

2005 Protests and strike against Northern Ireland Water Charges

(February 2005) A series of rallies have taken place in Northern Ireland in protest at plans to introduce water charges, 12 February. The demonstrations against the government plans took place in Belfast, Enniskillen and Londonderry. Campaigners in Belfast were joined by trade union members, politicians and members of the public.

Organisers said the marches were being held to send a message to the government that people were united in their opposition to charges. Reforms announced last August would see the Water Service become a Government Owned Company, or GoCo, in 2006 and be almost completely self funding by 2008. { {Jobs lost}} On Wednesday (9 February), Water Service workers staged a one-day strike over proposals to reform the service. (NIPSA, GMB, AMICUS and ATGWU) Members of the four unions voted for industrial action, saying attempts to engage the government in negotiations had failed. Plans for the government company to take over from the existing Water Service could see up to 700 jobs lost. The umbrella group for the unions said the strike would not affect consumers.

And from a NIPSA Press Release

Water Service workers go on strike - Wednesday 9 February 2005 NIPSA BACKS WATER SERVICE STRIKE} Northern Ireland's largest public service union NIPSA has pledged to give full support for the Water Service workers and unions (NIPSA, AMICUS, ATGWU and GMB) in the dispute with the Government over its plans for Water Reform. The unions are objecting to the massive programme of job losses and the threats to members' terms and conditions from the reforms which would also see the introduction of water charges for every household in Northern Ireland. NIPSA General Secretary John Corey said: - "Water Service workers are determined to fight for their jobs and to protect pensions and other hard earned terms and conditions.

The Government's Water Reform proposals are a dual attack on every household

and also on 2,000 Water Service employees who with inadequate resources deliver this essential public service. The unfair way Water Service staff are being treated under the Government's reforms will result in hundreds of members being under threat of redundancy and all Water Service staff facing the loss of their civil service employment." NIPSA represents around 800 members employed in the Water Service in a range of administrative, professional/technical and scientific posts. These members voted for industrial action as a last resort in the battle to secure fair treatment. Mr Corey added: - "For over two years the trade unions have sought to negotiate a fairer way forward but Direct Rule Ministers have refused to listen. There is total opposition across Northern Ireland to the Water Reform proposals. We are calling on the Minister to enter into round table talks to provide a solution to the problems facing the Water Service that is fair to Water Service workers and to the people of Northern Ireland."

NIPSA also called on the people of Northern Ireland to come out and support the public rallies against water charges being held on Saturday 12 February 2005 in Belfast, Derry, Cookstown and Enniskillen.

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