



PRIME MINISTER

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ELECTORATE TALK - THE VICTORIAN STRIKE

Community life throughout the state of Victoria has been disrupted by the actions of 230 men. Motorists are going without petrol because a small section of the Transport Workers Union is confronting oil companies in Victoria and the Conciliation and Arbitration Commission, both rejecting indexation and seeking to impose on employers the cost of health care for which they have already been compensated.

This is taking place at a time when throughout Australia employers have voluntarily agreed to hold prices, and at a time when the Government is asking the ACTU President, Mr. Hawke, and the representatives of other national union bodies, to join in an overall income and price pause.

In the past, some commentators have accused the Commonwealth Government of seeking confrontation with the trade union movement.

This is a ludicrous charge. Nothing is further from the Government's intentions. We do not want confrontation. The fact is that these few members of the Transport Workers Union are confronting the people of Victoria.

What the Government wants is industrial harmony. The Government seeks a co-operative effort by all members of the community to work together, to restore economic activity to those levels which produced the prosperity we took so much for granted in the 1950s and 1960s.

The disruption to life in Victoria, because a handful of men want industrial conditions in advance of the rest of the community, is of deep concern.

In these circumstances, I have informed the Victorian Premier that the Commonwealth is willing to assist him in any action that the State Government might take.

The Victorian Government has the powers to protect the people of Victoria from such action as that taken by these 230 transport drivers.

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I understand, and I am gratified to hear, that the Victorian Premier is considering the legalities of the matter and his future action.

The dispute primarily affects Victoria, although there is a direct impact on interstate trade and commerce. In these circumstances, I have informed the Victorian Premier that Commonwealth officials would be made available to meet with State Government officials forthwith to consider how best to protect the people of Victoria from state-wide dislocation by a small group of people.

I hope that good sense, and an understanding of the fact that we are a community, will come through to the striking men, and will lead to an end to the dispute as soon as possible.

The Commonwealth is prepared to use all resources under its control to alleviate the hardship of the people of Victoria. Public opinion has been respected by employers since the seven heads of government of Australia made a call for a voluntary income and price pause. For example, on Friday, one large overseas company, Leyland, responded to public opinion by rescinding a projected price increase.

Last week, on the other hand, I found the President of the Australian Council of Trade Unions, Mr. Hawke, and the representatives of other national trade union bodies, quite impervious to public opinion.

They were not prepared to give any sort of commitment to the objectives in the heads of government agreement of income and prices restraint.

The demands of these Victorian Transport Workers for a sharp increase in pay would overturn the well-established principles of indexation. The claims of these Transport Union members at this time involve the repudiation of everything heads of government were calling for.

What is the point to a national conference about restraint when Mr. Hawke evades the issue and withholds even a personal commitment. At the same time, another small section of the trade union movement is making demands which greatly inconvenience all Victorians and which would make a mockery of the wage restraint part of the income and price pause.

It becomes clear why the Government sees little point in Mr. Hawke's proposed national conference.

I would like to emphasise again that it is important, whether or not the trade union leaders allow the wage price voluntary restraint to succeed, to stay within the overall wage setting system.

The Government will not look kindly on any company which gives in to union pressure of the kind being exerted in Victoria. Any firm which surrenders to pressure of this sort should know that the Government would feel disposed to subject its pricing policy to close examination through the powers which are available to the Government.
