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JUL 12 1979

**PRIME MINISTER**

FOR MEDIA

12 JULY 1979

TELECOM

The Prime Minister sent the following telex to Premiers this morning:

"My dear Premier/Chief Minister,

I am writing to you because of my concern about the gravity of the situation that might exist throughout Australia if a continuation of the bans by the Australian Telecommunications Employees Association leads to a breakdown of the Telecom system. So far, problems have been principally confined to interstate communications. Further continuation of the bans, however, could lead to a degradation of local services. If other unions become involved, the entire system could be affected.

If the bans continue many in the community could be put at risk. Some essential services such as the electricity and gas networks depend, to an extent, on Telecom services. Many individuals in the community depend on communications for their health, and in the extreme, their lives. I am thinking particularly of the old and the infirm, the very young and the handicapped. Without communications, the house-bound will be unable to call for medical assistance, fire services, and help of other kinds.

The Commonwealth is giving careful thought to the ways in which assistance might be provided to those in the community who would be put at risk by the continuation of the bans. I assume that you are giving consideration to these matters.

I should make it clear that we are not only thinking about plans to cope with emergencies that might arise, if the bans continue. The Commonwealth Government is working actively to ensure that good sense prevails and that the relevant unions are persuaded to see that penalising the community in this way will not achieve their industrial objectives. No country can contemplate a situation in which essential services cannot be performed or are continually at risk. The community pays heavily for essential services and is entitled to see that they are provided. We shall do what we can both to ensure that essential services are provided and to ensure that any emergency is minimised.

"I shall be in touch with you shortly about possible arrangements for co-ordination of Commonwealth, State, Local Government and community-based assistance, should the continuation of the bans make that necessary.

Yours sincerely,

MALCOLM FRASER."

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