

'A charge too many'



Sam Hurley, Trevor Power and Anthony Firth who attended the march in Waterford. See pages 20 and 21 for more photos from last Saturday's protest. Photo: Noel Browne

Palpable anger was as heavy in the air on The Mall on Saturday last as the teeming elements that drenched the thousands who marched against water charges.

That which does actually "fall from the sky" had rarely fallen with greater ferocity all year, aided and abetted by a strong gale that seemed to career through most of Munster during the protests in Waterford, Dungarvan, Portlaoise and Carrick-on-Suir.

And while there was an unhelpful soundtrack produced by a small number within the crowd who were determined to drown out the views of some keynote speakers on the steps of the Bishop's Palace, there was little doubting where most protestors' ire was directed.

"The political establishment were probably thrilled with the bad weather," said one protestor as the crowd slowly filed away after the speeches had ended.

"But to see thousands of people still out on the streets today despite the wind and the rain says it all really. We've had enough. This is one charge too many and we will not stand for it."

"The funny thing is," said another who had canvassed for Sinn Féin during the Local Election campaign, "well, it's not funny at all, but what I mean is at most of the doorsteps I stood on with residents, I actually didn't meet all that many saying they'd be unwilling to pay for water in some shape or form.

"But the way this whole process had been handled - the arrogance of the Government, the attitude of the Board of Irish Water, the way they've failed to communicate with the public, and the feeling that this is just another big money-spinning quango, lining the pockets for the friends of those in power, for me that's what's caused the most frustration for ordinary people.

"And still both the Government and Irish Water give the impression that they're just not going to listen to the people or change course in any way to do with any of this: I thought part of their job was to listen to their citizens?

"Well they got their answer today - people in their thousands in Waterford and right around the country telling them we've had enough, and we're not going to put up with any more of this."

Meanwhile, the latest Sunday Independent opinion poll, which places Sinn Féin at an all-time polling high in the Republic, despite the talk of a revolt against the 'big three' parties, interestingly leaves Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil and Labour on a combined vote of 49 per cent.

And given the number of Independents drawn from the gene pool of those three parties, expect talk of a new rainbow coalition (with potential support from such Independents) to enter the political discourse between now and the general election.

As for the here and now? Well, the Irish Water mess looks like one that won't be getting cleaned up any time soon by a

Government which got 120,000 more reasons to do something about it last Saturday.