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In the 1990s water charges were beaten by a mass campaign of non-payment. Now the government has said it is going to try again.

Dermot Sreenan and Gregor Kerr, who was the Secretary of the Federation of Dublin Anti-Water Charge Campaigns, looks back at the struggle that defeated the government and forced them to abolish water charges in 1995.

In time to come we should remember this victory and how it was won. We must remember that direct action and mass resistance destroyed their best laid plan this time and be ready to employ these tactics again when they unveil their new tricks.

Dermot Sreenan, who was Secretary of the Dublin Anti-Bin Tax Campaign, draws some lessons from the unsuccessful fight against refuse charges.

The escalation ended because we couldn't sustain it, there weren't the numbers. There weren't the numbers because when the campaign was being built, certain parties were happier to establish leaflet droppers than real functioning local groups. Weak local groups meant few people active on the ground, which meant no numbers for the depot blockades.

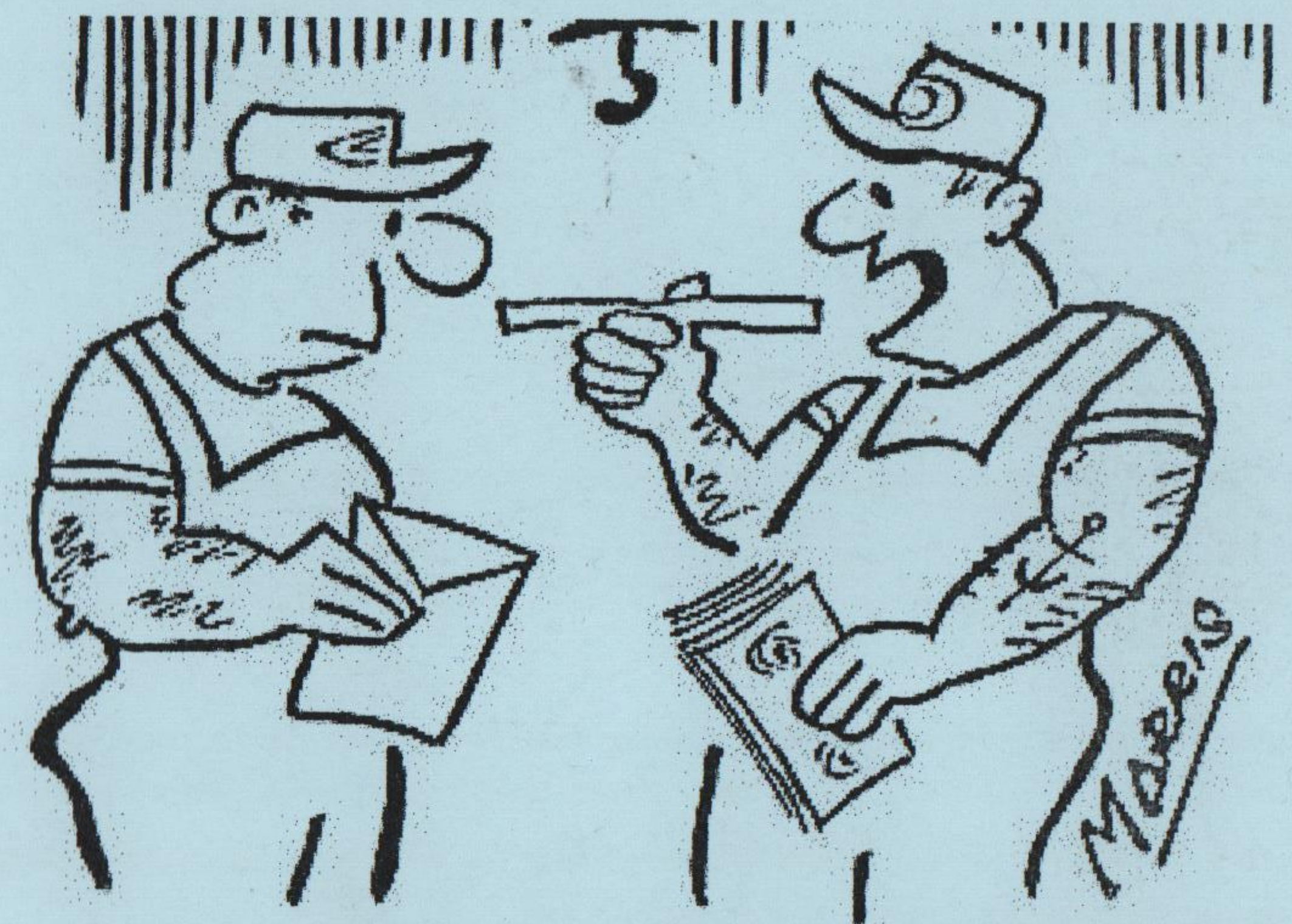
Workers Solidarity Movement

*"Freedom without Socialism is privilege and injustice..
..Socialism without freedom is slavery and brutality"*



HOW WE BEAT THE WATER CHARGES THE LAST TIME

Dermot Sreenan
Gregor Kerr



"I've got more money this week. They've given me my deductions and kept my wages."



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In 1996, the domestic water charge was abolished. At the time Dermot Sreenan, an activist in the Federation of Dublin Anti-Water Charges Campaigns, examined the campaign and the demonstration of people power that brought about the downfall of this charge.

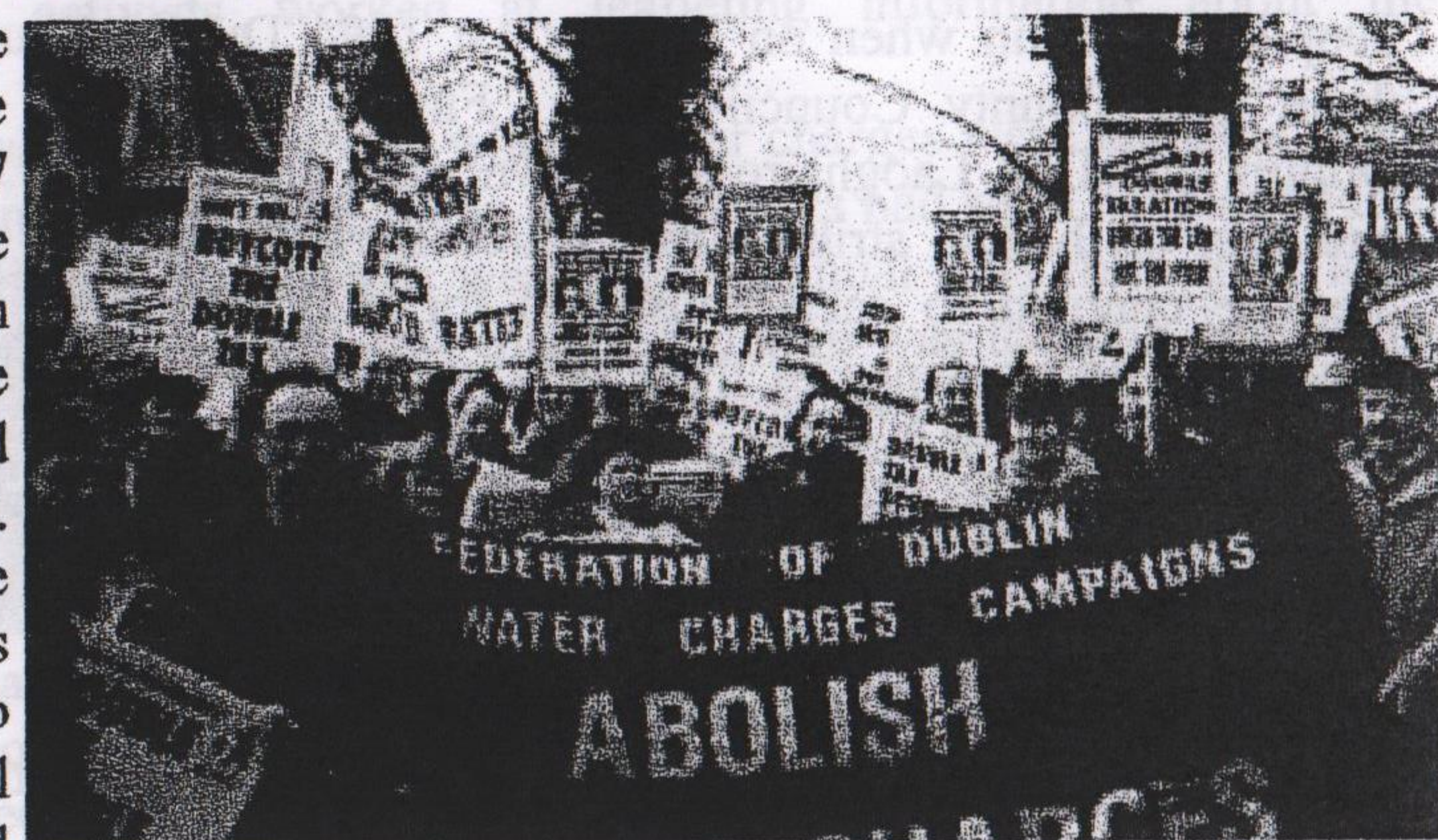
WINNING THE WATER WAR

by Dermot Sreenan

Ireland is famous for being a place where you can get all four seasons in the passing of one day. The predominant season here is the rainy season which extends through spring, summer, autumn and winter. The one thing we are not short of on this island is water.

But then, since when did our 'leaders' or the authorities let the facts get in the way of further exploitation. Over the last three years in Dublin a battle has raged between the councils, trying to implement a charge for the supply of water and the people opposed to this policy. This is the story of the campaign against the imposition of this double tax.

When the domestic rates were abolished in 1977 following the general election an increase took place in income tax and Value Added Tax. The money made from these increases was to be used to fund the local authorities, who had



previously relied on the domestic rates for their funding. Central government was to pay a rate support grant to Local Authorities. This rate support grant increased until 1983 when the then Fine Gael and Labour government decided to cut this grant and brought in legislation to allow the councils to levy service charges.

Though people were effectively paying more taxes less of this money made its way to local councils, so they were asked to pay more money in the guise of 'service charges'. Eighty seven per cent of all the tax paid in this country is by the Pay As You Earn (PAYE) worker. This is a massive amount of money especially when contrasted to the fact that many multi-national companies are

attracted to this country for exactly the opposite reasons, because they have to pay relatively small amounts of tax. Put plain and simply the beleaguered taxpayer in Ireland has been getting screwed not once but twice. This is what made this campaign so important.

The Son of Rates

In the 1980's resistance led to the scrapping of the first attempt to introduce a water tax in Dublin. Other successful campaigns took place in Limerick and Waterford. In Waterford also, around the Paddy Browne Road a gang of contractors who were cutting off non-payers were held hostage by residents and Waterford Glass workers.

In other counties the charges continued and by 1993 the amount expected to be paid by a household varied from one county to another. The service charge for Kilkenny was £70 per annum plus extra money for refuse collection while in the County of Cavan you had to pay £180 to the local council. In 1995 the service charges continued to rise with Mayo commanding an annual charge of between £205 and £235.

The Water-Charge is Born

The writing was on the wall that a new charge was about to be levied on the people of Dublin when on January 1st 1994 Dublin County was divided into three new County Council areas. Fingal, South Dublin, and Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown were created and they all had to strike a rate which they would then be charged to each household for the water service. The existence of three new areas made it easier to administer the charge on each household.

All the councillors had been elected on the basis that they opposed this charge. In 1985 the Fianna Fáil manifesto for the local elections stated "Fianna Fáil are totally opposed to the new system of local charges and on return to office will abolish these charges and repeal the legislation under which they are imposed." However when the time came to show their opposition they stalled before striking a rate. In South County it was £70, in Fingal it was £85, in Dun Laoighaire/Rathdown it varied from £50 to £93.

The sorry excuse that arose on the occasion of all these politicians proving themselves to be liars was that they were forced to strike a water charge rate or else the government would dissolve the council. Councillor Don Tipping of Democratic Left later wrote his excuse in the Tallaght Echo "We (Democratic Left) faced down a threat to abolish the council in 1994 by Fianna Fáil Minister Smith, who insisted that we must have the water charges." The way Mr Tipping and his fellow councillors 'faced down' this threat was to concede totally to the



government wishes. It is for such weak reasons that politicians' promises are broken.

This whole episode also speaks volumes about how our 'democracy' works. The government pushes for water charges and the councillors bluster but fail to oppose it in any meaningful way. Instead they set the charge and set about the business of collecting it. In just a short space of time nearly all the elected councillors went from opposing water charges to imposing water charges.

Opposition blooms

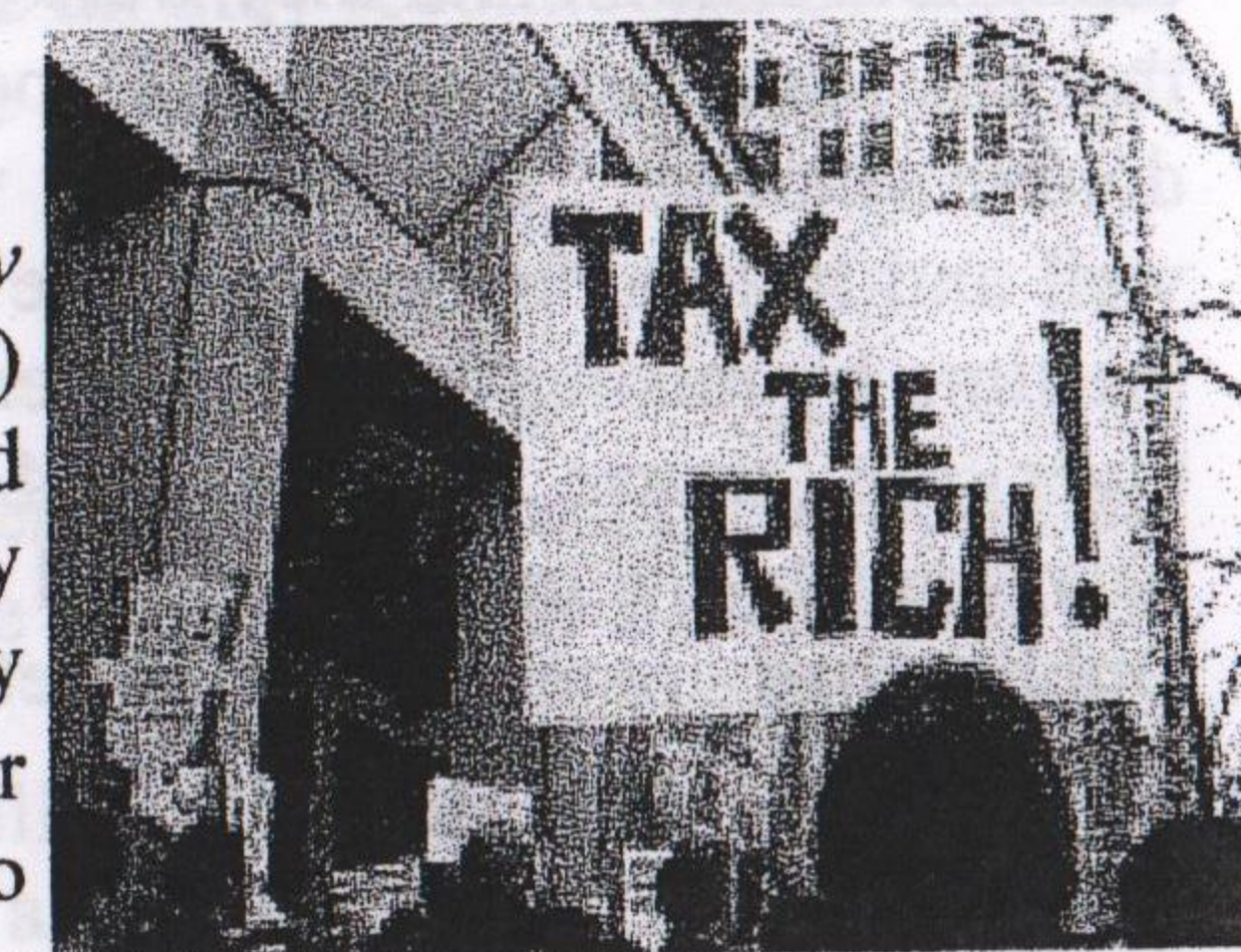
In the spring 1994 issue of *Workers Solidarity* (paper of the Workers Solidarity Movement) Gregor Kerr wrote "Householders and residents in Dublin should immediately prepare to resist these charges. If nobody pays, they will be impossible to collect." Over the summer of 1994 political opposition to these water charges was drummed up as many public meetings were held all over the county. Members of Militant Labour (now known as the Socialist Party) and the Workers Solidarity Movement and many non-aligned activists worked at leafleting information about the forthcoming charge.

We showed what had happened when similar charges were imposed in the other cities, towns and county areas. The water charges had soon developed into a service charge and now households were facing annual bills from their local councils in excess of £100. We knew this first charge was the thin end of the wedge and we went about getting that information into as many houses as possible.

Long hours were spent going around housing estates dropping in leaflets and talking to people on the doorsteps. I remember spending evenings walking around one particular suburb with comrades leafleting for a meeting which we had organised in a local pub. After distributing thousands of leaflets two people turned up for the meeting, one from the local newspaper and one a worker in the council. In Templeogue people had not been involved in campaigns and there was little history of community based struggle.

A sense of community appeared absent as each person looked after their own interests. But this area became more organised later on in the campaign and more people became involved as the council began to drag people to court. The hard work done a year earlier was rewarded as the campaign blossomed in the area.

The response was different in other areas of the city. In Firhouse 70 people showed up for the initial meeting. The activists organised a survey as a good means to develop contacts and as a means to argue against the charges.



Persistent work by activists helped raise the awareness of the issue. As people became aware of the campaign more and more became involved.

On September 24th a conference was held and this gave rise to the Federation of Dublin Anti-Water Charges Campaigns. Councillor Joe Higgins (Militant Labour) was elected Chairperson of the campaign. Gregor Kerr, a member of the WSM, was elected secretary of the campaign. We prepared and built for a march which took place in November 1994. Local meetings were held throughout Dublin and they were generally well attended. A march took place in the city centre and over 500 people protested at the implementation of this double taxation. The campaign was by now well and truly alive and we were building all the time by raising the issue where we could. Over the course of late 1994/early 1995 nearly every house in Fingal and South Dublin had received a leaflet from the campaign.



Ambush in the Night

By early December '94, South Dublin County Council had had enough of our campaign. People weren't paying the bill fast enough for their liking so they decided to up the ante and declared that if people didn't pay their outstanding bills within a certain number of days cut-offs would commence. The councils were now resorting to the tactics of the school yard bully by their use of threatening language in letters and ultimately with the threat of cutting off people's water supply.

All the activists raced into action. There were stake-outs at the water inspectors' houses. We would follow them around to ensure that they didn't attempt any cut off under the cover of the night. Clondalkin people organised their own cars to patrol around that area. CB radios were installed in the cars so that we were in constant communication with each other as we monitored the movements of the men who would try to cut people's water off. One house in Tallaght was turned into a virtual headquarters for the campaign. The phone calls kept flooding in. Communities learned to be vigilant of the blue Dublin Water Works vans and were very wary when they came into the estates. Children playing football on the park were told to knock on the doors when they saw such vans in the area. Indeed one van ventured into an estate in Clondalkin village and when the kids alerted everyone to their presence they hopped back into their van and drove away rapidly.

I remember freezing one night in a not so new car with a comrade from Militant Labour and waiting on one water inspector to move. I got out of the car to answer the call of mother nature behind a bush and I heard a huge roar from the car. Our man was on the move at 5.00am in the morning, a little early to be

starting work we thought. He was aware that he was being followed so he gave up and went back home via Crumlin Garda station where he moaned about our close attention.

All our efforts did not go unnoticed. One South County Dublin councillor called us "political pygmies." The Evening Herald called us the "water bandits." But the final result from the reports the campaign received was that only 12 houses were disconnected and they were all duly reconnected by us. The campaign had won the first battle and no house would be without water for that Christmas.

Little Changes except the Government

Things now suddenly changed because a different game was being played in the Dáil. The Brendan Smith affair [1] caused the collapse of the Fianna Fáil and Labour government.

A new government was formed. It still had Labour in it, but this time their partners in government were Fine Gael and Democratic Left. With the change in government came a change in the tactics used to try to extract the double tax of the water charge. In the Dáil the Minister for the Environment announced that the power of the local authorities to disconnect water was to be 'delimited'. When pursued on this issue he said "The Government will delimit their power to ensure that water supply is not cut off as a quick reaction but where somebody has the capacity to pay and refuses to do so the ability to disconnect water supply will remain with the local authority." As you can see statements like this did little to clarify the matter for us.

We continued to apply political pressure. We held a picket outside the Democratic Left conference which was in Liberty Hall. The Labour Party conference in Limerick was picketed. Labour members continued to be smug as they passed our picket and they paid little attention to us but disliked the slogan "You didn't axe the double tax, now watch your vote collapse." On that picket we were joined by anti-water charge activists from Limerick and Galway.

Over the next couple of months nearly a hundred thousand leaflets were produced and distributed calling on people to maintain a non-payment policy and explaining the government's pathetic tax-free allowance scheme. It proposed that if you paid your water charge on time then you were entitled to claim a tax rebate at 27%. So if your tax was £150 you were entitled to a maximum rebate of £40.50. In South County Dublin with the Water Charge at £70 you were entitled to a maximum rebate of £18.90. If you lived in Cavan you could claim back £56.70, but you'd already paid £210 for your service charge.

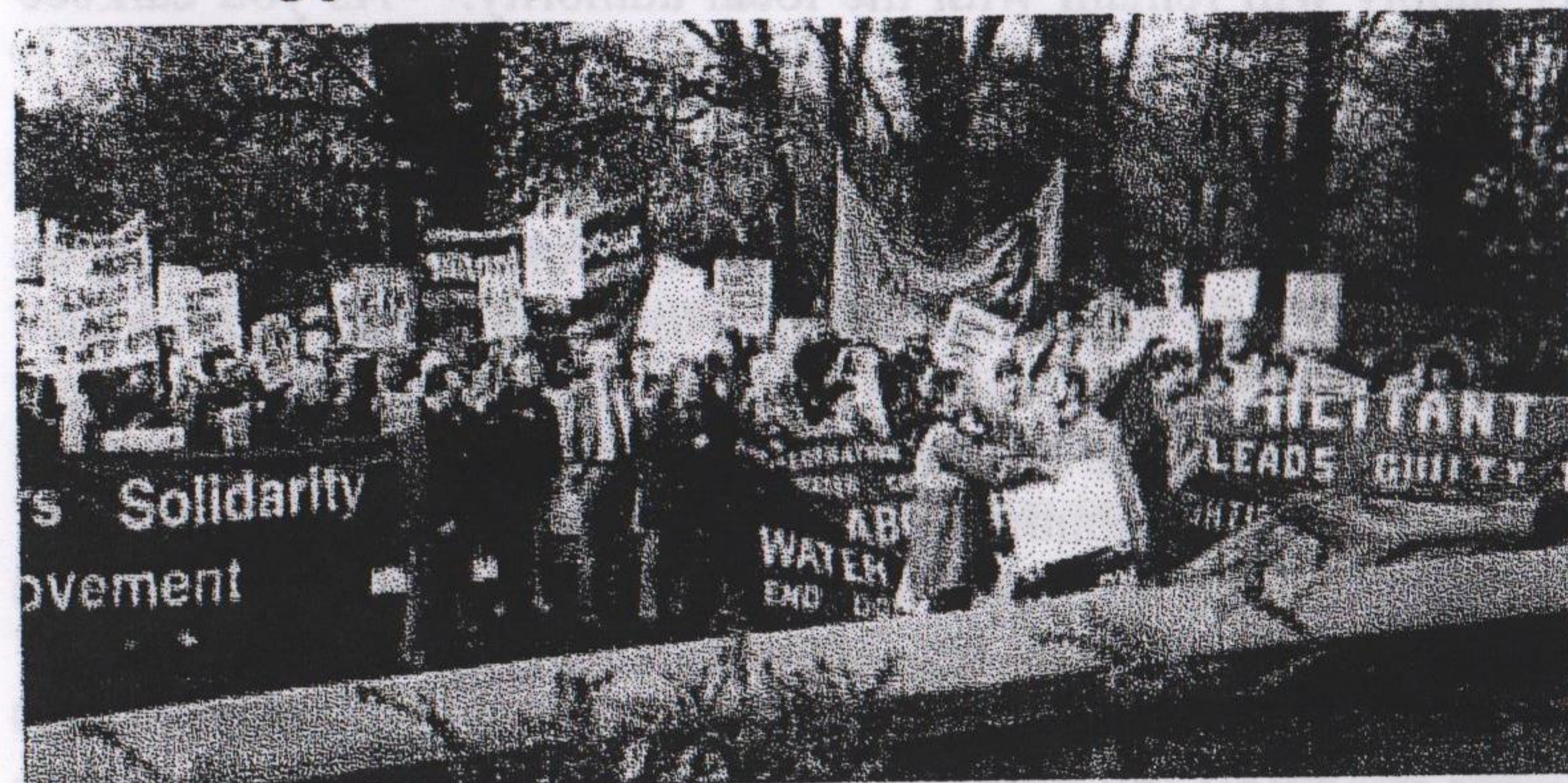
1. The Brendan Smith affair arose from the Attorney General's office taking an exceedingly long time to get extradition papers prepared so that Father Brendan Smith could be extradited and prosecuted for child abuse. It led to the resignation of Albert Reynolds as Taoiseach and the formation of a new government (without an election).

A Law made to be Broken

On 31st March an announcement was made that the councils would have to bring people to court to obtain an order prior to being able to disconnect the water. This was what the newspeak word "delimit" meant in real terms. This was the major concession that was won by Democratic Left in their negotiations in government! A press conference was held by the campaign outlining a strategy for dealing with the threats of court action. All cases would be legally defended in Court but whatever the outcome, pickets and protests would ensure that nobody's water was disconnected.

A conference was held in the ATGWU hall in Dublin on May 13th. It was decided then that during the coming summer the FDAWCC would launch a membership drive at £2 per household to help fund the legal costs which would no doubt be incurred when the councils finally got around to summoning people. For the moment they contented themselves with sending out more threatening letters. The rate of non-payment remained strong. Over £23 million remained outstanding from 1994. Successful meetings were held in many areas with 150 people showing up for one meeting in Tallaght.

Late into the summer final warning notices began to appear threatening court action. This was the final stage before the real summonses would appear. The membership campaign was growing quite rapidly and over 2,500 householders had contributed. The Amalgamated Transport and General Workers Union very kindly provided the campaign with an office. An All Dublin Activists Meeting was held in September with the campaign working on a three pronged attack of non-payment, defence of non-payers in court, and maximising political pressure.



The first court cases were scheduled for Rathfarnham court on November 13th 1995. The activists made a large attendance at this case a priority and

on the day over 500 people turned up. They voiced their support for those people fighting in court and made clear their opposition to the charges. There were people from all over Dublin, as well as from other cities and towns throughout the country. Various union banners were present. People sang and were in good spirits as the judge decided to adjourn the cases to the next week.

We never expected justice in court. So the next week we returned to the court house. That day in Rathfarnham finished with a 500 strong march through the village after the judge threw the council's cases out of court. RTE (national broadcasting service) finally decided that the campaign warranted some coverage and the picket appeared on the afternoon news. Both Joe Higgins and Gregor Kerr were amongst some of the many people interviewed on the Gay Byrne morning radio show. After two years in existence the media finally began to take notice of us.

The local authorities continued to pursue people through the courts. The council had many legal representatives such as a solicitor, a barrister and sometimes a senior barrister, as well as various council officials. They pursued the cases tirelessly but the campaign's solicitors (F.H. O'Reilly & Co.) contested them on several grounds. Despite this some disconnections were ordered but the campaign's tactic of appealing these decisions to the circuit court ensured that no disconnections could take place.

Larry Doran (a pensioner from the Greenhills area of south Dublin) made an eloquent speech from the dock of this courtroom in February 1996 when he highlighted the injustice of this state which grants tax amnesties to the rich while pursuing pensioners for water charges through the courts. He said "if the wealthy paid their due taxes, PAYE taxpayers would not be asked to pay double and I would not be before this court." The Judge ordered the court to be cleared after the cheering and clapping that Mr. Doran's speech received.

Larry, with the support of his local campaign, decided not to appeal but instead challenged the council to come and try to cut his water off. A demonstration was organised outside his house to show the council who they would have to deal with if they attempted to cut Larry's water off. The council decided not to take Larry up on his challenge.

The Councils of Fingal and Dun Laoghaire / Rathdown brought people to court as well. All members of the campaign were legally represented. After six months of trials up to May 18th 1996, involving 25 appearances by councils, only 25 disconnection orders were issued against campaign members. One judge in Swords even invoked the Public Order Act to deal with a protest outside his courthouse. As William Morris said back in 1887 "The ruling class seem to want people to use the streets only to go back and forth to work, making profits for them." In 1996 the judge was still not too keen on the idea of the streets being used for much else, especially protests.

Death & opportunity

When Brian Lenihan, the Fianna Fail TD for Dublin West died it became obvious that his seat would be contested and Councillor Joe Higgins was going to run for the vacant seat as a Militant Labour candidate. Joe had always spoken strongly against the water charges and campaigned tirelessly against them. On

13th January an All Dublin Activists Meeting was held at which Joe sought the endorsement of the campaign for his candidacy in the forthcoming by-election.

Members of the WSM present at this meeting spoke strongly against this proposal. We said that we would much prefer to see the charge defeated by the working class organising on the streets to show their opposition. We believe that people have to seize back control over their own lives and this is not done by electing some official to fight your corner. Empowerment would come from defeating the combined forces of the state, the government, and the local authorities, by organising together and fighting against the imposition of this charge. Now that we were winning, we just had to keep on pushing forward with our demands to have this charge abolished. Electing Joe to sit in the Dáil to argue our case was never going to be empowering. Joe would have been ignored just as on the local council his opposition to the charge was ignored. While our arguments were well received and considered, the decision of the meeting was to endorse Joe's candidacy.

In the end Councillor Joe Higgins nearly became Joe Higgins TD but for a few hundred votes. In the end however, Irish politics didn't vary from the mean and the son Brian Lenihan Junior was elected to the seat his father had died in.

The Federation of Dublin Anti Water Charges Campaigns held a conference in May of 1996. Many people were jubilant by the good showing of Joe Higgins in the Dublin West by-election. For many activists this was the most media coverage the campaign had

received since its inception. But on the various prongs of attack we were doing well. Not one member had been disconnected despite the flurry of court activity and the huge resources spent by the councils chasing non-payers. The Campaign was still solvent and over 10,000 households had now contributed £2 each to it. We decided to continue to maximise political pressure and the majority of people were in favour of the campaign running a slate of candidates in the next general election in order to 'put the frighteners on the politicians.' Once again we argued against this tactic. The Campaign was already on winning ground. The courts couldn't operate.

Resistance to payment was still very high with over 50% of homes not paying. The Councils were heading into their third year of setting a rate that would not be paid by the majority of people. When a campaign of working class resistance to this injustice is so strong the last thing you need to do is to elect more politicians whose voices will be lost, often to be followed by their principles. Mass resistance had got the campaign into this winning position and mass resistance would be the murder weapon of the water charges.

In November and December of 1996 the Campaign increased the pressure on the local councillors. All sorts of incentive schemes had been introduced to try and make people pay this double tax and all of them had failed. The non-payment of water charges had increased and the councillors knew the imposition of this tax was becoming impossible. The prospect of a General Election in the summer of 1997 had all the political parties running for cover.

They were running scared in the face of the massive unpopularity of this form of local funding. The last turn of the screw came in the shape of Civil Process cases. In this instance the councils took people to a civil process court where they would try and get the judge to rule for them and where they would be entitled to seize assets to the value of the money owed. This new tactic, which they are continuing to persevere with, has met with as little success as the previous ones. Again, people turned up in their hundreds to defend their fellow citizens from this persecution, and a combination of court protests and legal defence continues to make life very difficult for the councils.

The water charges were effectively dead in the water (pun intended). They had become uncontrollable and largely uncollectable. Further demonstrations were held outside local council meetings where they tried to strike an estimate for the following year of how much they would seek from the people. A march was held in the city centre which attracted a good attendance.

The message was to stand firm and we would definitely see victory. Protest phone calls bombarded the local councillors. Massive public meetings were held. 500 people attended such a meeting in Baldoyle in late November. Finally, on December 19th 1996 the Minister for the Environment announced that the Water Charge was going to be replaced by a new system whereby the road tax collected in each area would be the source for local council funding. Of course he neglected to mention that his hand was forced in this change of policy.

The working class people of Dublin had organised, rallied and won an important victory. Double taxation was over and this is due to the policy of mass resistance, organisation and direct action. The political establishment had once again thought they could exploit the working class for yet more money. But this time they had their noses bloodied. The fight is not over but the victory is certainly ours.

In time to come we should remember this victory and how it was won because the politicians will not be long before they come up with a new method to exploit us while they leave the rich to get richer. We must remember that direct action and mass resistance destroyed their best laid plan this time and be ready to employ these tactics again when they unveil their new tricks.

Gregor Kerr was the Secretary of the Federation of Dublin Anti-Water Charge Campaigns

WATER CHARGES ABOLISHED A VICTORY FOR PEOPLE POWER!

by Gregor Kerr

On Thursday December 19th Minister for the Environment Brendan Howlin finally announced the abolition of water and sewerage charges. He had been left with no option but to surrender to a massive campaign of people power which rocked the political establishment to its core. Long before the formal announcement, however, it was clear that water charges were dead. They were dead because they were uncollectable. They were uncollectable because of a two and a half year long campaign which scared the hell out of politicians of all political parties, a campaign which withstood bribes, threats and intimidation from the Councils and which proved that solidarity is indeed strength.

Those of you who have been involved in this campaign or who have followed its progress in the pages of Workers Solidarity or elsewhere do not need to be reminded of its highpoints. From the early morning patrols to prevent water disconnections through protests outside courts in Rathfarnham, Swords and elsewhere and on to the latest round of protests outside Council estimates meetings, thousands of people have taken to the streets and shown their opposition to double taxation.

Court Cases defended

Tens of thousands of PAYE taxpayers and householders have refused to pay the charges and the membership and other financial contributions made by them have enabled the campaign to successfully defend court cases taken by the Councils. (It was certainly not a campaign ever likely to receive funding from Ben Dunne, Larry Goodman or any of the other "entrepreneurs" in whose interests the political and taxation systems are run).

Despite the introduction of special legislation by the government to allow the Councils the right to disconnect water, not one single disconnection happened. When the Councils became frustrated at their inability to push disconnection cases through the courts, they turned to the "Civil Process for Recovery of a Debt" and when the first of these cases hit the courts late last year the story was the same - protests, legal objections, refusal to bow to intimidation and frustration for the Councils. Just as a few short years before massive street

protests had ensured that the Court decision to refuse the girl at the centre of the 'X' case the right to travel to England for an abortion had to be overturned, the vision of people power and communities standing together left the courts and the judges with no alternative but to find in our favour.

Scurrying politicians

In my capacity as Secretary of the Federation of Dublin Anti Water Charge Campaigns one of the most ironic events of the campaign was the scurrying of politicians during late November/early December to jump on the bandwagon of opposition to the charges. Treating us all with the contempt which so many people have come to expect from politicians, they expect us to forget that members of all political parties set these charges and that the water tax in Dublin was presided over by two governments consisting of Fine Gael, Fianna Fail, Labour (twice) and Democratic Left. Let us not forget - politicians were responsible for imposing this unjust tax upon us. The working class people of Dublin and around the country who have resisted the tax are responsible for its end.

Now that the charges have eventually been abolished, all involved in the campaign should certainly take all the plaudits due to us. However, we must remember that our work is not over yet. Many of the people who have been on the frontline still have court cases pending against them. Tens of thousands of people have bills of several hundred pounds each against their property - bills which may be called in in the future if these people attempt to sell their houses. The two demands of an amnesty for all non-payers and an end to court cases must be fought for with the same vigour with which we have defeated the charges. In addition we must fight for the abolition of refuse collection charges where they exist and be prepared to resist their imposition in other areas. Any attempts by local authorities to increase motor tax must also be resisted.

Self-organisation

The essential message to be taken from the campaign against water charges must be that the sight of tens of thousands of working-class people organising to defend our own interests led to the surrender of a government. We did not depend on anyone to fight on our behalf, self-organisation and direct action were our primary weapons. Every single person who put a leaflet into someone else's hand, who attended a meeting or protest, who refused to pay the charges played his/her part in our eventual victory. We showed the powers-that-be a glimpse of our potential power when we stand together. It is a lesson that we ourselves must not forget. It is a lesson which we must ensure the politicians are never allowed to forget.

Congratulations to all involved in the Campaign. Here's to our next victory!!

THE BATTLE OF THE BINS

The campaign against the bin charges was one of the largest organised mass movements of resistance to the state in recent years. Local organising groups popped up across the city. It climaxed in the winter of 2003, with the jailing of numerous activists in quick succession. Here we talk to **Dermot Sreenan**, a member of the WSM who was a committee member of the Dublin City Anti-Bin Tax Campaign.

What are the bin charges?

The bin charges are a charge for the collection and disposal of domestic rubbish. This service was, and still is provided by the local council. Funding which is supposed to be supplied from central government, from our taxes, to the council for such services has been drying up. The city manger, a glorified accountant, introduced a charge for the collection of rubbish. It is a classic tactic, take a public service, impose a charge, make it profitable, and then add the final part of the jigsaw, privatise the service.

Why would anarchists be arguing for lower taxes?

The bin charges are frequently referred to as a double-tax, or a stealth tax, which I prefer. You pay the same for your bin regardless of your personal wealth. It costs over 180 euros to get your bin collected if you earn 12,000 euros, if you earn 22,000 euros, if you earn 122,000 euros. No matter what you earn, you pay the same charge. In summary, it's unfair, and this bin tax is another attack on our class and we fought against it for that reason. At the same time as this tax was being imposed, millions were being found in offshore accounts set up for the ruling class to avoid paying any tax at all. The rich avoid paying taxes, and the rest of us have it deducted at source.

How did the campaign start off?

The campaign started off in a room in a club, with a wide selection of various people from different left wing groups. The Socialist Party and the WSM had the experience of being in the campaign that had defeated the water tax, and we knew that this tax was coming because it had been predicted in the estimates. (The 'estimates' is name given to the budget that the city manager puts forward for running the city for the year. In this year he had put in a new cost for collection of rubbish). There were representatives from other groups there, the Socialist Workers Party, the Workers Party, and Sinn Fein. I recollect that there was about twenty or so people in the room, and it was decided to contest this issue with a mass based non-payment campaign. A steering committee was set up, and we started building the resistance to this new tax.

What was the involvement of anarchists in the campaign?

We were involved from the very start of the campaign. I was on the steering committee for four years, being campaign secretary for the first two. However it's one thing to have someone sitting on a committee but far more important to us was to build real local groups so that when the fight really came we could have every street organised for that battle. I and a number of comrades were involved in getting the first meetings off the ground in the area where we were living, the Liberties. We started to ask people to not pay and not to apply for waivers (an exemption from paying granted to those on low incomes). We started to get a local group off the ground.

We worked closely with some people from the Socialist Party in this task. In other areas of the city members of the WSM were taking the same initial steps in getting the campaign and local groups going. For us it is a very important step to get people involved in the struggle,

to get them to saying no to this new tax, to show them that resistance is not futile. That was the only way that a real mass non-payment campaign could be built. Many local meetings attracted hundreds of our neighbours.



Householders Against the Service Charges protest outside refuse depot in Cork

Was there any involvement of globalisation/anti-capitalist activists in the campaign?

No, not really. I think that there was a perception that the campaign wasn't for them. Of course this is not true, but many of these activists live in rented accommodation and it was unclear as to whether the landlord or the tenant would deal with the charge. So perhaps they didn't see it as affecting them. Most of the people involved in the campaign were older, people who were settled, with children and grandchildren, while the anti-capitalist activists tended to be much younger.

The anti-bin tax campaign was also more of a local / community campaign. So perhaps the anti-capitalists didn't feel that there was a place for them or that there was an easy way for them to get involved. Also, the campaign was probably seen as being dominated by the old Trotskyist left, and many of the anti-capitalists have a poor view of these groups, having had experience with one or other of their various front organisations.

How did the campaign develop?

Initially we held local meetings. We would invite the city councillors to come and meet their electorate and explain their position on the bin charges. Most declined to show up, so we would line up chairs with missing councillors' names on them. Then the meeting would discuss how to organise the area to drive up membership of the campaign, and how to increase non-payment. Certain areas got local groups off the ground very quickly, and these then continued to meet, organising stalls and getting leaflets into all the streets in the area. Some areas only ever had one meeting and never seemed to meet again.

What strategies were used?

The primary strategy was to ensure non-payment. This meant taking on the arguments of the local loyal Labour Party people who tried to rubbish our campaign, and who promised that some leader or other would get rid of the bin charges. Labour would look after the people, that would've been a first!

The main strategy in the early stages was to get recognised as a campaign, to let people know that this tax was being fought against, and to spread it far and wide and to drive up non-payment and in turn increase the membership of the our campaign. In the later stages when they stopped collecting rubbish we blockaded the bin trucks, either in our estates or at the depots, arguing that they collected all the bins or none of the bins.

What were the organisational structures of the campaign?

A major conference was held, the campaign was launched, and the steering committee was elected and recognised. The anarchists tried to ensure it was as democratic as possible, and we had motions passed at conference that all major decisions should be taken at All-Dublin Activists' meetings which would meet regularly and the job of the steering committee would be to keep the campaign functioning, and in the media, in the meantime.

On paper, the organisational structure was good, but decisions aren't

made on paper, they are made in rooms full (or not so full) of people. In reality, the organisation of the campaign was poor.

Properly functioning local groups weren't set up in every area, and the All-Dublin activists' meetings were often poorly attended (and at times its decisions were ignored by the steering committee).

Anarchists wanted local groups to function properly and

organise their area for themselves. What I mean by that is that the local people are in charge of the local group, that they are calling the shots, they are electing their delegates to the All-Dublin activists' meetings. For people to seize control of their own lives and to take the fight to the authorities, the local group had to work in a very clear and openly democratic way, with those involved taking the decisions and acting on them. This way people could learn things like speaking in public, drafting leaflets and convincing their neighbours to join the campaign.

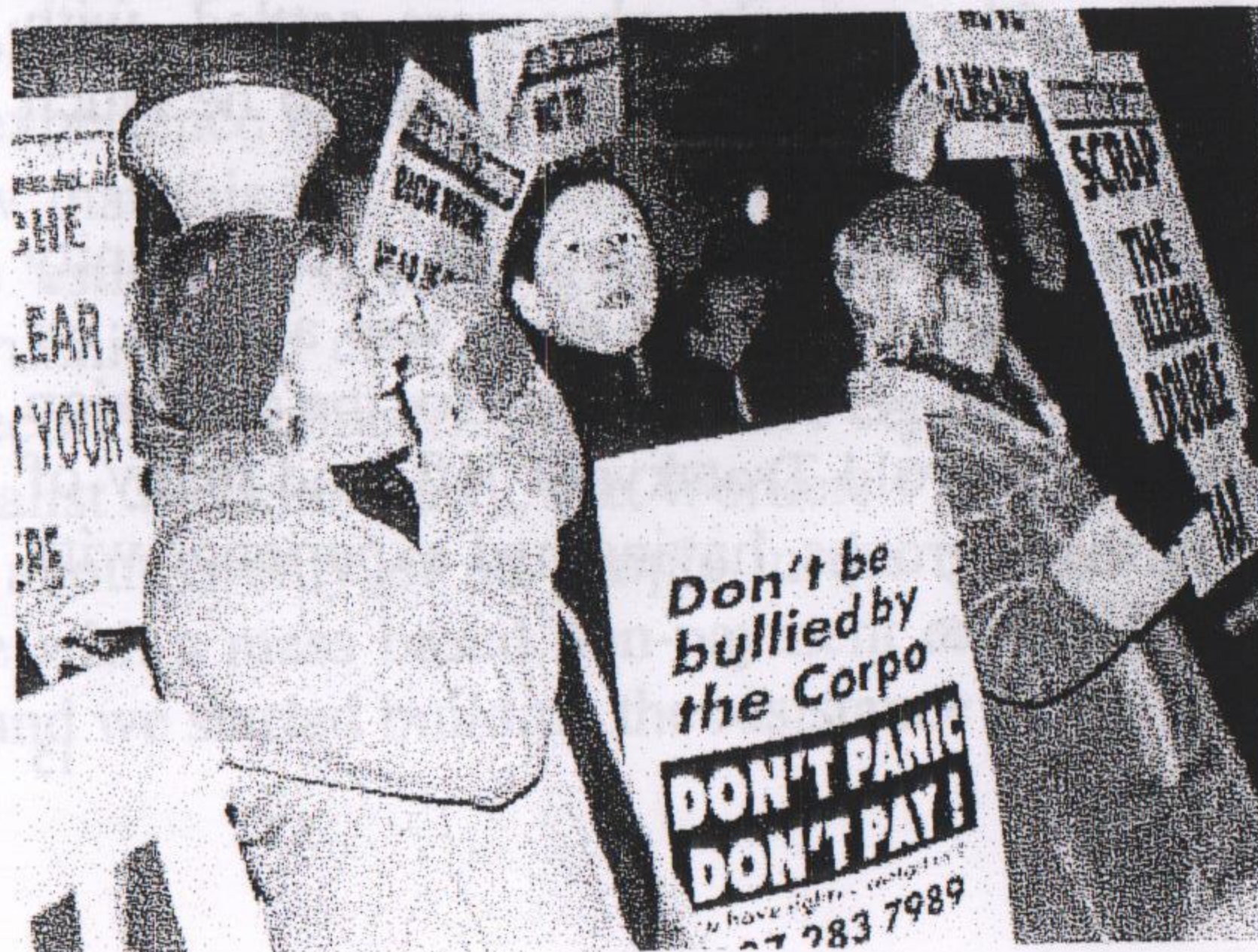
In other areas, and because of the nature of politics of their parties, once a leafleting network was established and membership was being collected, members of the Socialist Party or the Socialist Workers Party were happy to represent the views of the area, without going to the trouble of holding that many meetings

Instead of a campaign based on strong local groups, whole swathes of the city were carved up along political party lines. Local meetings would be organised, and depending on which party, the Socialist Party or the Socialist Workers Party, was stronger on the ground, that area was then run by that party. Over a period of time, the campaign evolved where each party took charge of particular areas of the city, and local groups were dependant on their contact on the steering committee for leaflets and information. In some cases local groups only existed on paper, or only existed in the sense that someone from the steering committee would drop off leaflets to a group of people in the area, who would then distribute them.

To make matters worse, co-operation amongst members from both parties was poor. Meetings would happen and people from the other party wouldn't be informed about them. So while there was a level of co-operation between the two major Trotskyite parties, the Socialist Workers Party and the Socialist Party, but there was also a deep level of distrust. The Socialist Workers Party felt that they had ignored the anti-water charge campaign (which successfully resisted a similar tax a few years previously) and in this way they had lost an opportunity. They did not want this to happen again and so were involved from the very start. The Socialist Party had worked in the previous campaign, but this time had to work with the other Trotskyist party. The steering committee was split, having members from both parties represented.

Did all local groups function like this?

In areas where we lived we tried to encourage our local groups to meet regularly and to be in charge of their local campaign group, but unfortunately there weren't very many of us so we could only be active in a couple of local areas. Some of the other smaller political groups that were involved, such as the Irish Socialist Network in Finglas and Working Class Action in Cabra and East Wall, also tried to build local groups that were run by local people. Later on, these were among the most active parts of the city campaign. Unfortunately though, the groups



run candidates in the local elections. So ultimately, this led to the most active groups still being asked to elect someone to sort out the problem for them, instead of sorting it out for themselves.

What did the campaign publish?

The campaign published a news bulletin that was aimed at householders, letting them know the non-payment figures, what moves the council had been up to, and most importantly encouraging people not to pay. It reacted to the council's threat that they were going to pursue people for money owed. Letters threatening court action went out with alarming regularity, followed by some court summonses. We produced the news bulletin with the constant message of "Don't Panic - Don't Pay".

The council waged a very heavy and direct propaganda war against the campaign. Very expensive council advertisements were aired on prime time television telling people that a tsunami of waste was coming their way if we didn't recycle. The truth was the council didn't care about recycling, they just wanted money out of the householders (for instance, initially they levied a flat charge and didn't take into consideration how often or how full people's bins actually were).

How much of a mass mobilisation was there when non-collection of rubbish started in parts of the city?

Eventually, when non-collection started in the city, it started in areas where the campaign was not strong. This made perfect sense from the Council's point of view. They had all the facts and knew the places where there was high payment (and no active campaign), and which places were defiant (where the campaign was strong and well supported). The sad truth was that although the campaign had grown, it hadn't grown strong enough, and when non-collection started it meant that there were a lot of political activists going out to areas to try and ensure that collection of the bins took place. We blockaded the trucks in our estates to force the trucks to take the rubbish. A lot of people were nervous as they were being intimidated with talk of 'breaking the law' etc. and all too quickly injunctions preventing the blockades were granted and arrests were made.

What was the campaign's reaction to the arrest and jailing of activists?

The campaign ended up with a lot of people arrested in a very short space of time. This was the time when the council, ably assisted by the state, went all out to smash the campaign. Joe Higgins and Clare Daly (Socialist Party) got arrested out in Fingal, and they were followed by 12 more arrests from the city



think people were shocked at the lengths the Council were prepared to go to get in their precious tax, but road to profit has to be paved. Nearly four thousand people marched to Mounjoy prison. The unions pledged their support, and to stay strong. Over a 1,000 people marched from Cabra (a very strong part of the campaign) to the gates of Mountjoy prison again in a tremendous show of solidarity from one area.

After this initial stand-off the Council got smarter and started doing non-collection only from certain depots in the city. We knew that non-collection was going to be implemented in the city area. The campaign took a decision to attempt to blockade, to stop all the trucks from going out on their routes, when we knew that they were doing non-collection from a specific depot. This meant getting to the bin depots very early in the morning, at around 7.00am. The campaign stated that all bins would be lifted up or none of them would be picked up. This was the idea behind the tactic of blockading the depots.

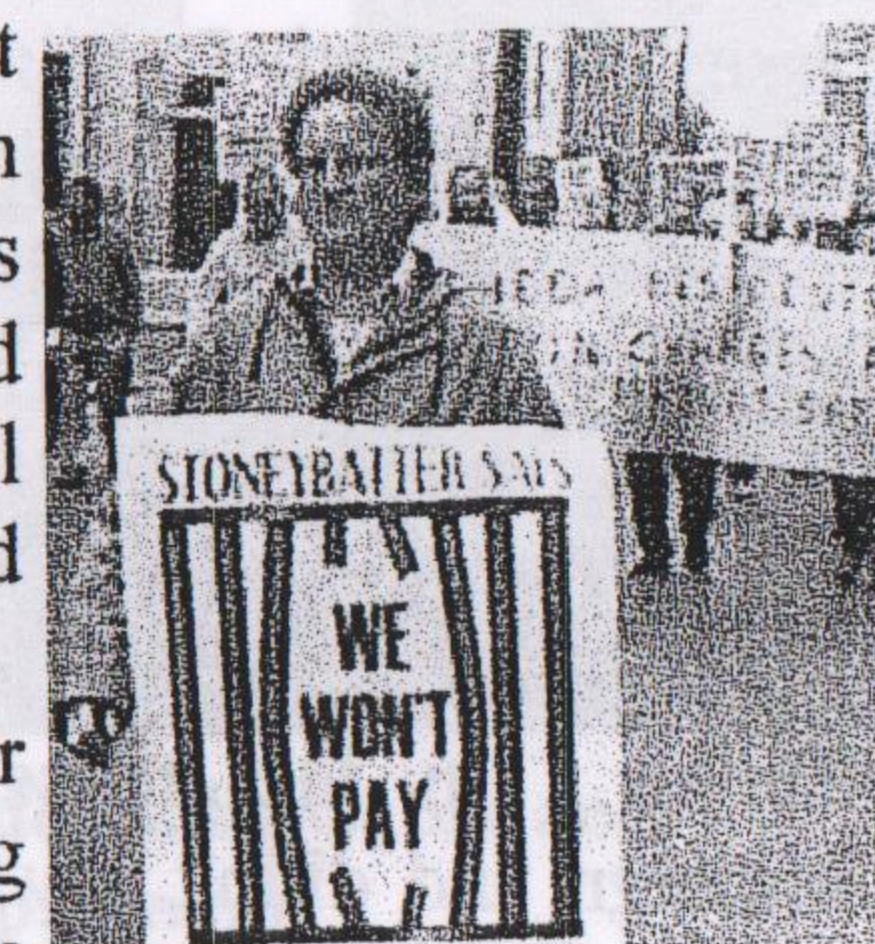
The campaign didn't really have the numbers to blockade all the depots successfully, and once again the union leaders, who spoke of support outside the prison walls, couldn't be counted on for tangible support when this started. In short, I would say that the intention of the arrests was to intimidate people and I think it worked.

Why and how did the escalation end?

After two days of blockades on all depots where non-collection was happening, I got a phone call from someone on the steering committee saying they were calling it off for the third day. I think people were tired, but it's interesting to see how bad the decision making process was in reality. No meetings, no real discussion. Just a phone call saying that there wasn't going to be any pickets for the third successive day.

Later, the Campaign took a decision to start blockading commercial refuse collections that were run from certain depots in the evening. This meant it was easier for people to get to them after work, and we had some successful blockades. Injunctions, threatening jail if we didn't leave, were read out to us and we ignored them when there were enough of us.

After a good protest outside City Hall, I remember attending an activist meeting. I was still on the steering committee and I remember the reluctance of the committee to go downstairs and talk to the activists assembled, because they hadn't a line worked out for the tactics to be employed at this stage. I wanted the activists meeting to decide what we should do next, that was the closest thing we had to getting a democratic decision. There were many elements of farce, but this was the height of it. Eventually that meeting decided to concentrate our



forces on one depot, early in the morning and to see if we could at least block that one for the day. The decision was passed by most of the people in the room, a clear majority.

The following day as I cycled down in the rain to the depot, I got a phone call from someone in the Socialist Party who fought on this issue in Cork, and had nothing to do with the Dublin campaign, informing me that someone else had called for another depot to be blockaded instead. We were left with about 8 people to blockade that depot in the lashing rain. There appears to be a scant regard for democracy in certain parties.

The escalation ended because we couldn't sustain it, there weren't the numbers. There weren't the numbers because when the campaign was being built, certain parties were happier to establish leaflet droppers than real functioning local groups. Weak local groups meant few people active on the ground, which meant no numbers for the blockades.

What kind of support the campaign get from the trade unions?

I don't think there were many problems getting motions passed in favor of the campaign. This happened in many of the trade unions, but what did this mean in real terms? It was more difficult to get money from them to support the campaign, so all the money that was used in the campaign had to come from donations or memberships.

The campaign knew that the unions would have a very important role to play in this fight but as usual when it really came down to the crunch, the leadership and the officials ran away from the fight, and into the arms of the bosses. In South Dublin we heard of union members being ordered back into their bin depot by officials. When we were blockading the bin depot at Grangegorman a member of the IMPACT trade union (who was also a supervisor) read out the injunction to the campaign and warned us that we were breaking the law.

In effect, if you were in the union, and you wanted to make an issue of this, it didn't appear to me that you were going to get any backing from the officials. In fact those bin workers who were deeply sympathetic to the campaign and didn't pay the double tax themselves, were so paranoid that they would only meet secretly with the campaign. I think that is testimony to truth behind the trade union motions in favor of the campaign. The members were in support but the union leadership was most definitely not going to make this a battleground. The leadership of the unions did what they often do; they calmed members down and de-escalated at every opportunity.

Did the campaign approach the bin-workers?

Yes, we did this officially though SIPTU and also unofficially by talking to many of the men who were living in neighborhoods where the campaign was strong.

Like I mentioned before, there were many bin workers who were

sympathetic, but they knew in their hearts that the union, despite having motions in favor of the campaign, was not going to support them. The bin workers, when they were caught up in a blockade, were often quite cheerful and never displayed any animosity to the activists. They would just go back into their cabs and call their supervisor.

How did Electoral Politics influence the campaign?

This is a good question because I think that this had an overwhelming influence on the way the campaign worked, and developed. The illusion was sown early on that it was the election of Joe Higgins to the Dail that truly defeated the "Water Tax" seven years ago. The anti-bin tax campaign never even reached the same strength as the water-tax campaign and I think it's because people believed the myth. Thousands of people were involved in the campaign against the bin-tax, but in the end all they were asked to do was to vote for one protest candidate or the other.

Many of the local groups were organised with an eye to the election. The major organisers from the political groups saw themselves as potential candidates. They were happy to often be the sole point of contact between local groups and the steering committee and the campaign. They didn't believe the myth, but they certainly propagated it. They knew that if the campaign developed in this way, that no other 'independent' candidates would emerge. Also, that if they were the ones who brought the news of the campaign, it stands to reason that they would most likely be the ones to stand up for the people and represent them when the elections come

So many local areas didn't meet too often, and when they did it was only to listen to news of how the campaign was faring.

Batches of leaflets were given to people to distribute, but they were usually just the main campaign newsletters.

In effect, local groups didn't develop the autonomy that they required in order to give people a sense of ownership of it. People needed to be drawing up local leaflets, instead they were being handed ones from the steering group to hand out. There were lulls in activity, but I think over a period of time people didn't feel like they owned the campaign, even in their own areas.



Blockade of Grangegorman depot by Cabra and Stoneybatter campaigners



Bin lorry stopped in Cabra

groups have to come together, function in a democratic way, and bring others into them, and then those groups have to be federated upwards. The way this campaign started was with 22 people in a room. The next campaign should start with 22 people in your estate, talking about how you are going to not pay the new tax for water, or whatever it might be.

It should not be left up to far left political parties to divide up areas and organise them. Sure they can have a meeting about the issue, initiate something, but you cannot leave it to them because in a few years they are just going to ask you to vote for them.

When we needed the numbers in this campaign we didn't have them and I firmly believe that's for a few reasons. Real functioning local groups were not built in enough areas, and the campaign did not spread into enough areas of the city, and there was no



...and in Stoneybatter

real support for the workers when they needed it from the unions.

When an issue like this comes around again, local meetings have to happen quickly in our communities. We cannot wait for word from the central steering committee, we cannot wait for a central campaign to get off the ground, what each of us can do is organise a meeting in our areas and get people prepared for the next fight.

Working class people must seize the opportunity; they must own the campaign from the start and view it as an opportunity to bloody the Councils noses and put a halt to their gallop towards privatised services

What lessons can we draw?

I think that the founding principals of the campaign were fine, a mass campaign of non-payment, but it's in the structure and application that this campaign failed and failed badly. Local

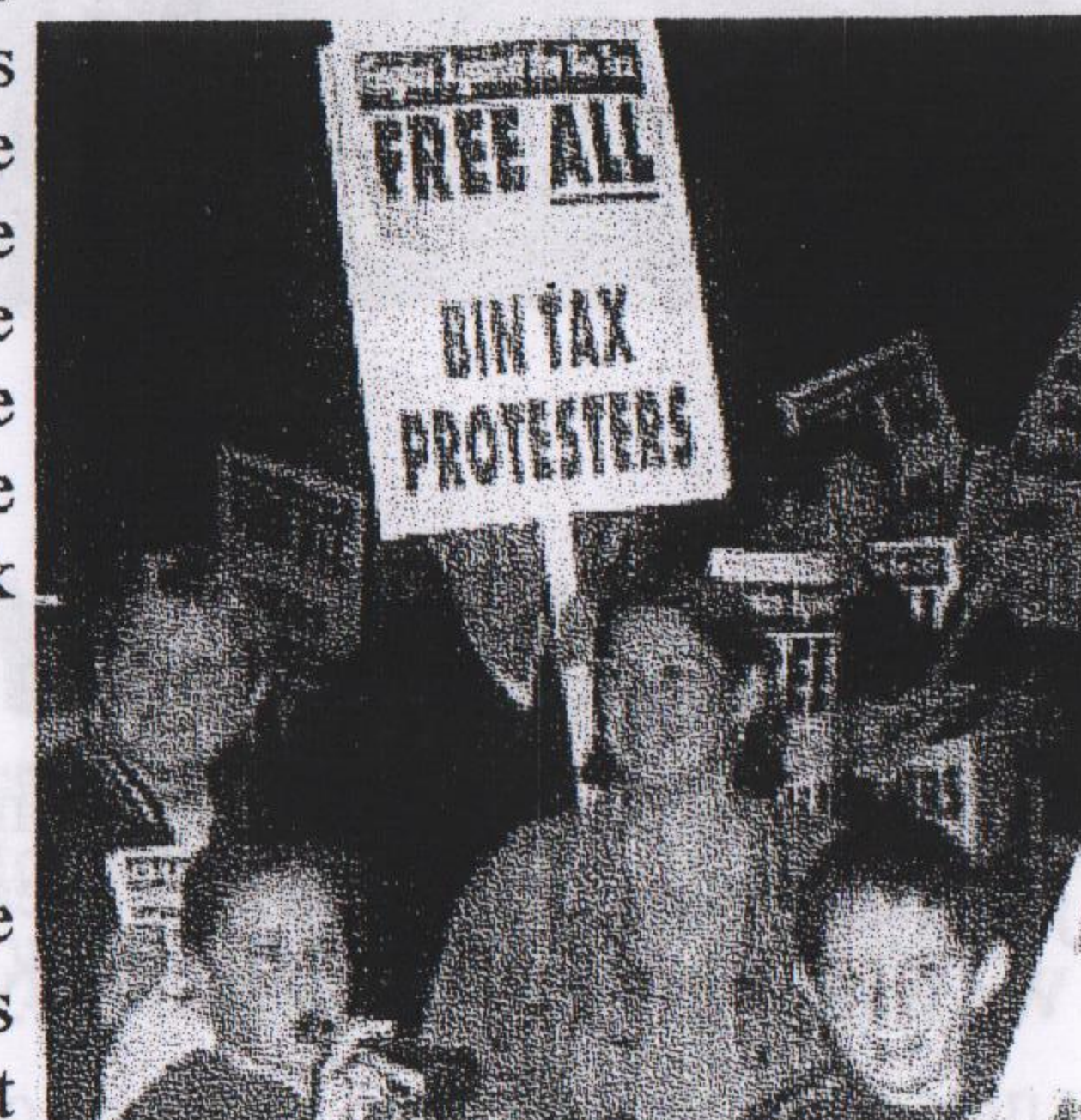
It seems that the anarchist arguments weren't that influential in terms of the campaign structure. Why do you think that was?

The anarchist argument was won in terms of having a structure where the All-Dublin Activists' meeting was the supreme decisions making body of the campaign. If that All-Dublin meeting was comprised of delegates from real functioning local groups, then I think it would've worked. But, that was on paper, and campaigns are not won on paper.

The anarchists were weak, there wasn't enough of us. Our ideas were the dominant ones in just one area, and we only had members in a few other areas. In some places we only had one individual living locally, so we weren't in a strong position in terms of influencing the campaign across the city. The structure was ignored, and so too were decisions from the all Dublin meetings. The real place where anarchists lost the argument was in the one over elections, and we lost that because we couldn't argue it in all the areas where people stood for elections. We couldn't hold back the stampede for power.....

What next?

Well, it will only be a short time before we get to take them on again. Fresh from this victory, I would only say it will be no time at all before they dust down their plan to start charging us for the water. It may sound ridiculous that they could attempt to charge us for a resource we appear to be deluged in everyday, but our chance to take them on will be at hand, and if we can learn from this, it will be our chance to put this privatisation





JOIN THE ANARCHISTS

We are different, very different. Unlike so many others we do not believe the end justifies the means, we say the means you use will shape the society you create. We want a free and socialist society and we have to organise in a like manner.

We are anarchists. We are socialists. You can't have one without the other because they are one and the same thing. Socialism is not a collection of reform and minor changes. It is a lot more than that. It means building something completely new. Any you build everything from the bottom up - socialism is no exception.

ELECTIONS

That is why you won't see us standing in elections. We don't want to be the new rulers. This is not because we are against democracy. We are totally in favour of it. But by democracy we do not mean letting 166 professional politicians run our lives. We mean people coming together to make their own decisions. Councils of delegates from jobs and communities. Economic planning that has to be put to the people for their agreement. We don't want to change the faces in the ruling class, we want to abolish classes.

Likewise you won't find us in the ranks of the full time union officials. Instead we will be found working for the power to be returned to the membership. At the moment the means arguing for respect for pickets, solidarity with workers on strike, regular branch meetings and taking the initiative away from unelected full-timers.

SELF-ACTIVITY

We support self-activity. On the picket line you learn to do things for yourself, in an election you do something for someone else. In a strike you begin to assert yourself and come together with others for a common goal. In an election you can only decide who should be in charge, who should run your your life. Anarchist socialism means workers control. Not somebody, no matter who they are, controlling workers.

CONFIDENCE

We base ourselves on the struggles of working class people. Struggles not only at work but also for women's rights, against imperialism, against sectarianism. We do it because struggle can not only win gains but also because of the confidence it gives people in their own ability to change things. And that is the sort of confidence needed to change society.

JOIN US

We won't be trying to take over the state structures. Government, the existing civil service, police, army and so on are there to meet the needs of a capitalist society. They can not be turned around to serve socialism, they were not designed for that. The state is only necessary when a minority wants to rule.

Workers will create their own structures to bring a new society into being. Structures that are efficient and geared towards mass involvement and democratic decision making.

All this is not just around the corner. But unless we know what we want and how to get it we will be stuck with the chaos and inequality of the present system with its' continual series of crises.

Freedom, socialism, workers control, anti-authoritarianism...if these are the sorts of aims you have, then you belong in the Workers Solidarity Movement.

Find out more at www.wsm.ie

or write to the Workers Solidarity Movement, P O Box 1528, Dublin 8.