

# DEFEATING THE WATER CHARGES



## Don't be fooled by the concessions.

In the face of massive opposition to the water charges, the government have made several clumsy attempts to placate us, while their partners in the media seek to frighten us off the streets. The latest attempt, delivered by Alan Kelly, Minister for the Environment, Community & Local Government in the Dáil on the 19th of November, is the plan to charge us €160 per year for our water and to give 'eligible households' a water conservation grant of €100.

These allegedly 'very attractive' and 'reasonable' double charges for our water remain the real issue, despite government claims that there has just been a 'communications failure'. That is, they think the problem is that they didn't soften us up with enough propaganda first, not that we simply won't accept double charges, commodification and privatisation of our water supply. The government will promise us anything and everything in order to get us to lie down and accept these charges, including the laughable claim that if we use a low enough volume of water that we'll each actually make money off the water charges! Rest assured that any temporary and limited reductions in charges from the figure they initially stated will be swiftly removed if we were to pay up come April. Though, with the credibility of the Irish political class at an all time low, no one is buying the lies the government are selling. Even a concerted media onslaught has failed to scare people off the streets and into silence.

It's worth noting that the reason that the Fine Gael/Labour government is throwing concessions at us is because of the scale and militancy of the anti water charge protests, rather than because of the actions of any government party. It is above all ordinary people, who perhaps have never considered themselves political before, who have stopped the government in its tracks. The democratic self-organisation that underpins the recent protests is what the State really fears. The reason the media have been foaming at the mouth, condemning militant working class protest is because the system can handle a few dissenting voices elected to the Dáil but it cannot handle a risen population.

Even as Denis O'Brien's media machine tries to scare us, and the government parties attempt to divide and conquer, we must continue to educate ourselves, to organise and to protest the water charges at every turn. Protests, marches and pickets on the current scale are impossible to ignore and are putting politicians under serious pressure to comply with our demands. If we keep it up, we will see off this latest attempt at squeezing more money out of our already struggling communities.

[wsm.ie/water-charge-faq](http://wsm.ie/water-charge-faq)



### **Garda brutality, from Rosspport to Dublin.**

Scenes of Garda violence against water charge resisters have come as a shock to many people. If this had happened 10 years ago most people elsewhere might only have heard rumours and assumed that something must have been done to deserve the response. Today however, the prevalence of camera phones and the ease of sharing photos and video on Facebook has meant one video after another showing disproportionate violence from the Gardaí has 'gone viral' and made it very hard to conceal.

By the weekend when water charge resisters surrounded Joan Burton's car in Jobstown, the level of Garda violence captured on video looked a lot like the video's coming out of Rosspport in 2007-9. This was seen most strikingly outside the Mansion House where 3 Gardaí threw a woman into a metal bollard with considerable force. That same week the media changed its reporting angle on the water charge resistance from a sometimes sympathetic 'they have a point' approach to a series of hostile smears.

As with the Rosspport protests of 2007 a number of stories were published suggesting that the protests were controlled by a 'sinister fringe' and included 'dissident republicans' determined to bring down the state. As with Rosspport while incidents of Garda violence against protesters were downplayed, explained away or simply ignored, the few instances where someone snapped and fought back were magnified out of all proportion. The Jobstown brick which bounced harmlessly off a Garda car was turned into a major news story. In both cases this is done to create a false division into 'good protesters' and 'bad protesters' to weaken the resolve of those resisting.

The struggle against Shell in Rosspport involved a community of a couple of hundred people subjected to years of such intimidation. Their resistance taught Shell a lesson, the project that was meant to cost 600 million and be finished in five years is still not completed and will cost over 3.4 billion. That project was imposed through Garda violence, a hostile media and craven politicians working in the service of big business. Exactly the same range of forces that are imposing Irish Water and trying to destroy our resistance. But in Rosspport they were beating down 200 people and their supporters, now they are trying the same tactics against hundreds of thousands. Obviously those tactics are not working this time and by staying united, we will win.



### **'Conservation' is a Lie.**

The government tell us that water charges are being introduced as a "conservation measure". We are all very wasteful of a precious natural resource, so the narrative goes, and it's only if it's metered and we are made to pay for it that we will be diverted from our extravagant ways.

Enda Kenny and others have gone so far as to talk about 'anecdotal evidence' of people 'leaving their taps running all night'. While the 'taps running all night' claim is just blatant nonsense, if the concern was actually about conservation of water, surely it would have made far more sense to invest the €539 million that is being spent on the installation of meters on fixing the leaks in pipes. At any rate there is absolutely no evidence that meters have an appreciable effect on people's usage habits in the medium to long term. The Commissioner for Energy Regulation has recently released figures showing that the meters will only result in a reduction of approximately 22 litres a day for the average family – or the equivalent of one dishwasher cycle. This amounts to a usage reduction of just 6%.

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Comparison with studies done in areas of Britain where meters were installed suggest that even this will be very much a short-term reduction and that in the longer term the saving will be more like 1.5%. When meters are initially installed, people are probably very careful with usage and this will lead to a short-term decrease in consumption. But when people get used to the metering and get fed up giving out to their teenagers about the length of time they spend in the shower etc., they go back to similar usage patterns to pre-meter times. In Britain, meter installation has, in the long term, reduced water consumption by just 1.5%.

#### **The 'No consent, no contract' argument.**

**The recent announcement that people who have returned their registration packs to Irish Water blank, or emblazoned with the words "No consent, no contract", are now registered with the service provider, should be enough to expose the counter-legal mumbo jumbo being spread by Direct Democracy Ireland (DDI), and other groups influenced by the "Freeman of the land" ideology.**

DDI's advice, as illustrated by the fact that those who followed it are now registered, is nonsense. The authority to charge users of water comes from Section 21 Part 3 of the Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013, which says Irish Water "shall charge each customer for the provision of its water services in accordance with the approved water charge plan." The entitlement to charge is not dependent upon a contract because section 2 of the act defines the customer as "the occupier of the premises in respect of which the water supply is provided."

Contrary to the DDI/Freeman theory, there are no magic words that "provide an extra layer of legal protection" for water charge resisters. When we refuse to pay, we break the law. When we block meter installation, we break the law. These are the only tactics that can deliver victory, so if we are to win, the law must be broken. The law is not there to protect us, it is there to protect the power and wealth of those who rule us.

#### **5 THINGS YOU CAN DO TO SET UP YOUR OWN CAMPAIGN GROUP.**

**1) Online Presence - A first step is to set up a local Facebook page. This can be used as a focal point for information about the group, and a way of raising awareness that the group exists. A group Twitter account is optional but not as important. Also set up a group email account.**

**2) Plan a Public Meeting - This could be a street meeting for your estate, or a larger meeting for the wider area.**

**3) Find a venue - Think of any local community centres, sports clubs, pubs, or even an outdoor space (as some people have done). Ask attendees for small donations if you need to.**

**4) Try to get a couple speakers to speak for a few minutes at the beginning. Organisers from other local campaigns will be happy to speak, as will trade union and political activists, and even anti water charge politicians.**

**5) The next step is advertising the meeting. This can be done several ways: leaflets and posters, door-knocking, a Facebook ad, and word of mouth.**

**Hand out leaflets in key areas like shopping centres, and put up posters in areas of high traffic. Ask local shops and businesses if they will display some leaflets. Knock on doors of local people to tell them about the meeting and give them a leaflet (slow but effective). Post on the Facebook page advertising the meeting, and 'boost' that post as an advertisement for greater visibility (costs a few quid). Tell everyone you know to spread the word about the meeting.**

### After we win, what comes next?

The revolt against the water charges is of a size and militancy that if we stay on the streets we will certainly win. But the revolt has also exposed in plain view the level of co-operation between media, politicians, big businessmen like Denis O'Brien and the Gardaí. All have acted together to cajole, bully and suppress protest and then to lie and distort events. While we might defeat the water charges they come at the end of a long sequence of cuts in services and wages, a period of unemployment and emigration. All this takes place in a society where people are marginalised because of their gender, migration status, sexuality and whether they are settled or Traveller. Stepping back and looking at the whole picture, is this really the sort of society any of us would build for our children given a choice?

We don't get to make that choice, we have never got to make that choice. Our ancestors may have won the right to vote but that has proven a fairly meaningless exercise where we only get to choose between parties that lie to us. They promise one thing and do the opposite when in power. Part of the reason for that being there isn't actually much power in the Dail. What can be decided there is sharply limited by the dictatorship of the market, a dictatorship that saw the costs of the banking crisis being imposed on us despite the fact that in a referendum we would have voted no.

When we defeated the water charge in the 1990's they simply waited a couple of decades and then tried to impose it again. That's the way the system we live under works, even when we successfully resist one assault it looks for another way to make us pay. Which is why when we fight and win on single issues we also need to be thinking about creating a very different society and starting the process of organising for it.

The water charge resisters who produced this leaflet are anarchists. That means we want to replace this society of fear and greed that is divided into order givers and order takers with one where everyone, and not just the super rich, are free. Not just free in the sense of choosing to buy one phone rather than another but free of the fear of poverty removing our ability to live life as we choose, free of the way racism, sexism and homophobia shape our society into a grey, lifeless world where many cannot express their love or live their ambitions. Free of environmental degradation caused by the need for an endless, destructive economic growth that lines mainly the pockets of the rich.

Our vision is of a society where we can all come together as equals to collectively decide what our priorities are, what we will produce and how to create the space in which we all can live as we want. If that vision appeals to you and you want to organise with us let us know by registering at this link:

[www.wsm.ie/user/register](http://www.wsm.ie/user/register)

**READ OUR WATER CHARGES FAQ AT [www.wsm.ie/water-charge-faq](http://www.wsm.ie/water-charge-faq)**

**Keep up to date on the fight against water charges and on the many other struggles happening at the moment, both nationally and internationally, by following us on Facebook at 'Workers Solidarity Movement (Ireland)'.**

There are many local pages being set up or already established to help organise in our communities. Keep an eye out for local Facebook pages like 'Dún Laoghaire's Not Paying' or 'Drogheda Anarchists' to link up with like minded people in your locality. Together we can beat these double charges, build strong community organisations and ensure that we will never be seen as an easy target for austerity again.



**[www.wsm.ie](http://www.wsm.ie)**

