

It's time to take back the tap



Our water industry is failing people and rewarding bosses, let's put it back in public hands

When it comes to water, England is the odd one out in that its water and sewerage services are privately owned. It is becoming more apparent that Margaret Thatcher's privatisation of the water industry in 1989 has failed.

The water industry is about as natural a monopoly as you can find. It is a vital resource we all depend on and with zero competition between the different companies. As our General Secretary Tim Roache told our 2018 Congress, 'if you go to your sink and you don't see a tap offering water from Thames Water or Yorkshire Water, you see hot and cold.'

As the leading trade union in the water industry GMB members have a close up view of the shortcomings of water privatisation. Pensions have been attacked, jobs have been outsourced and lost,



health and safety has consistently deteriorated and the lack of investment is there for our members to see.

These are symptoms of a fundamentally broken model which put incentives in all the wrong places. As a result, England's nine water and sewerage services are focused on shareholders and those at the top - not the public, the workforce or the environment.

GMB has longstanding policy in support of bringing water back into public ownership, but our Take Back the Tap campaign has been boosted because it chimes with Labour's manifesto commitment at the 2017 general election and the mood of the public.

We were delighted that **Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn supports our pledges** developed in conjunction with our Water Forum so that no worker would be worse off from public ownership, pensions would be maintained or improved, investment in infrastructure would be increased, outsourced jobs would be brought in-house and trade unions would help have a say in improving health and safety standards in the industry and that collective bargaining would be valued.

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GMB has led the way on this issue and got agreement from Labour that for those members working in the water industry who have shares are part of their package, they will be compensated from any loss in value so that no-one is worse off.



The corporate excess at the top of these companies is impossible to justify, yet this is what customers are paying for through their bills. Since privatisation in 1989, customers' water bills **have increased by 40% above inflation**.

As part of our Take Back the Tap campaign, GMB is showing the scale of the problems with the privatised water industry in England. It has resonated with the public and our lead officer Stuart Fegan has given countless interviews on the topic and we have had **widespread coverage from newspapers right across the political spectrum**.

“ Here's how many millions of litres of treated water are lost DAILY from England's privatised water company leaks:

United Utilities 439M

Northumbrian 134M

Yorkshire 295M

Severn Trent 432M

Anglian 180M

Wessex 68M

Thames 677M

Southern 88M

South West 84M [@GMB_union #TakeBackTheTap](#)

— Neil Foster (@NeilFosterGMB) [July 27, 2018](#)

GMB has highlighted:

2.4 billion litres of treated water **is wasted by England's privatised water companies each and every day**. United Utilities waste 430 million litres a day which has **not gone down well in the North West** as they approach a hosepipe ban.

The CEOs of the 9 water companies took home **an average of £1.2 million each year** which is six times more than the UK Prime Minister.



It's not just those 9 individuals who are paid at such a sky-high amount. The 54 most senior executives in England's water companies **took £175 million as a result** of salary, bonuses, pension contributions and other benefits between 2013 and 2017.

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Our most recent research with **Corporate Watch** has revealed that shareholders have **profited by £6.5 billion** between the same five year period. Some of that could have gone towards tackling leakages, improving services and lowering bills – but instead it has gone into pockets of those seeking to profit from our water.

This won't be the last hot summer as global temperatures continue to rise. Margaret Thatcher's failed privatisation of the water industry has led to leaking pipes wasting a trillion litres of treated water a year, a reduced and fragmented workforce under intense pressure while executive pay is indefensibly high in a sector with no competition. Shareholders profit from higher bills while millions of customers face greater restrictions. We can't carry on like this. That is why GMB will be continuing to campaign to Take Back the Tap and for a new water industry which works for the public and improves conditions for our members working in it.

For more information about the campaign contact stuart.fegan@gmb.org.uk (industrial) or neil.foster@gmb.org.uk (political).

This piece originally appeared on Class' blog

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