



PRIME MINISTER

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AUSTRALIA-EEC TRADE

I welcome the assurance given in Brussels to the Australian Ambassador that there is now no question of cancelling the bi-lateral talks and that these will be held early in June.

It is my wish and the wish of all Australians, that the negotiations with the EEC that the Minister for Special Trade Representations, Mr. Garland, will have will be productive. We seek to achieve equitable trading opportunities with the major trading bloc in the world.

The Government has consistently and for many months pointed to the imbalance of opportunities between the EEC and Australia. We are virtually shut out of many of Europe's markets by quantitative restrictions and non-tariff barriers. On the other hand, Europe has much more open access to Australian markets.

The present opportunities are unequal. My government has the simple objective of giving Australia's producers a fair go in Europe. I have used, and will continue to use, direct and accurate language in describing the erosion of our markets in Europe since the Community came into being.

In addition to that, the dumping of their subsidized agricultural surpluses in other markets compounds our problems.

I was in Brussels last June. Mr. Howard left a detailed note in Brussels in October. Now, after Mr. Garland has left Australia for detailed discussions we learn the Community needs another month.

My responsibility to the Australian people was to express the Government's concern in forthright, direct and accurate terms, and that I did.

It is no credit to the Labor Party that while Australia's products were being shut out of Europe it raised no protest and no authoritative voice to arrest the trend. In their time, our markets for most of our major agricultural products virtually disappeared.

I find it incomprehensible that the Labor Party speaks on this issue only to chide the Government for seeking to redress what the Labor Party lost. They suggest the Community should be treated with kid gloves and that we should use a feather duster. If they themselves went even as far as that when they were in office, nobody was aware of it. Their great achievement was to lose markets.

Of all the political parties in all the democracies in the world, it is only the Australian Labor Party which advocates a counsel of despair in relation to Europe's agricultural policies. Australian farmers will remember that the Labor Party not only lost those markets, but now does not want the Government to do anything about regaining some of them.

At a time when Australia needs a total approach, with the Australian community standing with the Government totally and absolutely in its efforts, the ALP takes an attitude that can only undermine Australia's negotiating position. We can all remember that that is what the Labor Party did last year when it set out deliberately to undermine the strength of the Australian dollar for political purposes.

If the Labor Party was concerned for great national objectives, if the Labor Party was concerned to achieve the essential unity of purpose that would strengthen Australia in these vital discussions, they would support the Government in its effort and at the same time bring credit on themselves.

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