

Water charge campaigners ready for action

New threat of cut-offs

Workers Solidarity Movement

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DO YOU REMEMBER Democratic Left's election promises? The party who contested the last election on an anti-service charges platform have convinced their Fine Gael and Labour partners to drag non-payers through the courts instead of immediately cutting off their water. Hooray! Like all professional politicians, DL see no reason to stand by their election promises. According to their way of doing things, voters are merely sheep who can be told anything to get their votes and then promptly forgotten about.

Before the Act was even passed householders in Dún Laoghaire/Rathdown and Fingal got letters threatening them with instant court action if they didn't pay up without delay. This scare tactic was intended to frighten people into paying. It didn't work. 60% (70,000 households) are refusing to pay in the three Dublin county areas.

Under the legislation two further letters have to be sent, with at least two weeks between them. The third one has to be delivered either by hand or by recorded post. Only then can the county manager seek a court date. It looks like September may see the start of court cases, South Dublin Council having already sent out the first two letters to non-payers.

The Federation of Dublin Anti-Water Charge Campaigns is ready for action. Local meetings have been held throughout the three Dublin council areas, some attracting over 100 people. If enough people stick together we can follow the hot summer with a hotter autumn. The courts can't defeat us if we stay united, and we have already shown that the Federation can turn disconnections into reconnections within hours.

Keep up the refusal to pay, get more information, contact the campaign at 494 7025 (Gregor Kerr) or 820 1753 (Joe Higgins).

National Conference

Anti-Charges campaigners from Cork, Limerick, Dundalk, Galway, Offaly, Monaghan and the three Dublin council areas met in May. Over 80 activists shared information and reaffirmed their intention to resist double taxation, whether it be called 'service charges', 'rates', or 'community development charges'.

One particularly petty response to the campaign was reported from Limerick where the County Council is now charging people for waiver application forms. Waivers are supposed to be for people who cannot afford to pay the charges! Hopefully householders in the county area will take a lesson from the those in the Corporation area whose campaigning led to the abolition of service charges back in 1991. The Corporation had employed contractors to wreck water pipes leading into the homes of 140 non-payers on a Friday afternoon, the local campaign had every one of them reconnected by noon the next day. After that the politicians admitted defeat and abolished charges in their area.

Outrageous accountants and outraged taxpayers

When the government suggested that accountants be obliged to report tax evasion by their clients they held a mass meeting in Dublin's RDS to protest at this "outrage". If some kid robs a car radio these are the sort of people who scream for harsher punishments and more gardaí on the streets. When they are told to report major frauds involving millions of pounds they are

indignant. Finance Minister Ruairi Quinn agrees with them. Section 153 of the Finance Act allows them to overlook £5,000 in tax fraud.

Last year the average PAYE worker paid 34,115 in income tax. Last year also saw a tax amnesty for rich tax dodgers and big business which wrote off at least £500 million. This amount would have funded all the service charges in the country for the next ten years.

They had hardly started their meeting when a dozen people from anti-water charge groups took over the stage and hung up big banner inscribed with “When big business cheats, PAYE workers pay”. The meeting was held up for half an hour while the accountants were given a lecture about how little tax the wealthy pay and how much is taken from working people. They all had to sit and listen as some dopey accountant had locked the door of the hall to stop more protesters getting in and then couldn’t open it again!

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