

PRIME MINISTER

cc Home Secretary.  
Secretary of State  
for the Environment.

WATER STRIKE - REGIONAL PRESENTATION

Today's report contains evidence of a desire to return to work in some regions, and moves by some Water Authorities to encourage this by offering job protection.

Recourse to the law by Water Authorities to secure the ejection of strikers from premises is interestingly exciting little trade union comment or resistance.

But the strike is still not causing much fuss and the details from the regions are as follows:

North East

A Group of striking waterworkers who have occupied a Tyneside sewerage plant are the main focus of attention in the dispute today (Monday) in the North East. Northumbrian Water Authority has applied for a Court Order instructing the men to leave.

The Sunday Sun also reports that thousands of trout have been killed by untreated sewage flowing into a stretch of the River Derwent. Derwent Angling Club say their five thousand-plus fish stock - which took four years and cost £6,000 to build up - has been destroyed.

Journal (Newcastle) in a leader today, says there appears at last to be on the horizon a means of solving the dispute. The paper says Environment Secretary, Mr Tom King, is expected to back the idea of a three-man committee of inquiry into the waterworkers' pay claim. It seems that it is now simply a question of finding the right collection of words which would enable both sides to agree to the setting up of the inquiry. That, surely, should not be beyond the wit and imagination of man.

In Cleveland union leaders were said to be incensed by a letter sent to workers by NWA's managing director, Mr Frank Ridley. In it he said: "I can assure all staff that those who put the public first will certainly have no reason to suffer at the end of the dispute, no matter what working arrangements are eventually decided upon."

### Yorkshire & Humberside

No dramas over the weekend. Low key coverage in today's press emphasises that hopes of settling the dispute now rest firmly on an independent inquiry.

Yorkshire Post (Business) bitterly attacks the strikers and contends that occupation of pumping stations and prevention of chlorination should not be tolerated by any society. Union negotiators have made rings round management side.

Saturday's Sheffield Morning Telegraph reports the comments of a High Court Judge that damage caused by a burst main to premises and stores of a Rotherham firm should be paid for by the YWA. Also quotes a YWA spokesman as ruling out payment of water rate rebates to consumers affected by the dispute.

### East

Few reports of hardship as a result of the water strike.

Editorial in the Cambridge Evening News states that the two sides in the dispute seem to have become polarised very quickly indeed. They have also become extremely isolated as pressure grows from those who stand on the sidelines for both to swallow some of their pride and find a settlement.

Southend Evening Echo carries a front-page item that angry water-workers want to return to work but risk losing their jobs if they do so. Anglian Water Authority spokesman said: "We will find men work if they are willing to take the risks, but because of the closed shop we can't give any guarantees."

### London and South East

The Evening Argus, Brighton (Feb. 12) reports that hundreds of Sussex waterworkers may return to work today (Feb. 14). There are 150 blue-collar strike-breakers in the Southern Water Authority's area - almost 10% of the workforce - and "industry sources" insist that hundreds more are planning to follow suit. The paper quoted Southern Water Authority chairman, Sir Godfrey Taylor, as saying: "Yes, there are people asking to come back. I don't believe now that the strike will go on much longer."

The paper says Mr Brendan Nee, National Union of Public Employees area officer, denies the workers are losing heart.

### South West

Wessex WA obtained a Court Order for men occupying the Taunton Sewage Works to appear before a High Court Judge, but the men had already left. A shop steward threatens to leave the union because of the men's action. At Swindon Sewage Works a sit-in was ended by a NUPE official.

Strikers at Cirencester worked for three hours in heavy snow to restore supplies to eight pensioners at Weston-Subedge.

After management plugged a pipeline leak, Severn Trent waterworkers decided to withdraw emergency cover at the weekends. CBI warns that West\* jobs could be lost because their British customers would order from abroad rather than wait even one week.

### Midlands

Derby Evening Telegraph reported on Saturday Industry Secretary Patrick Jenkin's "fierce" attack on striking waterworkers. It is nothing short of outrageous that people who are being paid £140 a week and could earn £145 just by going back to work now should be depriving whole communities of the essentials of life in order to get more."

Leamington Spa Courier in a leader said the strike was enough to make consumers put some thick heads (from both sides) under the cold tap. Trouble is they can't spare the water.

### North West

A quiet weekend in the North West amid rising hopes of an inquiry being set up which could end the strike.

The chairman of the North West Water Authority, George Mann, made several local radio broadcasts hammering home the employer's case. So far there has been no response reported to the individual letters sent to watermen by the Authority.

Press comment is scarce and most front pages of regional evening newspapers fail to carry any waterstrike stories.

The Chester Chronicle reports first signs of a crack in the watermen's solidarity. It quotes an unnamed NUPE striker as declaring the men are not worth what they are claiming. He admits to working only 25 of his 36 hours a week. He also claims many men joined the strike because they fear repercussions from the unions when it is finally settled.