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AIRLINES

Statement by the Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. Sir Robert Menzies

The Prime Minister, Sir Robert Menzies, tonight released his reply to a letter he had received from the Premier of New South Wales, Mr. Renshaw, on Wednesday. The Prime Minister's reply reads :

"Your letter of October 20th seems to overlook the fact that it is only the commencement of your Air Transport Act, with its particularly harsh penalties, that can prevent a continuation of existing air services to Dubbo and Orange.

There is, in the Commonwealth's view, no reason whatsoever why the existing air services should not continue while the question of conflicting Commonwealth and State laws is resolved. Your proposal is that a change be made pending legal challenge. That would, of course, be contrary to usual practice which is to maintain the status quo pending the determination of any legal issues.

Despite what you say about previous judgments of the High Court and Privy Council, the truth is that neither has considered the position as it now stands. The judgments to which you refer seem to me to have little bearing on current matters, except that some comments made in the High Court judgments support the view, upon which the Commonwealth has acted, that the Commonwealth has wide powers in this field.

As I see it, your letter attempts to present the matter in such a form that the blame in the public mind for any dislocation of air services will fall on the Commonwealth whereas, in fact, any dislocation of air services can only result from a decision of your Government not to defer the commencement of your new Transport Act. If your Government is determined to let your Act come into force, and not to allow the status quo to continue pending the litigation, you will understand that my Government will have to make it clear to the public who is responsible for any dislocation of services which results.

R. G. MENZIES

PRIME MINISTER."

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CANBERRA,

22nd October, 1964.