

WATER STRIKE - REGIONAL PRESENTATION

Leave aside Wales, North West and London and South East Region have clearly been - and are - the most active with the media at a political public relations, as distinct from information level.

Leading articles show hostility to continued strike and disruption.

Evidence of increasing tension between workers and pickets.

But still remarkably little coverage, showing how little the dispute has hit on ordinary people.

Details from regions are as follows:

North East

Rodney Bickerstaffe, NUPE General Secretary, affirmed during a visit to Tyneside last night (15.2.83) that the unions are not prepared to end the strike despite the move for an independent inquiry.

Visiting sewage treatment workers engaged in a sit-in at the Northumbrian Water Authority's Howdon works, he is reported to have said: "The 29,000 people around the country who decided to strike for the first time didn't take this action lightly and they are not now going to throw in the towel and leave it to the inquiry to sort out."

A leader in the Northern Echo endorses the Prime Minister's plea for a return to work and suggests that, at the least, there should be a ballot on an immediate return to work. The Journal's editorial view is similar and the paper does some arithmetic to demonstrate the financial cost to the strikers of an end to the strike. "Even if they were to be awarded a 10% wage increase, it would already take them more than seven months to pull back the pay that has been lost. If they were kept out for a further week it would be nearly ten months before they could break even", it states.

Yorkshire and Humberside

Little of consequence in today's press.

A local union spokesman is quoted as saying that the ban on emergency cover in the YWA region, which started yesterday, is likely to continue until the inquiry report is accepted.

There are fewer press items about hardship cases than earlier in the week.

East

There is a minimum of 'local' water strike coverage in the region's main papers, though some give space to the 'national' moves towards a settlement.

Only indigenous coverage is in the Cambridge Evening News which reports that local striking waterworkers have voted in favour of maintaining emergency cover, to be reviewed daily.

Residents in Clare, Suffolk, are considering calling in contractors to repair mains damage and, as suggested by Lord Denning, send the bill to Anglian Water Authority.

London and South East

Striking water men in Sussex have been told by the Southern Water Authority chairman, Sir Godfrey Taylor: "Go back to work - you are losing money for nothing."

Brighton Evening Argus says that Sir Godfrey said that with the likelihood of a committee of inquiry to resolve the dispute, there was no longer any point to the strike. No union reaction is quoted.

In an editorial, the same paper says that there are no winners in the dispute but there are "plenty of losers".

"Let us hope that when this wholly unpleasant affair is over, the repairs are carried out as speedily as possible, with priority given to those who have been deprived the longest of proper water supplies. That, at least, shouldn't be the subject of the sort of niggardly bickering that has characterised this dispute."

Kent Evening Post reports that pickets have pinned up a list of "blackleg" white collar workers' names outside a Chatham Depot. NUPE area officer is reported as saying there is "tremendous bitterness" which in the long term will have disastrous effects on the relationship between white collar workers and manual workers in the industry.

Bristol

Flying pickets clashed with the 14 waterworkers returning to a water depot at Priorswood, Taunton, trying in vain to get them not to work.

Bristol Evening Post and Dorset Evening Echo stick mainly to the national stories of peace hopes and engineering workers in the water industry called out from Sunday.

Midlands

Leaders in newspapers call for an early return to work. Chesterfield Star said an independent inquiry would be a face-saver for both sides and would almost certainly result in an improved deal for waterworkers. It should go ahead even if waterworkers insist that its findings are not binding, because they would face total public condemnation if they refused a reasonable offer.

Northants Chronicle and Echo asked where was the sense of prolonging the strike now that the two sides have agreed terms for a committee of inquiry. Northants union leader said he was relieved.

Wolverhampton Express and Star commented on the entry of Lord Denning into the wrangle. It added an extremely hostile element and was another reason why a speedy end was vital. Interference by individuals could shatter what fragile rapport has been created.

A mouldings firm has more than trebled production of water filters to meet increased demand.

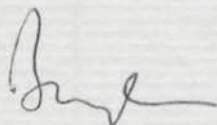
North West

NW Water Authority spokesmen were on radio and television yesterday in response to union claims that lead levels were unacceptably high in parts of Tameside, Greater Manchester.

Liverpool Echo says grim determination was being voiced by striking water men on Merseyside, despite national peace move.

Manchester Evening News says despite hopes of an end to the dispute, strikers in the North West took a new hard line yesterday, occupying sewage plants across the region and some local union leaders demanded that any peace deal must be agreed by the membership first.

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



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16 February 1983