

Anti-water tax campaign gets off ground in Dublin

Gregor Kerr

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Considerable progress has already been made in laying the foundations for a campaign against the service charges. Throughout all three Dublin County Council areas, residents' associations and local action groups have been taking surveys and petitions, collecting bills for return to the Councils, and organising public meetings and protests. All the indications are that these efforts are meeting with a good deal of success. In the Fingal area, for example, figures are showing 77% non-payment up to mid-July. Results of surveys carried out in a number of areas in South Dublin show similar levels of non-cooperation.

The Dublin Anti-Water Charges Campaign (DAWCC) has been the focus of much of the activity to date. Much credit is due to Militant Labour for taking the initial steps to get DAWCC off the ground. The fact that the campaign to date has been built in an open manner with maximum involvement of local activists is to be welcomed. It is imperative that the future development of the campaign continues in this open, democratic vein.

A conference is being planned for late September to attempt to draw all the forces together. This conference must encourage maximum involvement and must be built for properly to ensure maximum attendance. Invitations should be issued as soon as possible to all DAWCC groups/branches, the Association of Combined Residents Associations (ACRA), the National Association of Tenants Organisations (NATO), trade unions (especially shop stewards and committee representatives in the local authorities, political groupings and residents' and other groups from around the state which have been campaigning against the charges for years – in fact everyone who is opposed to these charges and is seriously interested in building a campaign against them. The conference should be open and democratic and should look for motions on the future tactics and strategies of the campaign.

This conference should elect a co-ordinating committee which would ensure representation for the various groupings. This committee would have responsibility for building the campaign in areas in which it does not already have a base and for co-ordinating the various activities as decided by the conference. The committee should involve two convenors/co-ordinators from each local authority area (Fingal, South Dublin, Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown and Corporation). These convenors would have responsibility for co-ordination of the campaign at a local level.

The campaign should build — through local activities (petitions, pickets, lobbying of councillors' clinics, occupations of council offices, public meetings at which councillors would be put on the spot, etc.) for a rally/march before the end of the year. This should be aimed at putting maximum pressure on councillors when the budgets for 1995 are being discussed in December. However, it should not be expected that councillors will suddenly cave in and activists should look on this period as merely the first phase of the campaign.

It is of extreme importance that campaign groups at local level remain active. Many working-class people who have never been involved in political activity before will form the backbone of this campaign and if it is to be successful, it must remain open and democratic. Control must rest in the hands of these local groups of activists.

Above all, the campaign must remain a non-payment campaign. In this context, ideas and facilities must be put in place to ensure support for people who could well face court action or cut-off. Strong links must be developed between the campaign and local authority workers. Model resolutions should be drawn up calling on the relevant trade unions not to co-operate with cut-offs or legal intimidation of non-payers. As soon as possible after the conference, a meeting should be called for local authority workers opposed to the charges to discuss how they can contribute to the work of the campaign.

As Anarchists, the Workers Solidarity Movement will be fully involved in building this campaign. We believe that these charges can be beaten. We also believe that they will only be beaten by working-class solidarity and by a campaign which aims to involve as broad a layer of our class as possible. It is important that all political groupings leave aside the one-upmanship which has been a feature of many campaigns in the past. The issue is greater than any political party/group and is far too important for petty sectarian bickering. It is also important that all who are angry about these charges become actively involved. Don't expect someone else to take the initiative in your area — do it yourself.

Let's all stand together because we can win.

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