

Prime Minister

Ms 11/2

cc Home Secretary  
Secretary of State for  
the Environment

PRIME MINISTER

WATER STRIKE - COI RETURNS

Not attracting a great deal of attention and what attention there is is largely confined to the physical effects of the dispute - which are not very great in some areas.

No deterioration in opinion discernible.

Details from the Regions:

North Eastern, Newcastle

- Coverage of the water dispute relegated mainly to the inside pages of the North East's newspapers and to brief news items on local radio and TV stations.
- Northern Echo reports that the NWA yesterday (Thursday) issued a press release claiming that striking workers were earning gross weekly wages of between £95 and £222. "That's absolutely fairy tales", a NUPE official told the paper.
- Another unfortunate feature of the dispute is the emergence of "conmen" who are posing as Water Board officers to trick their way into old people's houses and stealing money.

Yorkshire and Humberside, Leeds

- Much reduced coverage of the dispute in both the evenings and this morning's press.
- South Yorkshire media are concerned to stress the "critical" state of water supplies. Unless consumption is reduced it is felt that rationing could be introduced soon (Doncaster Evening Post).

Eastern, Cambridge

- There is scant coverage of the water strike in the Region's papers today.
- Peterborough Evening Telegraph reports that water workers in that city have imposed a total ban on any emergency repairs involving sewers and have warned that the stoppage could spread to water supplies. The action came when strikers saw senior management of Anglian Water Authority clearing screens at a sewer works.
- Charles Cronin, NALGO's top official in East Anglia, is quoted: "If the employers attempt to pressure our people into doing this work - such action will only exacerbate the situation".

Midlands, Birmingham

- Last night's Evening Mail carries an exclusive interview with Sir William Dugdale, who said the only way out of the dispute

was through arbitration. He said he could not believe that people should be willing to put their pay packets at risk for what was an outstandingly good award in the public sector in a particularly difficult year.

- Nottingham Evening Post's leader said the dispute had reached a stage when the layman feels like banging both sides' heads together. It suggested the unions should be putting the 8.5 per cent to a new ballot.
- Shropshire Star reported Sir William Dugdale as saying that Union leaders were misjudging their members' mood. The majority would be ready to accept the latest deal, he thought.

#### London and South Eastern

- Media monitored so far today confined mainly to factual reports on the physical effects of the water strike in the region.

#### South Western, Bristol

- Bristol Evening Post reports a Bristol waterworks company spokesman as saying that during the first few days of the strike consumption in Bristol dropped by two million gallons a day. But now, with few in the city affected, there is very little saving.
- A Wessex Water Authority spokesman says that outside Bristol there has been a 12 per cent reduction in the use of water.

#### North Western, Manchester

- No broadcasts by Water Authority Chairman yesterday or any spokesman.
- Manchester Evening News editorial calls it a "crazy dispute" and says it is patently obvious to anyone with an ounce of sense that when a third party is called in whom both sides can trust, the conclusions reached "must be accepted without demur on both sides".
- A letter from a waterworker in Bolton Evening News states his take-home pay is £81-£83 a week for working in slop, mud and sewer water. "We don't want to strike and cause suffering, but the Government gave us no choice. Top Civil Servants got 14 per cent, no questions asked. Also top people in the Government got big pay rises for ruining the country".

#### Late News

*Bernard* Arrangements have been made today (Friday) for the Chairman of the NW Water Authority to go on Radio Manchester today and most other local radio stations over the weekend. He is expected to emphasise the need for dispute to go to arbitration, the fact that Unions signed an agreement with ACAS to do so as a last resort and to urge waterworkers themselves to think seriously about agreeing to arbitration. The Chairman is sending a letter to every manual waterworker this weekend re-emphasising the benefits of the employers' offer. There will be a press release distributed tonight to tomorrow by NWWA on text of Chairman's letter and his advice to employees.

BERNARD INGHAM

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