

## The Air Tax

It was pretty normal as elections go, the parties made outrageous claims about the wonderful changes they would make if elected but no more so than the National Liberty Party, who actually promised to abolish all taxation if elected, so it was with little surprise to anyone that they stormed home with the biggest majority ever recorded in the history of the British government.

Their mantra was sustainability, and that was where the problems started. In a nation of some sixty million souls, it was the opinion of the party that the nation could not support a population of more than about thirty-five millions.

Nothing much was said about it and the party continued to work on their no taxes pledge.

Finally a date was announced for the abolition of taxes and the people prepared to rejoice. There had been reassurances that no public services would be affected and the people, in their greed, did not think to ask where the money would come from.

A week before "No Tax Day" every household in the country received parcels. Every family member received a small face mask and a pack of seven filters to attach to it.

NT Day dawned and the people woke to face a new and chilling dawn. The press, television and radio were all broadcasting the same message:

"At 12 noon today please put on your face masks. There is no need for alarm or panic but the government has decreed that atmospheric pollution will reach certain levels that need to be controlled. Scientists have devised a method of cleansing the atmosphere but there is a risk of fallout. Please make sure that all family members are wearing their masks by 12 Noon."

This same message was broadcast from cars and vans with loudspeakers that roamed the streets all morning.

A few minutes past 12 the sky filled with aircraft. They flew high; almost too high to be seen, and, unseen by most people, they dropped strings of canisters that fell to earth. While they were still many thousands of feet from the ground the canisters burst in bright orange flashes. The sky was soon covered with orange dust that floated down slowly. People watched, the snouts of their face masks pointing towards the sky. It was at this point that it was noticed that some masks had green LEDs glinting on the side of them. Others had blue LEDs.

Soon it was apparent that all was not well. People started to fall to the ground; they twitched and convulsed for a few minutes then lay still. Theirs was not an easy passing, their screams, even though muffled by the masks, pierced the air. It was soon noticed that the ones that fell were the ones with the blue LEDs

Soon teams of soldiers appeared, their LEDs were red, they started to lift the corpses onto trucks. Consulting lists they opened the doors of certain houses and proceeded to carry the deceased occupants out to the waiting trucks, picking up bodies from the streets as they found them.

The day passed, there was heavy rain that night and all trace of the orange dust was washed away.

There were warnings to keep wearing the masks though, and advice about when to change the filters. The masks had two connections for filters; you had to plug the new one in before taking off the old one. Those that got it wrong succumbed to the remains of the dust and died a long and lingering death. The worry was that there were only five filters left for each person.

A solution was soon revealed. Shops started to carry large stocks of filters. The cost of filters included a levy, not apparently a tax, as these were by now consigned to history that paid for public services. It was a matter of pay or die.

What really upset the citizens of this fine nation was the cost of the filters. It worked out to £20 per person, per day. The cost did not affect just the working tax payers but everybody, from toddlers to pensioners, meaning that, for the first time history a government had achieved what no other had, a tax on air.

The contamination of the air was maintained by regular flights over the country, the canisters were now deploying a brown mix into the atmosphere. This mix did not discriminate between the different types of filter; it merely killed anyone who ventured out without a mask on.

It was inevitable that two things would happen:  
Firstly that a thriving black market in replacement filters would spring up; the location of the distribution centres was soon common knowledge and the warehousemen could be bribed.

Secondly, the government's popularity started to slide drastically, to the point that groups of people started to form illegal organisations to resist the establishment. What brought matters to a head was the announcement that further elections on a five year cycle would be abolished.

The first attack on a government minister happened completely out of the blue; the minister of interior affairs was spotted in his official car heading for a country mansion that he used at weekends. There was a crowd gathered on a street

corner in London. As his car slowed to take a corner, a child ran out and was knocked down. He wasn't badly hurt but the car had to stop and somebody in the crowd shouted out:

"Look! There's one of the bastards now!"

The body guards got out of the car and started to try to reason with the crowd. They fell on them like a tide crashing onto a rocky shore and were soon completely overwhelmed.

Other angry hands pulled the protesting minister from the car and he was soon lost to sight under an avalanche of fists, boots, sticks and bottles. He was beaten to rags before the crowd dispersed.

Before the first police siren could be heard howling in the distance there was nothing left in the street but an overturned official car, the bloodied remains of the minister and two unconscious security guards.

One died later in hospital, his mask had been damaged in the melee and he had taken a small whiff of the poisoned air.