

Prime Minister

MS 31/1

PRIME MINISTER

WATER STRIKE - PRESENTATION

The latest return this morning from the COI of presentational activity in the regions by Water Authority leaders shows some increase in employer activity but evidence of significant efforts only in the North West, South West and Southern.

Editorial opinion still seems to be substantially with the Government.

Waterworkers are, as expected, producing pay-slips showing earnings well below the stated average.

Extracts from Regional round-ups are as follows:

South West

"South West Water Authority chairman, Len Hill, who is also chairman of the employers' side of the National Joint Council for the water industry, urges waterworkers to accept arbitration. In extensive interviews in the Western Morning News and Western Evening Herald Mr Hill, a former trade unionist, said he found it difficult to understand why they did not take their case to arbitration. 'They have got 7.8% - arbitration is not going to give them less' he claimed."

"There is no significant evidence in the Wessex Water Authority area of employers' spokesmen putting forward their case. However prominence is given in the Bristol Evening Post to waterworkers making public details of their pay packets in support of their claim."

Yorkshire and Humberside

"There is no evidence that the YWA is engaging in any media efforts to convince their workers or the public that the pay offer should be accepted: the newspapers report only the comments made by the national negotiators and Government Ministers."

"Local coverage: more case histories of individual workers earning considerably less than the quoted national average waterworker wage."

East

"The only message given out by the Anglian Water Authority to its consumers during the weekend, and widely reported in most papers, is a 'Save It' appeal."

"Anglian Water Authority has issued no statements re their case in the dispute. They say that this is a matter for the National Water Council."

"An editorial in the East Anglian Daily Times states that the Government has settled firmly for another war of attrition and, on balance, this must be right. . . . . The strikers may have over-estimated their strength."

North East

"Comment from both the employers and trade union sides was drawn from statements by national representatives."

"Northumbrian Water Authority chairman, Mr Michael Straker, was said (Evening Chronicle, 29.1.83) to be sure that strikers would come to the rescue in an emergency rather than allow troops to move in. He was reported to be confident that staff 'would help out in a critical situation so there would be no need to call in the military'."

London and South

"The Evening Argus (Brighton) headlined across its front page on Saturday a robust warning from the Southern Water Authority chairman Sir Godfrey Taylor, that waterworkers in Sussex could face redundancies if they win more money.

"The newspaper went on: 'in a get-tough stance to the strike Sir Godfrey insisted' 'the Water Authority will not back down over this - there is no way we will give in'."

"He said he hoped the unions would now go to arbitration and added that he was furious that people in other industries had lost jobs because of the water strike."

North West

"Blackburn and Burnley Evenings report George Mann, chairman of the NW Water Authority, as saying that the pay offer was worth between £9 and £11 per week to the average waterworkers doing a few hours overtime a week. He outlined the effects of the offer in a letter sent to all of the region's 4,000 manual workers."

"George Mann, appeared on Granada Television on Friday evening with union negotiator Gateley of G and M. He spoke on Radio Cumbria on Sunday and was interviewed by the Cumberland Evening News and Liverpool Echo over the weekend. It is understood that arrangements had been made for him to appear on two television stations and one radio station today and tomorrow. . . . . In addition to spelling out the employers' offer, he has been saying that the increase is higher than three settlements for the miners in recent years."

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Midlands

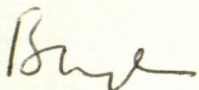
"Hereford Evening News (Friday 28) gives prominence to a warning by Welsh W A Division Manager that 'If the water strike goes into next week it will make the summer of 1976 look like a picnic'."

"Today's Birmingham Post's second leader says: 'It was only to be expected that before too much time elapsed the waterworkers on strike would begin to show the unacceptable face of trade unionism. As if it is not bad enough that the whole country is being held to ransom over an unrealistic pay claim, the strikers have turned to spiting the sick and the elderly'."

"The Nottingham Evening Post's leader (28 Jan) referred to a series it ran examining the performance of the Severn Trent Water Authority. The Post said the whole structure of the Water Authorities 'monstrous monoliths' should be examined."

"Leicester Mercury quoted a union spokesman as saying that the gap was closing and that they wanted a settlement. If the agreement was over 12 months instead of 16, it would be accepted."

I am copying to the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Environment.



B. INGHAM  
31 January, 1983