

Cuts or Water Charges? Axe Stormont!

Don't Pay



Water Charges



Health service in Northern Ireland in line for massive cuts!

Back in January 2008 the Executive and the Assembly approved spending plans for 2008-11, which, according to Finance Minister Sammy Wilson, included record levels of investment in public services, housing and schools etc. Since then however the recession has led to the imposition of cuts by Westminster.

Cutting £367million

So during the June 2009 Monitoring Round, the Finance Minister decided that a review of the budget of the following year was needed. The outcome of this review resulted in a proposed budget cut of £367 million. Naturally there has been a lot of political disagreement regarding this issue.

Health Minister Michael McGimpsey feels that health cannot bear the brunt of any more cuts. While he is obviously correct he warns that while he will resist these 'daft' cuts very strongly he cannot guarantee that frontline services will be protected. While health spending is the smallest percentage cut, 2.1% (average is 2.6%), it is the largest cash cut - £113.5 million. This is what Sammy Wilson calls "a targeted approach."

Health and Social Care Service already have a £700 million target of efficiency savings and health workers and health service users are struggling as it is.

Meanwhile Catriona Ruane has warned that education cuts will involve "pain". We can be damn sure that the pain will not be

experienced by Ruane but by working class kids, parents and staff as she prepares to cut classroom funding and jobs.

It has been predicted that these cuts will result in 4,000 job losses.

Blaming the poor

According to the Review of 2010-11 Spending Plans Consultation Document one of the main reasons for the strained budget is the non-payment of water charges. The Executive have 'kindly' deferred water rates for another year. The option presented by the Finance Department and in the media is water charges or budget cuts.

The Assembly's commitment to sorting out the Northern Ireland Civil Service Equal Pay Claim, brought on behalf of 13,000 underpaid civil servants, was also put forward as a reason for the cuts. Until a wee deal tied into the Sinn Fein/DUP policing and justice agreement saw Westminster foot the bill for that. Implementation is still a long way off and likely to throw up a lot of problems.

Costs of Stormont—they all add up

Over the years the Executive have, like politicians the world over, squandered and mismanaged money. Even while the assembly was suspended most members still claimed the £48,000 allowance for office costs. Former UUP John Taylor paid £33,600 in 2005/06 out of his allowance into a company he was a director of. This was approved by the Assembly. Stormont MLA's have claimed £8 million in expenses in one year. This includes everything from bin bags

and weed killer to expensive furniture. Some examples of how Assembly members spend your money are as follows: UUP Basil McCrea claimed £861.35 for a desk. Nigel Dodds claimed £525 for a sofa. Peter Robinson claimed £375 to have the leather on his desk replaced! I don't even know why a person would need a leather-bound desk.

Figures recently emerged that for one year the Stormont canteen cost £320,203!

DUP MLA provides a (partial) solution

Writing in December/January's edition of *Fortnight* the DUP MLA Peter Weir looked at meeting these cuts through cutting our political institutions. He asked "Does a population of 1.7 million people require 108 MLAs and 11 Government Departments?" and answered himself: "A simple reduction in the number of Assembly Members would save nearly £4million per year in salaries and office cost allowances alone. Cutting back the number of government departments from 11 to 6 could deliver savings of tens of millions of pounds each year."

Now, while it might be argued that Peter's scheme would have the added benefit of making the political position of the DUP (and Sinn Fein) stronger at the expense of smaller political parties, we think he might be onto something.

Axe Stormont

Imagine the savings to be made if we took Peter's suggestions that wee bit further and axed Stormont. Think of the money that could be put into education, the health service, public transport, social housing instead of into the pockets of politicians and bureaucrats. Further still the money that would be available if we axed the jobs of bosses and fat cats. For an example of how working people might begin to bring meaningful change to our own lives see the short but inspirational article of factory socialisation in Argentina on page 11. In the meantime we need to organise to resist these cuts. This is not our crisis—we should not pay for it!

The politicians in the Assembly are now openly speaking about imposing water charges on householders. This additional bill will be in the region of £400 a year - but once they are introduced, like electricity prices, they will increase.

Householders already pay for water through our rates. The introduction of water charges will be a double-tax. People are already crippled with high bills. Rising unemployment and wage cuts have seen ordinary peoples incomes savaged, and now the MLA's in Stormont want to take more out of our pockets.

The introduction of water charges has nothing to do with investment in the water service - it is part of the process of privatisation of the service. Once charges are established, it opens the door to private companies to take over to make profits.

100,000 say 'WE WON'T PAY!'

The We Won't Pay Campaign has successfully built mass support for non-payment of water charges since 2003. So far, over 100,000 people have signed our non-payment pledge. This campaign has been responsible for forcing the British Government and the Assembly to defer water charges for the past 4 years. This has saved every household hundreds of pounds. Water charges can be defeated through a mass boycott. The poll tax in Britain was defeated through mass non-payment and water charges were defeated in Southern Ireland in the 1990's as a result of a mass non-payment campaign. It is not a criminal offence to refuse to pay water charges. An organised mass non-payment campaign will force the politicians to scrap water charges.

Join the campaign

There are lots of things individuals can do to help build support for the We Won't Pay Campaign. Can you leaflet your street /estate /college/ workplace? Can you ask your local shops to display a poster advertising the campaign? Can you get others in your community to help you promote our campaign?

Contact us on 02890311778 or e-mail: wewontpay@bntconnect.com <http://www.wewontpaycampaign.com/>