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14,000 join campaign against Water Charges

Conor McLoughlin

1996

AS the campaign against the water charges approaches its second anniversary, it continues to go from strength to strength. We now have over 14,000 signed up members and there hasn't been a disconnection of a campaign member since November 1994. The rate of non-payment continues at a very high level in all areas. At a residents' meeting in Cherryfield Fianna Fail's Cllr. Sean Ardagh declared that only 17% of people in South Dublin had paid in full.

In the circuit court on June 20th lawyers for South Dublin Council declared that there were proceedings pending against 32,000 households. About 46,000 are eligible to pay so this puts the rate of non-payment at 70%. Whatever the real rate it is now obvious that the charges are becoming uncollectable.

The council are still dragging non-payers to court. However the first appeal against disconnection in the Circuit Court was heard on June 29th and the disconnection order was struck out. Although the campaign has very little faith in the courts this victory means

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that South Dublin council have had to suspend all cases until after a Supreme Court appeal in the late Autumn.

Within the campaign the Workers Solidarity Movement has argued that reliance should not be placed on either the capitalist courts or politicians to sort things out. Right now we need to keep up the pressure by picketing the clinics of local politicians and having mass pickets outside the estimates meetings, as well as maintaining the very high levels of non-payment.

Already in June there was a very successful picket of a South Dublin Council meeting in their nice new Tallaght offices, with 200 noisy demonstrators leaving the councillors in no doubt about the anger against this double tax.

Unfortunately the May conference of the Federation passed, by a large majority, a motion committing the campaign to endorsing candidates in Dublin constituencies in the next election. The WSM believes that this strategy is incorrect. As we argued in our special leaflet and from the conference floor, this means a fundamental change of direction for the campaign.

To run a successful election campaign would divert resources from the tactics that have worked up to now. Anarchists believe elections are a clever form of disempowerment giving people the illusion that they have a say in the way things are run. Up to now the campaign was giving people a sense of their own strength, rebuilding a feeling of community and solidarity in parts of Dublin. All this will be wasted if elections become the major focus of the campaign.

Instead of taking control of their own struggle, non-payers would be expected to vote for politicians and then sit at home passively hoping that one or two 'radical' TDs would sort out the problem. Needless to say, while continuing to put a lot of work into building the non-payment campaign, we won't be taking part in any election related activities!

We hope that the spirit of determination and commitment to self-activity in the campaign will continue until the charges are beaten,

and into the future to stop whatever the government tries to replace them with.