

WATER DISPUTE - REGIONAL PRESENTATION

Today's (Thursday) return by COI contains the following main features:

- unions doing their best to scare public about water supplies and discharge of sewage;
- continuing concentration on physical effects of strike but little evidence of hardship;
- adverse union reaction to any management moves in dispute to ease operations or which might be seen as 'propaganda';
- first signs of Backbench MP activity; and
- little evidence again of Water Authority public relations beyond advice on supplies.

Extracts from the reports are as follows:-

North East

Householders in the North East are only days away from having to boil water supplies, but there is some disagreement over how long it will be before the order comes striking waterworkers say that 'safe' supplies to many parts of the North would only last for two days, but the Northumbrian Water Authority says the region has 'four or five' days left.

An NWA spokesman said the weather was in their favour now with a good flow of water in the rivers which was helping to dilute the sewage.

According to the Echo, striking waterworkers in much of the region are threatening to withdraw all emergency cover because NALGO supervisors have been working extra shifts to man equipment in treatment plants.

Yorkshire and Humberside

Main story today concerns another 400,000 consumers, mainly in the Sheffield and Barnsley areas, who have received boiling orders. The same paper highlights the row between PUSG Giles Shaw and Robert Adley MP, about the efficacy and safety of chemical additives as an alternative to boiling.

A feature in the same paper on waterworkers' pay, which includes comparisons with other groups, is generally favourable to the waterworkers case.

The Huddersfield examiner leads with the appeal to industry to cut back on demand in order to maintain domestic supplies. Large firms are being approached directly by YWA to stress the point.

East

Again there is little regional coverage of the water dispute and little evidence of hardship as a result of the strike. An AWA spokesman says "We are reasonably confident of keeping water supplies going".

An editorial in the Cambridge Evening News says that there is a "Sneaking suspicion that there is one section of the waterworkers whose claim for more pay wins more sympathy than the others. They are the sewage workers, whose occupation must be just about the most unpalatable of any that society can produce".

Peterborough Evening Telegraph is the first paper in the region to quote an MP. Mr John Major, MP for Huntingdon, is quoted "The strike is one of the most unjustified disputes of recent years. The current pay offer means a rise of £10 a week. I hope local waterworkers will give a lead to their colleagues so that this dispute may be brought to an end without open warfare on the public."

London and South East

Regional media coverage monitored so far today concentrates on practical effects of strike. Comments noted from Water Authorities confined to guidance to the public.

South West

Thrifty use of water is saving approx. 10% a day, says Wessex Water.

TGWU spokesman claims that local Severn Trent Water Authority management (whose chairman is also chairman of the National Water Council) has been told "To goad us to see how far we will go", says Western Daily Press.

Midlands

Comment from the managerial and consumer side (as opposed to the unions) is beginning to appear but by far the majority of coverage is still, naturally, operational. However: Birmingham Post, 3 February, - "Meanwhile the Severn-Trent Water Authority entered the propaganda war yesterday by listing amounts workers would have collected in their pay packets if they had accepted the employers' average 7.3% offer.

A spokesman said waterworkers' pay packets this week would have been thicker by between £6.50 and £12.41 if they had accepted the offer.

Northampton MP, Michael Morris, has launched an attack on the waterworkers' demand for more money and their claim that they do a dirty job and told the annual general meeting of Duston Ladies Conservative Club "The work they do is not particularly dangerous and unpleasant."

Burton Mail: "The waterworkers' strike is madness which will harm the old and weak and put jobs unnecessarily at risk" says Burton's MP Mr Ivan Lawrence.

North West

Most regional evenings carry NW Water Authority appeal for economies in consumption.

Unions are seeking written assurance from NWWA that management will not carry out jobs normally done by watermen.

Manchester Evening News, Liverpool Echo and others carry threat of emergency cover in region being withdrawn because of "unwarranted intervention" in dispute by management, according to a NUPE leader, who also hit out at Water Council survey because of small sample taken.

In Letters to the Editor, an old age pensioner says that when water is cut off, people should withhold their water rate as protest against watermen's selfish wage demand. A Blackpool reader says the strike is "disgusting".

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

RP LB
B. INGHAM
2 February 1983