

## Water Charge protestors all set for Leinster House

Right 2 Water meeting at Tower Hotel attracts 250



Tommy Hogan (Acting Chair, Waterford Right 2 Water) addresses last Thursday's meeting at the Tower Hotel. Also pictured: Brendan Ogle (Unite), Senator David Cullinane and Sean Walsh (on behalf of John Halligan TD).

A crowd of approximately 250 assembled at the Tower Hotel on Thursday last, as the Waterford Right 2 Water Campaign rallied opponents to the Water Charge ahead of next Wednesday's national protest outside Leinster House.

The meeting, which ran for just over two hours, called on the people of Waterford to remain committed to the abolition of both the proposed charge and Irish Water itself, a refrain delivered by the meeting's keynote speakers.

Waterford Right 2 Water Chairman Tommy Hogan predicted a "significant number from Waterford" will attend next Wednesday's rally, which coincides with International Human Rights Day.

"Over the last two weeks or so, the dogs have been let out of the cages in terms of attacking the campaign because the campaign has been so successful since October 11th," he said. "Over 300,000 people have come out onto the streets since then, and that represents a major challenge to the Government."

While all speakers didn't approve of the Jobstown incident which garnered major media publicity a fortnight ago, Tommy Hogan described it as "a minor incident in the greater scheme of things".

He added: "The forest of newsprint that was used to describe the distress that Joan Burton said she felt subjected to that day has to be contrasted with the distress that thousands of people find themselves in, in relation to the dire straits that they're in after six years of austerity and the dread of this further tax coming down the track on top of this."

Earlier that day, Mr Hogan had spoken to a woman who was in tears at the other end of the phone, a conversation that had him also in tears.

"She told me she felt suicidal, she said she honestly didn't know where she was going to get the money to pay this, the €160, and it was terrible to listen to that, and I'm sure that's a phone call which elected representatives have to deal with on a regular basis."

As for the Government's climbdown on charges, Tommy Hogan added: "We didn't march for concessions - we marched for abolition."

Senator David Cullinane claimed that the public backlash to the Water Charge had "rocked the State to its foundation".

Of the reduced charges proposed by the coalition, the Sinn Féin representative stated that the Government remained committed "to introducing the principle of the water tax, and once they bring that in, we know, given what has happened with bin charges, property tax and other regressive charges, that the water charge shall go only one way - and that us up".

Speaking on behalf of Deputy John Halligan (Independent) who was tied up with Dáil business that evening, Sean Walsh said the continued installation of water meters at a cost in excess of €500 million represented "absolute madness".

He told the gathering: "Water is a basic human right and it must not be made a commodity."

In an impassioned speech, Right 2 Water National Spokesperson Brendan Ogle (Unite) said the campaign was one which

featured “lots of anger – but the right sort of anger”.

Mr Ogle added: “If the numbers we’ve had out on the streets had been replicated in Britain, you would have four and a half million people out protesting, and that’s well worth noting.”

Calling on the working class and the political left to concentrate on what they agree on as opposed to what has consistently divided them since the foundation of the State, Brendan Ogle described water as “the last frontier”.

“Surely we have given enough over the past six years. Let’s abolish this charge, let’s abolish Irish Water, let’s do this one thing and our children and our grandchildren will thank us for forever,” he said to a rapturous ovation.

Unite and Right 2 Water will be running at least two buses from Waterford to Dublin on Wednesday next, departing Waterford at 9.30am, with a return charge of €8 for anyone wishing to travel via such means.