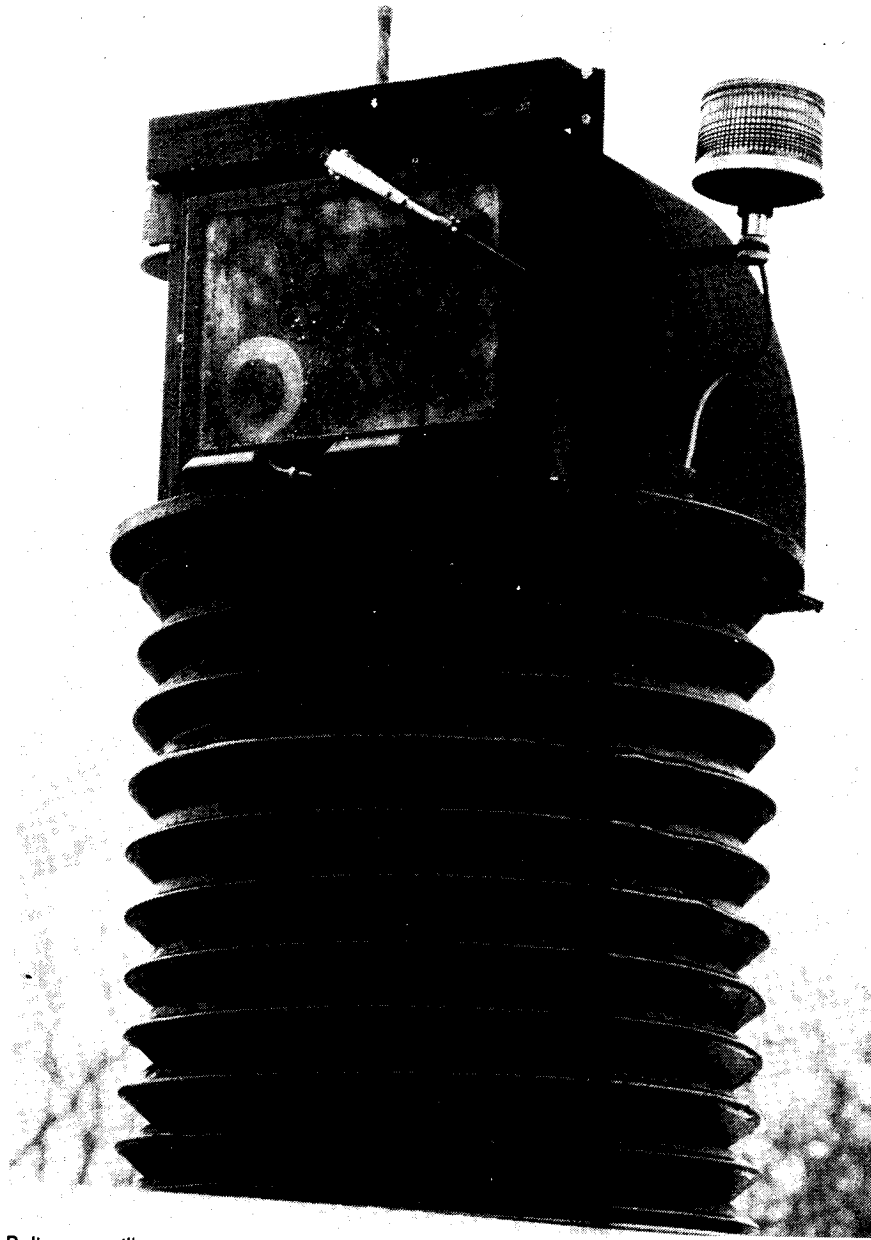
The poll tax will force people off the electoral register. Yes, the registers are separate, but if your name is on the electoral register, you'll be on the poll tax register. If you want to keep your name off the poll tax register — in order not to pay — you'll have to keep your name off the electoral roll (as well as not claim the dole, not be a council tenant, not be a member of a public library, etc.).

And if your name's not on the electoral roll, you can't vote.

Tens of thousands of people won't be able to *afford* to pay the poll tax. They will have to *sacrifice* their right to vote, to avoid payment.

A further invasion of privacy will come from the sale of register lists. Councils may be obliged by the government to sell those lists to private companies — the ones who send unsolicited mail to your home telling you that you've already won a Ferrari...if you pay them £100.

So we'll end up getting *more* unwanted letters or, worse, be pursued by debt collectors.



Police surveillance camera

No place to hide

The poll tax is a big threat to our civil liberties. The Tories say there will be "no place to hide" from the poll tax register. This will mean a serious invasion of privacy.

The register can contain all sorts of information about you — from name and address to "such other matters as may be prescribed". They will be "prescribed" by further regulations, which will be presented to — but cannot be amended by — Parliament.

You will have the right to see what it says about you on the register — but not to see the extra records which the council keeps to track down people it may suspect of avoiding the poll tax.

Soon everyone will have a number to identify them on the poll tax register, to make it easier to transfer your record from one council to another when you move. That will create a national database covering everyone over 18 with their name and address. The government will be able to monitor the movements of everyone in the country. The poll

Instead of poll tax

The old rates system is not ideal, but it's better than poll tax.

In fact, no system can be ideal. No system of local taxes, however well-designed, can undo the inequality and injustice of capitalism. Only collective ownership and democratic control of the wealth of society can do that.

But some sorts of taxes are better, or less bad, than others.

Rates have one great advantage. They are simple and easy to administer. That's an advantage not just for administrators, but also for socialists. Rich people will always find ways to evade any complicated tax. They can't evade rates.

Moreover, businesses have to pay rates out of their profits as well as workers having to pay out of our wages.

Rates mean the rich paying more than the poor. But — and this is the big disadvantage — they tend to mean the rich paying a smaller *proportion* of their income than the poor.

Say a worker on £5,000 a year lives in a flat costing £100,000 (there aren't many cheaper than that in London). A capitalist on £500,000 a year might have two houses worth £1 million each.

The capitalist's houses are worth 20 times as much as the worker's flat, so the capitalist pays 20 times as much in rates as the worker. But the capitalist's income is 100 times the worker's.

So the slice that rates take from the capitalist's income is only one-fifth the slice they take from the worker's income.

And if the worker becomes unemployed, or retires, it's even worse. They still have to live somewhere. But now the rates may take half their pension or benefit.

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Rates are better than poll tax — but they still take a bigger slice of income from the poor than from the rich

“Employers wouldn’t have a workforce without the education, housing and social services provided by the council: why shouldn’t those employers pay?”

This is impossible, so we have rate rebates. Like every means-tested rebate system, they are complicated and involve lots of bureaucratic hassle. Many people don’t claim the rebates due to them.

Small businesses also suffer from the rates system, because they have to pay more in rates, as a proportion of their turnover, than bigger businesses.

Some of these problems could be reduced by making rates more flexible. Why shouldn’t councils be able to charge more rates per pound of property value on bigger, more costly buildings than on small, cheap buildings? Why shouldn’t councils be able to set rates on businesses much higher than rates on homes, rather than the relation between them being set by Whitehall?

Local income taxes exist in many other countries. Advantage: your tax rate is decided by your ability to pay. Disadvantage: it would be no fairer than the present national income tax system, with all its loopholes for the rich.

Labour Party policy is for some combination of rates and local income taxes.

Again, a more flexible system could be better. Why shouldn’t councils be able to claim a sort of “poll tax” from the *employers* of workers who live in their area (and from the central government for unemployed people) in the same way that the National Insurance fund collects employers’ contributions? After all, employers wouldn’t have a workforce without the education, housing, and social services provided by the council: why shouldn’t those employers help pay?

Central government grant to

councils is good in that it siphons money from rich areas to poor areas where the council has a lot to do and few rich people to get any sort of tax from. What’s bad about it is that it can give central government excessive power to control and victimise local councils — power which the Tories have used ruthlessly.

Central government grant should be decided by predictable formulas which the government can’t easily alter.

Generally, socialists should support local government having more autonomy to raise its own income and make its own decisions. Local councils in Britain are much more restricted in what they can do than councils in other countries.

Several times since 1979 courts have found the Tory government to be breaking the law. Each time the Tories have just changed the law to square it with what they want to do.

Local councillors, in contrast, can be hauled up in court when they have broken no definite law but only done what the District Auditor

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reckons to be “imprudent”. Labour councillors in Liverpool have been disqualified from office and fined huge sums for their delay in setting a rate in 1985.

Hammersmith and Fulham council have been warned about possible court action for juggling with their money in the City’s markets. When private capitalists do the same thing, the Tories praise it as the acme of “enterprise culture”.

Central government needs to be much *more* subject to the law, and local government needs to be much *less* subject to central government.

Such reforms would mean more local democracy and more scope for genuinely socialist local councils.

Labour’s alternative to poll tax

Labour’s leaders have proposed a combined local income tax and property tax as their alternative to the poll tax.

It would certainly be better than the poll tax. Your tax would depend on your ability to pay. But three problems remain.

This alternative sounds *complicated*. It has allowed the Tories to make demagogic, but still possibly effective, claims about Labour “wanting to replace one tax by two”.

Nothing the Labour leaders have yet said indicated how their more complicated formula is any better than a straightforward *local income tax*, which was favoured by the Labour Party as an alternative to rates in its evidence to the Layfield Inquiry on local government finance.

The Labour leaders also have not ad-

ressed the question of giving local government more financial autonomy. As long as local councils depend on central government for much of their money, and are closely restricted as to how they can raise the rest, local democracy will be very limited.

Any central government with a budget problem will be likely to shove cuts on to local authorities by cutting grants — and to do that in a politically selective way.

Since 1979 the Tories have cut billions from central government grant to local authorities. The third, and biggest, issue which the Labour leaders’ alternative does not address is *restoring those cuts*.

Until they are restored — or a substantial chunk of central government tax-raising power is transferred to local authorities in compensation — all debates on local government finance will be debates on squeezing local people and local council workers more and more to pay for worse and worse services.



Council workers against poll tax

By Nik Barstow (Assistant Secretary Islington NALGO, in personal capacity)

Council workers will be at the centre of any fight against the poll tax. Some will have to collect it, many will have to be snoopers to make it work, and all will be under threat from it.

The Tories see the poll tax as a way to "make the inner cities pay their way". The tax will give a new choice to some of the poorest

working class people in the poorest and most run-down areas of the country — 'Vote for huge poll tax increases, or vote to slash services'. That will mean driving a wedge between the people who work for local councils and the people for whom they provide services.

Council workers should refuse to have anything to do with implementing the tax. We should stop it before it starts, especially in England and Wales, now we can see what is happening in Scotland.

Unfortunately the union that organises most white-collar local government workers, NALGO, doesn't take that line. Despite last year's NALGO conference voting to support "mass campaigns of defiance", the union's leaders have backtracked.

At the end of December last year, NALGO's local government leadership voted "not to support branches which adopted blanket, principled non-cooperation with poll tax implementation".

The next day the union's National Executive turned down calls from two branches (Islington and Knowsley) to hold official ballots for non-cooperation by their members in finance departments.

It was part of a joint retreat, alongside Labour councils in England and Wales. When the preparations were being made for the poll tax in Scotland, Labour councils dithered about how to appear to oppose the tax, yet plan to collect the money.

Councils in England are all just pressing ahead with the tax.

Can council workers stop this retreat? There are important things we can do now, and in future.

The chance of total non-cooperation which would stop poll tax departments being established has already gone, but there are ways of preventing, or at least sabotaging, the operation of the tax.

The many council workers who will be asked to give information have very good reasons not to: housing workers, housing benefit workers, swimming baths attendants, etc. Almost everyone who has lists of who uses council services can be asked for information. We need to organise to say no! Council workers will stand alongside the people we work with, and not provide information against them.

In March 1990 small disputes were breaking out around the country — in Sheffield, Manchester, Newcastle and London — over the practical implementation of the tax.

Councils have ignored housing and finance workers worried by the workloads, worried by being in the 'front line' of dealing with this unpopular tax, and emboldened by massive demonstrations to take a stand.

As the tax comes into force in England and Wales the small disputes could spread and be linked up — especially if NALGO takes the fight against 'poll tax cuts' seriously too — where thousands of workers stand to lose jobs because councils have tried to set low poll taxes.

A number of branches produce a magazine 'NALGO Action' which will highlight these campaigns — copies can be obtained from Islington NALGO, c/o 2 Orlestone Road, London N7 8LH.

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Labour against cuts and poll tax

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Manchester's 'Labour Against Cuts and Poll Tax' was formed in November 1989 by Labour Party activists and councillors opposed to the cuts and the poll tax.

The campaign was launched after a series of meetings called by the last four City Labour Party chairpersons. They felt the Labour Council's move away from the 1984 "Defending Jobs, Improving Services" manifesto had gone too far.

The poll tax was leading to a serious budget crisis for Manchester City Council. To balance the books, the ruling Labour leadership wanted thousands of job cuts and a poll tax of over £400. This was too much for many councillors and Labour Party members who had gone along with the council cuts in 1987/88. 12 Labour councillors broke from the Council leadership to help found 'Labour Against Cuts and Poll Tax'.

In the 1987/88 budget crisis, *Socialist Organiser* supporters launched 'Manchester Fightback' to campaign against the cuts. Now the possibility opened up for a broader, more powerful anti-cuts,



Protest in Lambeth. Photo: John Harris

anti-poll tax campaign.

The Council budget meeting on 28 February 1990 set the poll tax at £425 and cut 3200 jobs. 300 attended the lobby. Many Council workplaces struck for the morning of the meeting.

'Labour Against Cuts and Poll Tax'

has so far organised two conferences — on 3 February and 17 March. Both conferences attracted about 75 delegates, drawn from tenants associations, local anti-poll tax groups, shop stewards' committees, trade union branches, student unions and Labour Parties.

'Labour Against Cuts and Poll Tax' opens up the possibility for a broad, open, democratic campaign linking up council workers, Labour Party activists and local community campaigns in a fight against cuts and the poll tax. In this May's local elections there will be a number of wards standing Labour candidates who oppose the cuts and the poll tax. 'Labour Against Cuts and Poll Tax' is aiming to link up these wards in a "No Cuts, No Poll Tax, Vote Labour" campaign.

As the cuts and poll tax bite, more sections of the workforce and community will be drawn into confrontation with the Council. Social Services and Education are facing the worst cuts. In education, one quarter of Further Education provision is threatened with closure. Specialist educational projects for kids with learning difficulties are being threatened.

Social Services has had £6 million chopped from its budget. School meals are going up by £1.50 per week. The Council top-up for YTS trainees is being stopped. Rents are going up by £2 a week, and there will be a further rise after the May elections.

The poll tax spells disaster for services and jobs in Manchester. 'Labour Against Cuts and Poll Tax' can play a vital role in organising a fight back.

Civil servants fight the tax

In the winter of last year, civil servants in the CPSA at a number of DSS offices, including Bloomsbury, Oval, Greenwich Park, Kensington and Crystal Palace took strike action against registering claimants not receiving housing benefit for the poll tax register.

The strike action was unofficial and in some offices prevented registration. It was also the first time workers had taken strike action against the poll tax.

The reaction of the union leadership was to denounce the strikes as 'illegal'. Since then, the right-wing National Executive Committee have ruled that no discussion on 'illegal' action against the poll tax is allowed, ie. any motions on non-implementation or non-payment are allowed even to be debated!

This ruling has led to threats to suspend union branches and regions who dare to debate the poll tax. Most notably, Wales and South West DSS region was threatened with suspension for debating and discussing a motion calling for non-deduction of the poll tax from non-paying claimants.

The attitude of the CPSA Broad Left (currently dominated by Militant supporters) to the fight against the poll tax has been

abysmal to say the least. They made no attempt to encourage and spread the strikes in DSS offices in 1989. Militant supporters in some DSS regions also refused to debate the Wales and South West motion on the poll tax, for fear of the NEC reaction!

At a small Broad Left meeting in February 1990, Militant supporters overturned existing Broad Left policy, instead voting for a policy which, in effect, calls for any strike action against the poll tax by CPSA members to be conditional on the success of a mass non-payment campaign. This policy is clearly ridiculous and unworkable. Strike action against the poll tax and non-payment should be complementary — not counterposed.

Non-payment campaigns will be greatly strengthened by workers taking industrial action. Under Militant's scenario, claimants will have their benefits reduced — unless CPSA members take action against it.

It is very likely that CPSA members will continue to defy the NEC and debate motions on the poll tax, and take industrial action against both deductions from claimants' benefits and deductions from fellow workers who are non-payers. Those who denounce such action will be dealing a blow to those fighting the poll tax everywhere. Instead, we must argue to build and spread industrial action throughout the civil service against this evil tax.

The Tory attacks

The poll tax is the culmination of 10 years of Tory attacks on working class people. We've had the anti-union laws, the cuts in housing, health and education. The miners, the printers and the seafarers have had the entire might of the state thrown against them and been battered into defeat.

Social security and benefits for the unemployed and the very poorest have been slashed while get-rich-quick parasites in the City have

been given massive hand-outs. This is a government that knows which class it represents.

Meanwhile, the opposition from the 'leaders' of the labour movement has been miserable. The miners and every other group of workers who stood up and fought back, have been left isolated and all but disowned by the Labour and TUC leaderships. Time and again, we've been told, "Don't fight back now, don't defy the law: wait until Labour wins the next election".

But under its present leadership,

Labour doesn't even seem to be very good at winning elections.

The poll tax gives us the opportunity to change all this. It is deeply unpopular, even amongst people who voted Tory in the past. The Govan by-election, where thousands of traditional Labour voters turned to the Scottish Nationalists because they seemed to represent a bolder form of opposition to the Tories and the poll tax, shows the bankruptcy of the Labour leadership's "softly-softly" approach — even in electoral terms.

Even Labour's local government

It's right to break this law

Labour leader Neil Kinnock says we should fight the poll tax without breaking the law. He's used the same argument before — on trade union laws, for example. We have to respect the law, his argument goes, or democracy collapses. First elect a government, then change the law.

If working class people had ever taken this argument seriously, *we wouldn't have democracy now.*

Our democratic rights were all won through struggle. And very often that struggle has meant disobeying the laws of the day, because those laws have been worked out to protect the interests of the rich and powerful. *Only* by breaking the law could working class people win rights for themselves in a society dominated by the rich.

The idea that laws are democratic because a democratically-elected government passed them is ridiculous. In 1975, a democratically-elected Prime Minister in India, Indira Gandhi, decided to suspend Parliament! Was that democratic? Adolf Hitler came to power through parliamentary channels. Did



What 'the law' meant for striking miners

Photo: John Harris (Report)

that make Nazism democratic?

Of course not. Democratically-elected governments can make thoroughly *undemocratic* laws. And when they do, they should be opposed by every means possible.

The poll tax is an attack on working class people's rights. If we don't break the law, what do we do? We comply with the poll tax all down the line. We pay it. Trade unionists collaborate in implementing it.

In other words, we don't really oppose it *at all*. Our opposition is just words. We wait until Neil Kinnock is Prime Minister.

But if the Tories get away with the poll tax, who's to say they won't just go from strength to strength? If we're to get a Labour government, we need to *beat* the Tories now.

Inevitably that means breaking the law. It means breaking *unjust* laws — not breaking *all* laws! It means taking seriously the fight against the Tories.

Either we fight or we don't. In this, like every working class struggle in the past, if we fight we refuse to play by the ruling class's rules. If they make laws designed to keep us in chains, we have no choice but to break them.

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spokesman, David Blunkett, has apologised for the weakness of the official opposition to the poll tax. Blunkett is thought to have tried unsuccessfully to persuade the National Executive Committee of the value of a demonstration.

He said in a letter to local Labour Parties: "Considerable delay occurred in getting agreement for these plans through the machinery of the NEC and the Labour Party headquarters," adding: "I can only ask that you do attempt to link in with the local protest activities even in these unsatisfactory circumstances."

Working class people have not been cowed by 10 years of Tory attacks. They *have* been demoralised and confused by the lack of any decisive opposition or alternative. The poll tax gives us the opportunity to rally and organise the working class opposition to Thatcher.

Almost *every* working class person stands to lose from the poll tax. Our job must be to organise that massive reservoir of potential support, to bring together the community activists and the rank and file of the unions and the Labour Party.

If we can carry our existing leaders with us, excellent. If not, they must be replaced by those who will give a lead to the fight.

To those comrades who've been demoralised by 10 years of defeats and say, "Nothing can be done now, we must wait until 1991 and the next election," we say: it is always better to fight back. Even if you are right, and outright defiance won't stop the Tories now, what it will do is build up the resistance.

To lie back and simply accept the poll tax is a recipe for further demoralisation and defeat, even if you think that we have to wait until the next election to get rid of the Tories.



The poll tax continues 10 years of Thatcherism



Photo: John Harris (Report)

Beat the Tories, fight for socialism!

The Tories know what they want, and they know who they represent. Since Thatcher came in, ten years ago,

they have set about redistributing wealth — to the rich. Last year's bonanza budget for the wealthy was only the most dramatic example.

In Tory Britain, the very rich have got richer and the very poor have got poorer.

That's what the Tories intended to happen. And they knew how to do it.

The poll tax is one element in Tory strategy. In fact it kills two birds with one stone. **ONE:** it leads to fantastic savings for rich house-

owners in Tory leafy glades. **TWO:** it hits the purses of Labour councils — and uses them as the villains who do the actual tax collection.

These two factors — handing-out cash to the rich and hammering local government — are important to the Tories. A third vital factor has been hammering the trade unions.

The Tories have been pretty clever in the way they have carried out their policy, relying on the weakness and incompetence of Labour and trade union leaders, and the apathy this helps create. They've piled on

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the pressure, bit by bit — so that now lots of people feel that the Tories will never be beaten.

Thatcherites are in many ways a new breed of Tory. They have set out to tear up the 'post-war' consensus — that is, the Welfare State, trade union participation in government, low unemployment. Their job they knew, was to restore the ailing profitability of British big business. And they've been quite successful — for now.

The fight against the poll tax can be the turning point. The Tories are not unbeatable. So far they've survived big crises, like the miners' strike; and survivors often look unbeatable.

But the poll tax, like many Tory policies, is unpopular. What we need to do is harness and mobilise the popular opposition to the Tories. Beat them on this, and we could really turn the tables.

How? This pamphlet has spelt out the strategy we need to beat the poll tax: a mass campaign of refusal to pay, linked to a trade union campaign to refuse to comply with the tax. If the labour movement — Labour Party and trade unions — adopted this policy and fought for it among 'non-political' working class people, the Tories would be very scared indeed.

For that to happen, people who understand and support this strategy have to get together and convince others of it.

We have to try to co-ordinate different battles against the Tories. We have to organise the people who understand how the different battles mesh together. That way we can build a coherent, intelligent movement that, like the Tories, knows what it wants, and knows how to get it.

Too often the working class movement reacts to Tory attacks. When we've beaten the poll tax, we should make sure that in the future we take the initiative. That way we can beat the Tories — and their money-grabbing system — once and for all.

To do that we need an organised body of socialists with a clear strategy and ideas, inside the labour movement. We need a cohesive Marxist left wing in the labour movement. That's what Socialist Organiser aims to build.

The left and the poll tax

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To believe the Tory press, you would think that the boisterous scenes outside (and inside) Town Halls throughout England and Wales in March 1990 had all been engineered and masterminded by professional agitators from the 'Militant Tendency'.

The Mid-Staffs by-election, where thousands of former Tory voters registered their bitter hostility to the poll tax by voting Labour, gave the lie to that ridiculous conspiracy theory.

Nevertheless, it has to be admitted that 'Militant' supporters have often been at the forefront of anti-poll tax campaigns, first in Scotland and then south of the border. Militant recognised the importance of the poll tax issue earlier than most people on the left and they have made it their central campaign since early 1988.

Unfortunately, their undoubted energy and seriousness on this issue has not always been directed towards building an effective anti-poll tax movement, so much as furthering their own factional interests. In Scotland, Militant packed out meetings of the Lothian Federation with delegates from local groups representing little or nothing on the ground, in order to take control. At the November 1989 'All-Britain Anti-Poll Tax Organising Conference' they used their control of the conference organisation and their majority on the floor to stifle any serious discussion and to turn the whole event into a self-congratulatory rally.

Worse than Militant's bureaucratic and often undemocratic organisational methods, has been their one-sided and simplistic over-emphasis on "mass non-payment" as the **only** way to beat the poll tax. Socialist Organiser supporters (and a few other serious campaigners) have insisted from the start that mass non-payment **alone** will not be sufficient to beat the poll tax: it has to be combined with a campaign for **non-implementation** by Labour councils and the trade unions.

Militant do not go so far as to oppose the demand for non-implementation:

it's just that they constantly "forget" to mention it (as at the November All-Britain conference), and rarely, if ever, discuss the practicalities of building for non-implementation.

For a while, carried away with community-based zeal, Militant even opposed allowing local Labour Parties to affiliate to the All-Britain Federation — a bizarre aberration for a tendency whose entire political existence normally revolves around the internal affairs of the Labour Party.

Worse still, material produced by Militant and by the All-Britain Federation consistently suggests that non-payment is an easy, painless matter.

"A surcharge of about £50 on those paying full poll tax and about £10 for those paying the 20% minimum" are the trivial penalties referred to by the Militant. £10 is, in fact, not such a "trivial" amount for someone who has to live on Income Support. The full implications of attachment from earnings, attachment from benefits or the arrival of bailiffs are never spelt out honestly or realistically in any Militant or Federation publication. Boosting the confidence of potential non-payers is one thing: deliberately misleading people about the possible consequences of such a strategy — **and its likelihood of success in isolation from a campaign of non-implementation** — is quite another.

In contrast to the Militant, the SWP has never really got its act together on the poll tax. The SWP were slow to get involved in Scotland and changed line (for instance, on whether or not non-registration was a viable tactic) on a number of occasions.

Unlike Militant, the SWP has given considerable emphasis to the demand for non-implementation by councils and trade unions. But this (correct) orientation resulted for much of 1989 in the SWP effectively writing off **any** non-workplace opposition to the poll tax.

The SWP pamphlet, (now apparently withdrawn) 'Socialists and the Struggle Against the Poll Tax', dismisses meetings on housing estates because "they only involve a minority...sometimes an extremely impressive minority, but a minority

nonetheless." But isn't "win the militant minority" the semi-official slogan of the SWP?

Anyway, "once the meeting is over, individuals are prey to the distorting and demoralising effects of the media. For once you are back in your home there is no collective debate or feeling of strength to counter them." The pamphlet contains no practical proposals for fighting the poll tax: what we get instead is a list of demands upon the STUC/TUC and Labour Party leaders ("Organise a national demonstration", "Labour councils must break the law", "MPs and councillors should declare they will defy the law", etc, etc).

The truth is that by the time this pamphlet appeared (early 1989) the SWP really believed that the fight against the poll tax was already lost. The very last words of the pamphlet give the game away: "If the real responsibility for the campaign is pinned squarely where it belongs (ie on the leaders) it can give us the chance to mobilise the forces to win and enable us to see where the fault for any defeat lies." (Our emphasis)

Since then, the SWP has toned down its pessimism and a series of articles in *Socialist Worker* even argue that community-based campaigns (eg. the Glasgow rent strike of 1915, dismissed out of hand in the pamphlet) could provide the start for a class-wide fight back. But the SWP has always failed to provide any coherent strategy. They have simply blown in the wind, tail-ending the ebbs and flows of the struggle, their "line" determined solely by considerations of expediency: by March 1990 the same people who a year earlier had been writing off any activity not based upon the workplace, were urging on disaffected young people to invade council chambers and denouncing Militant supporters for their timidity.

Militant and the SWP are the two largest and most influential tendencies on the far left; in many ways they are mirror images of each other. The struggle against the poll tax has exposed the inadequacy of the politics of both. Almost alone, Socialist Organiser supporters have consistently argued for linking up the community-based campaign for mass non-payment with the call for non-implementation by councils and unions. Against the simplistic triumphalism of Militant and the manic depressive zig-zags of the SWP, we have attempted to arm activists with a realistic practical and coherent strategy.

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Did you know?

"The community charge should be little more than £122 per head", promised Dudley Fishburn, Tory MP for Kensington, in his election address for the 1988 by-election.

The local Tory council has just set a poll tax of £375.

Private landlords will get a windfall of about £400 million from the poll tax, according to the Local Government Information Unit.

Many private tenants pay rates as part of their rent. With the abolition of rates, landlords should cut the rent. Many haven't in Scotland. Many won't in England and Wales.

Tenants will lose about £300 million, and the other £100 million will be covered by increased housing benefit.

Some people with no income at all, or only the dole, may have to pay full poll tax.

Unwaged wives are responsible for their waged husbands' poll tax, and may be pursued for tax arrears if their husband evades the tax and disappears.

The poll tax will fine prisoners on remand, awaiting trial, for being *innocent*.

If you're found guilty, and your time in prison on remand is counted as part of your jail sentence, then you're exempt from poll tax for that time on remand. If you're found innocent, however, you must pay poll tax for that period.

Most prisoners won't have to pay poll tax — unless they're in jail for not paying poll tax!

But the Tory council in Westminster, London, says it will charge prisoners poll tax on their "second homes" — the homes they are unable to live in because they're in jail.

A loophole in the law allows Westminster to do this. The council hasn't explained where it expects the prisoners to get the cash for the poll tax bills.

You could end up paying extra poll tax just because the government has got its forecasts of inflation wrong.

If the government forecasts 5% inflation, and levies business rate and allocates grants to councils on that basis, but inflation turns out to be 8%, then councils will have to raise poll tax by 20 per cent to make good the gap.

According to calculations done by the Local Government Information Unit in September 1989, 63 per cent of families lose from the poll tax and 37 per cent gain.

If the effect of poll tax is calculated together with the 1988 benefit and tax changes, the poorest 30 per cent of families lose an average of £4.30 a week, and the richest 10 per cent gain £20.60 a week.

Social Security officials in Birmingham have passed on the names of more than six thousand people on Income Support to poll tax registration officers to make sure the tax catches them.

The poll tax will fine young workers for reaching the age of 18.

Under age 18 you won't pay poll tax. When you reach the age of 18 you'll get a poll tax bill — a sort of birthday present in reverse. The bill will be over £500 in some London boroughs.

Every one of the Scottish peers who turned up to the House of Lords in 1988 to vote the poll tax through stood to gain at least £1,166 a year from it.

The Marquis of Haddington gained £2,700 a year. He paid £3,061 in rates on his ancestral home in Dunbar.

The poll tax allows the government to exempt the Queen from tax.

She does, however, it seems, pay £346 on her Scottish estate of Balmoral, classified as a holiday home. Her local postman, Alistair Leslie, has to pay £519 for himself, his wife and his son, living in a two-up, two-down house.

Get the Tories on the run!

Benn calls for civil disobedience

By Tony Benn MP

Britain is now witnessing the first major civil disobedience campaign since the Suffragettes demanded votes for women before the First World War, and in both cases the issue was the same — the demand for, and defence of, democratic rights.

For the real purpose of the poll tax is to destroy local democracy, and to enforce a tight central control from Whitehall in order to widen the gap between rich and poor, and to punish those who cannot afford to pay it, or, on principle, have decided to refuse to pay.

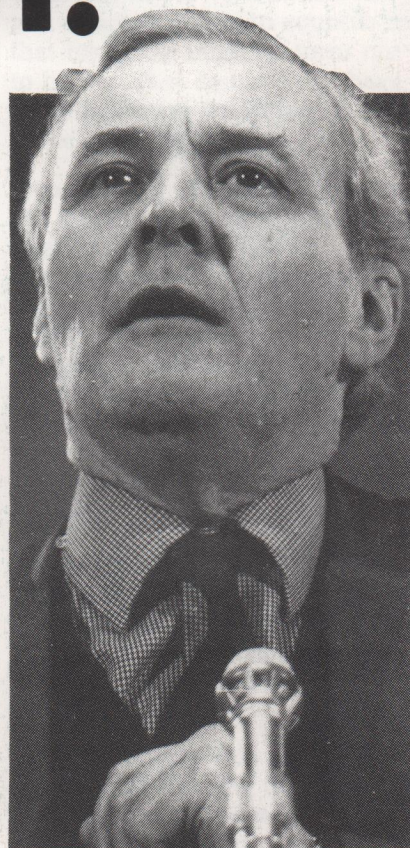
Non-violent civil disobedience has a long history in the politics of Bri-

tain and other countries, and we had better understand that if we are to respond to what is happening.

The American Colonists broke with King George III over the tax on tea that triggered off the Boston Tea Party, Mr Gandhi led a huge national campaign in India over the hated Salt Tax and we are also seeing the same process at work in Eastern Europe and South Africa.

Many of our most precious religious and political rights in this country were won by conscientious law-breaking which compelled parliament to make the necessary concessions to justice.

There is no moral obligation to obey an unjust law, but those who decide to defy such laws, on moral grounds, must expect to be punished, believing that their sacrifice may help others, later, when the judge-



ment of history confirms their stand.

Many people, including some Labour MPs, do not intend to pay the poll tax and the labour movement must defend all those who are, for whatever reason, refusing to pay and pledge itself to an amnesty to lift all the penalties which may be imposed on them.

The vicious campaigns against non-payment which are now beginning in the Tory press show how frightened they are by the extent of the popular resistance that is emerging, which is why they are desperately trying to suggest, against all the evidence, that it is all being orchestrated by a handful of dangerous and violent people.

If enough people stand firm against the poll tax, we can compel the government to withdraw it, and then repeal this wicked law by using our votes in the next general election.

**Labour: Fight for
a general election!
Stop the poll tax!
Don't pay, Don't
collect!**