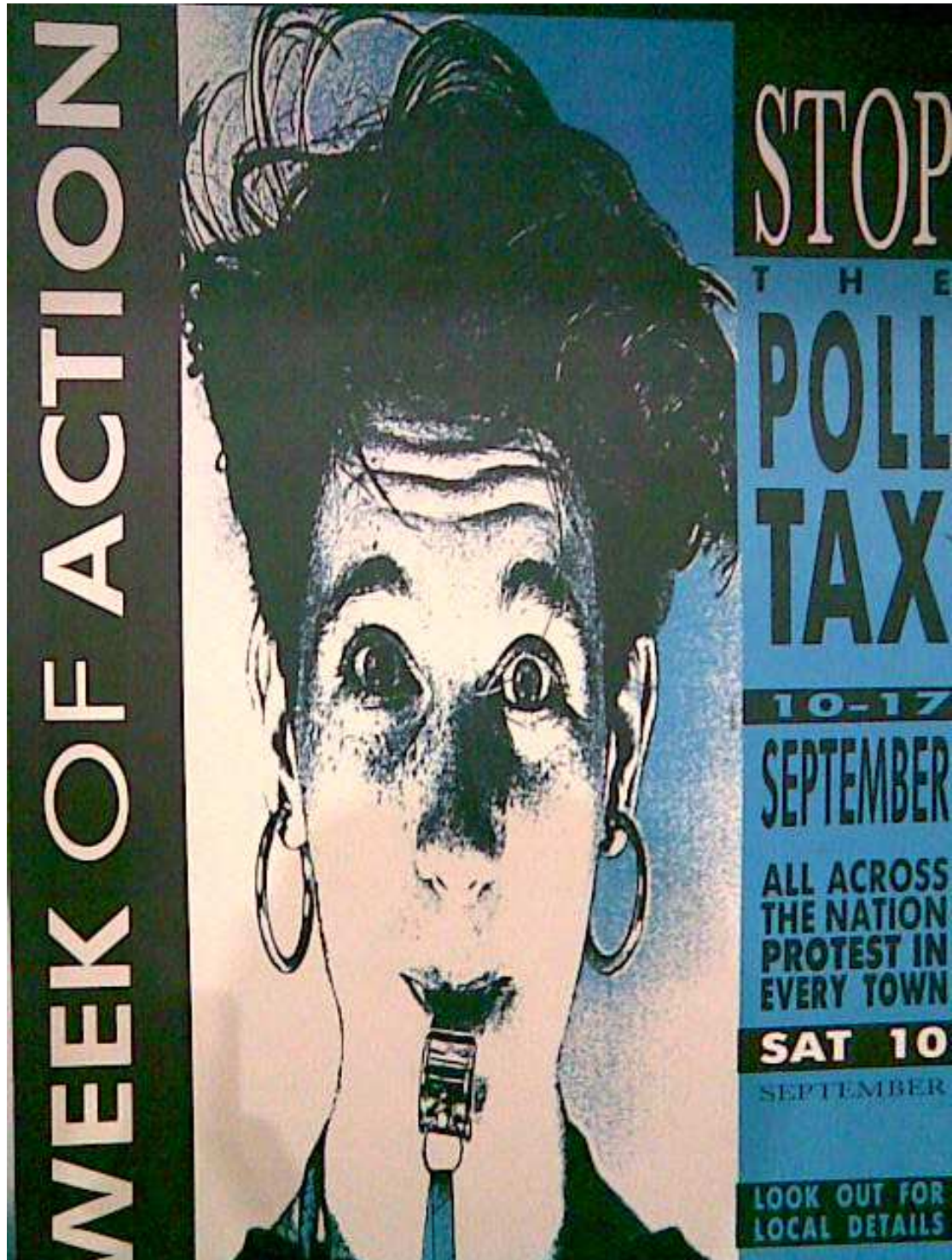


love and taxes - *how Jack and Sandra beat the poll tax*

a novel



by Adrian Johnson

Nearly twenty years ago (1989/90) millions of real people from across Scotland and England stood and spoke up for what they believed was fair when the UK government asked the dustman and the Duke to pay the same local taxes, regardless of income. This story, by Adrian Johnson, recalls those brave days of defiance and how people made friends for life, found lovers and discovered unexpected courage when people stood firm, together, and won a tremendous battle for their belief in a simple idea of what's fair, and what is not.

If you enjoy this opening first chapter and know someone else that will enjoy discovering the story please feel free to forward it onto your friends and family with the author's positive permission to do so.

The full version of the book has not, yet, secured a publishing deal, but you can register your interest in the complete book by joining 'friends of love and taxes – how Jack and Sandra beat the poll tax' on Facebook. Simply click the link, below:

<http://www.new.facebook.com/group.php?gid=28985202125&ref=mf>

The live show, with song, based on 'Love and taxes,' can also be booked, find out more, here: <http://kindandgenerous.weebly.com/whats-on.html>

Praise for 'Love and taxes – how Jack and Sandra beat the poll tax.' –

"Adrian's stories powerfully explore and dramatise the lives of the millions who campaigned against the poll tax."

Tony Benn, former Labour minister

"Adrian Johnson's short stories shine a much needed light on the Poll Tax debacle: a piece of history that should not be forgotten."

Jonathan Davidson – director, The Birmingham book festival, England.

"If ever there was a time to look back at our generation's political history and learn the lessons of the Poll Tax, it is surely now, before this Labour government panics itself into yet more stupidities betraying its own great socialist ideals and heritage."

Simon Thirsk – managing director, Bloodaxe books, UK.

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see also: <http://www.youtube.com/adrianwriter>
<http://kindandgenerous.weebly.com/whats-on.html>

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Cover pic from the People's Palace, Glasgow

The story

Love and taxes - how *Jack and Sandra beat the poll tax* is a story of love and struggle told through the eyes of Jack Jameson who joins an idealistic couple of friends, Sandra and Pete, together with 18 million others, they protest and defeat Mrs Thatcher's reviled poll tax during the autumn of 1989 to the winter of 1990 - a time when the Berlin wall collapsed, Nelson Mandela walked free, protesting Chinese students died in Tienanmen square and the music of 'Madchester's' Stone Roses swept across England. Oh, and Mrs Thatcher lost her job.

In the summer of 1989 no one particularly knew what the poll tax meant but Sandra, Jack and Pete did and they took this news to the street: how the new tax would ask a Duke in his mansion to pay the same as the dustman in his terrace. Across the country small towns like Northampton began to wake up to Mrs Thatcher's idea - already unleashed on Scotland a year before. As the story unfolds Jack finds himself inflamed with more than Italian world cup fever as fire sweeps through a bailiff's office and suspicion of manslaughter falls on his friend and ally Pete. The winning smile of Sandra, Pete's girlfriend, also pulls Jack between stolen kisses and betraying his best friend, amidst the protest, campaign and the steadily rising mood of revolt, across England.

The mood of growing defiance carries Sandra and Jack onto Trafalgar square, together with 200,000 other protesters in a march that starts out as a carnival but ends in mayhem and bloody injuries for protesters and police under the hooves of a mounted police charge in one of England's much overlooked political riots.

As the campaign grows Sandra and Jack improvise to beat off the bailiffs at the door, with help from wily old campaigners like Mrs Kinson. By the summer of 1990 one in four, 10 million people, refuse to pay their poll tax. Thousands crowd their local poll tax court where Sandra defends hundreds of people against prison as a formidable, and much overworked, McKenzie's friend. Meanwhile, Jack, Pete and Sandra occupy their local council offices to protest the imprisonment of their 80-year-old friend, Bert, who, in Punch and Judy style, then protests that he's *not* going to prison, after the newspaper magnate, Rupert Murdoch, steps in to pay his poll tax.

The campaign comes to a dramatic end in the autumn of 1990: Mrs Thatcher loses her job, Bert dies at the hands of the bailiffs, Jack squanders his chance to become a councillor and Sandra teaches Jack about love, discretion and early 1990's feminism.

In this story of courage, resistance, struggle and thwarted ambition Jack makes an abrupt departure from the heat and emotion of the poll tax campaign, until a poll tax collector, nearly twenty years later, arrives on his doorstep with a summons for his £12,750 unpaid tax. On the journey back to Northampton Jack reflects on what the poll tax really cost and makes some powerful, unexpected discoveries from Sandra, including how some debts of honour and secret love have to be re-paid with something other than just money.

Few books and stories are ever completed by the writer alone, so I want to thank the following people for their generosity, help and encouragement: Judith Cutler, Simon Thirsk, Joolz Denby, Bettina Reisser, Jo Bell, Sally Luton, Ros Robins, Meave Haughey, Pat Markey, Barry Hale, Jim Crace, Ian Bates, Sarah Beagley, Jessi Eastfield and Vanessa Paynton.

Biographical note: Adrian Johnson has written for The Guardian newspaper, the Poetry Society, the National Association for Literature Development and a variety of other poetry and trade journals since 1996 to date.

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Backwards and forwards

“I’m just Jack, I don’t do politics!”

That’s what I said to Pete, in the heaving squash of the Roadmender centre. What kind of geek would be thinking about politics on a band night? The small side bar was crammed with thirsty indie kids from all over town. In the hall a small weather system of sweaty bodies bounced around. Teenage hormones sent up clouds of perspiration that splashed and rained back down our necks from the low black ceiling. It was an overhead shower system, whether you wanted it or not. This wasn’t Phil Collins with £30 tickets. It was our music. Our time. What we definitely wanted was music, the throb of the amps, the crash of drums and hiss of snare to shock our senses, split our ear drums and shake our beer soaked bodies. Tonight it was *That Petrol Emotion*. John Peel had played them a few weeks back, and that was good enough for me. I absent mindedly noticed there was some kind of petition going on as I queued up. I didn’t get involved, at least not until Pete said hello in the bar. He wore baggie, Jo Bloggs jeans, much bigger than mine. A hoodie too. And a bulging, green, army surplus bag slung over his shoulder, stuffed with papers, leaflets and badges. How was he going to go jump and dance in front of the stage when the main band came on? Not my problem. Lost in the crowd, I just loved it at the front, swaying, strutting, pushing around with other sweat soaked bodies as the band thrashed out their mesmerising riffs against the thumping, urgent drum beats that pummelled and echoed round my head and vibrated right down to my Doc Marten boots. Somehow, no one ever got hurt, just squashed and deliriously happy up there, in the front. It was a full on, jump up and down, pick yourself up, lose your watch, glasses and loose

change kind of gig. A sweat soaked, stomping musical melee at the Roadmender.

“No one,” he emphasised, “is ‘just Jack’. I’m Pete. I’m organising a meeting against the poll tax. Do you want to come?”

“Maybe,” I said without making much of a commitment.

Then a woman squeezed past me and kissed Pete. “Give me a few more leaflets, these people are really keen.”

She had dark black hair, a crushed red velvet top and black leggings. She caught me staring, but instead of looking away, like they usually did, she met my gaze with a smile. The poll tax suddenly seemed much more interesting. Whatever poll tax was.

I took a leaflet.

“You can’t beat the government. It’s going to happen isn’t it? This poll tax thing, all the sell-offs and cut-backs. No one can stop Thatcher,” I said to Pete, but really to her.

“Get off your knees, little boy,” she said.

“There’s thousands not paying in Scotland already. If they won’t pay there, we won’t pay here,” Pete added.

“I’d like to at least think something could be done,” I said, but, you know...”

She touched my arm.

“...I’ll do what I can, of course,” I heard myself reply.

“You’ll come and help with our next door to door leaflet campaign then?” she said.

“Definitely,” I said. She flashed me a smile and turned away. Pete shook my hand and stuffed a leaflet into my shirt pocket.

“What’s her name?” I asked. Pete shrugged and said something but another roar from the crowd in the main hall drowned him out. The familiar howl and scream of guitars beckoned us on. Jumping Jack flash was on stage and she was on my mind. She was gas, gas, gas!

Right now though, twenty years after that night, I’m just Jack, in the box. I thought all that protesting was over. Finished. The Poll Tax was dead. A rotten tax that asked the duke in his mansion to pay as much as the dust man in his council flat, for whatever the council did. No one missed all that. But now, it seems my unpaid tax was missing but not forgotten. He was like a TV license man when he got me. I opened the door and he just smiled, like I’d won the National Lottery or found a cure for cancer. When he asked me my name I couldn’t stop myself from answering him properly.

“Jack Jameson, yes that’s me. How can I help?” I said.

I soon found out.

“Jack Jameson, under local government debt recovery legislation, I hereby serve notice on you for suspected unpaid community charges dating back to April 1990. You will need to report to the named council office and make arrangements to pay the sum of £12,570 within seven days of receiving this notice. After that, sir, you will risk the penalty of imprisonment for up to 30 days.”

“You bastard!”

I slammed the door shut and at the same time another door opened and out tumbled my past like unsorted socks and pants from the washing

machine. I had to go back to Northampton. I knew I would some day, but not to pay my taxes, not even to meet old friends. No, I owed something more than that. I had a bigger debt to pay. Something that money could not really fix and friendship might not easily afford. Would I be forgiven and could I ever bring myself to explain, when I got there?

That fire, the police and their accusations.

What she wanted, and what I didn't.

My dreams, and those ambitions.

But first, maybe, I should tell you about those defiant and fabulous last few weeks and months, of how Sandra, Pete, Les, Bert and I screwed up all our nerves, all our courage and fought for something else, something better . And, I suppose, I should also tell you something about Mrs Thatcher and her unsinkable, political flagship, the poll tax.

If you enjoyed this opening chapter and would like to see the full story, in print, please forward this file on to other readers and friends. Also, don't forget to join 'friends of love and taxes – how Jack and Sandra beat the poll tax' on Facebook, by clicking the link, below:
<http://www.new.facebook.com/group.php?gid=28985202125&ref=mf>
