IR

Prime Minister

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Would that we could handle power workers like this here.

Mr Holmes

PRIME MINISTER

MT

P.

10/9

When passing through Los Angeles recently I was particularly interested to note the handling and outcome of the power workers strike there and thought you too might be interested in a brief resume of what occurred.

2 The power and water workers in Los Angeles were offered a 9 per cent pay increase which they declined claiming 18 per cent and embarked upon strike action. As it is illegal for these workers to strike the authorities took out a Court Order and the union leaders were held to be in contempt of court. Meanwhile management took over the running of the plant and purchased electricity supplies from out of State companies. There was however a threat of complete blackouts and hospitals were warned to see that their generators were in order, so that the unions were in a fairly powerful position. Various union leaders were interviewed from time to time on television stating their determination to see the matter through and expressing derision for the Court Order. Within 24 hours of such expressions of derision they were back at the negotiating table. The main issue of the negotiations not being the pay settlement but an amnesty from the summonses which had been issued against the unions. Within a further two days the strike was settled. Eleven per cent was offered and accepted, no amnesty was given, so that the summonses and fines are still outstanding and furthermore the unions are having to pay for any company vehicles which were used for picketing. A very limited number of pickets were allowed during the course of the strike.

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3 While all this was going on there was no political controversy whatsoever, no politicians participated critisising the administration on behalf of the strikers, nor did the media participate in any controversial commentaries whatsoever but merely reported the facts. Nor was there any evidence of any strong public feelings for or against the strikers other than some mild concern about the possibility of a blackout.

4 This all illustrates vividly not only the difference in law and practice but most of all the difference in public and political attitudes in the United States.

Sally

SALLY OPPENHEIM

8 September 1980