

WATER DISPUTE - REGIONAL PRESENTATION

Yet again the North West, where Mr Giles Shaw was active on Friday, is virtually the only region where employers are consistently active.

Little evidence of any serious deterioration in the supply position.

Some evidence of desire for a return to work in Sussex.

Below are extracts from regional reports:

North East

Thousands of pupils have been told to stay away from North East schools today because of water and heating breakdowns. A further 131 homes in the region were cut off yesterday (Sunday) as the freezing weather caused more burst water mains.

A spokesman for the NWA said people in Newcastle and Northumberland were unlikely to be advised to boil water at least until the end of this week.

Yorkshire and Humberside

Appears to have been little further deterioration in the effects of the strike on either domestic or industrial users over the weekend.

Saturday's Yorkshire Post feared that a £5 - £10 productivity deal was unlikely to be genuine and should be carefully scrutinised. Same leader felt that the public would not expect the Government to stand by for very much longer without calling in the troops.

Yorkshire Post and Sheffield Morning Telegraph report the breakdown of talks last night - emphasising the unions' bitterness over the "50p offer".

Local radio included interviews, this morning, with regional union leaders in which they claimed to have been 'conned and hoodwinked' by the employers.

East

Little evidence of hardship in this region as a result of the water strike. East Anglian Daily Times quotes an Anglian Water Authority spokesman as saying that many of its four million consumers were becoming complacent. Consumption dropped by ten per cent in the first week of the dispute, but economy measures were being abandoned.

Other main papers in the region give 'parochial' coverage.

Southend Evening Echo features the general manager of Essex Water Company in a 'pro-management' story on how he is coping with all but twenty of his 490 workers on strike.

Midlands

A Severn-Trent spokesman accused the union leader of trying to frighten the people of Birmingham - especially the old and the sick.

The weekend papers were full of optimism that the strike was all over bar the shouting.

London and South East

The Evening Argus (Brighton) reported on Saturday that 15 workers in the Lewes area have asked water chiefs for assurances that they will not be sacked if they return to work and lose their union cards. They have asked for a meeting with the Southern Water Authority area manager today (Monday). The paper says that at least 10 sewerage workers are strike-breaking in Sussex and another 30 say they want to return to work as soon as possible.

Newspapers in the South East are beginning to carry letter pages devoted to the dispute. Those monitored so far opinions in favour of the employers' position outnumber those expressing support for the strikers.

Kent Messenger (February 4) comments "By and Large, people are fed up with the persistently cynical attitude of trade union leaders who exploit every dispute for political gain."

South West

Western Daily Press reports the case of an engineering contractor from Bridgwater who says he is on the water unions' "hit list". Mr Arthur Duckett turned out to repair a breach in the sea wall at Burnham but claims he was later told that he has been "blacked" by the union for his action.

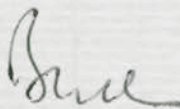
North East

Giles Shaw was on Radio Manchester and Piccadilly Radio during his visit to Manchester on Friday and was reported in Manchester Evening News. "Waterworkers should go back to work and accept the 7.3% pay offer - it was the best they could get," he said.

Chairman of NW Water Authority was on Piccadilly Radio on Friday evening talking about the general situation and saying that the coming productivity talks would not offer anything greatly different to offers already made. NWWA spokesmen emphasised there was no worry about the taps running dry "for a long time yet".

Several Evenings over the weekend report a NUPE regional officer saying there is no hope of NW unions accepting a productivity deal, they want an increase in basic pay - no scope for increased productivity.

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



B. INGHAM

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