

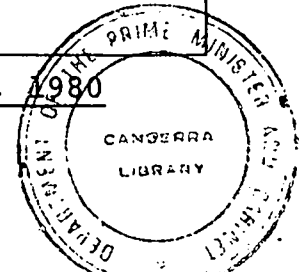


PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

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ELECTORATE TALK



Australia's oldest major export industry has just come through a pointless, futile strike, which lasted eleven weeks.

The wool industry has been disrupted around Australia and around the world because of the way in which a claim by the Storemen and Packers' Union was handled in the Arbitration Commission, and because the union refused to accept the final decision made by the Full Bench of the Commission.

The Government had hoped the normal arbitral processes would bring the dispute to an end. The Government became involved after it was clear that one large union was employing the tactic of dividing the industry so that only sections of it felt the brunt of a national strike. Within a week of the Government's involvement, the strike was over. The industry is now actively engaged in catching up with its delayed shipments and lost orders.

For the men involved there has been an enormous loss of wages. In Melbourne and Sydney, members of the Storemen and Packers' Union lost a total of 45 working days, as well as the opportunity to work at overtime or penalty rates during weekends. For these 400 workers, it will take about 10 years for them to make up their lost pay. For another 1,400 members of the Storemen and Packers' Union the loss of wages because of shorter stoppages was less, but it is nevertheless heavy. In the meantime, union officials continue to be paid.

The wool dispute is a reminder that it is always worthwhile to take a stand on principle against the bullying of trade union officials.

In New South Wales, the life of the community is under the threat of industrial action in the oil industry from the Transport Workers' Union. There is chronic industrial trouble in New South Wales, arising not only from the activities of trade union leaders, but also from the weakness of the Wran Labor Government.

Mr. Wran has demonstrated to the trade unions that if they bring pressure, he will give in. His industrial policy is simple: it is to buy time by surrendering to trade unions without paying any heed whatsoever to the consequences, either for the rest of the country or for the future. He puts public relations before principle.

This climate of industrial permissiveness which Mr. Wran has created in New South Wales is one which affects the whole country, as trade union leaders move in other States to match the gains they have made in New South Wales.

In New South Wales the issue in the current dispute is that of the rights of an individual. Mr. Leon Laidely is a self-made man running a small business who has been caught between a large oil corporation and a large union. They reached an agreement which cut off his supplies.

If two corporations had agreed to refuse to supply a third party, it would be outside the law. Should not the same principle apply when the agreement is between a big company and a big union?

It is unfortunate for Mr. Laidely that he operates in a State where the Premier puts publicity ahead of good Government.

The State Government has power to take action to ensure proper trading conditions for small businessmen like Mr. Laidely. Mr. Wran could have acted. He chose not to.

The Government has succeeded in bringing together all the parties to this dispute, including Mr. Laidely, in the desire to see a settlement which takes into account the interests of all parties and not just the Transport Workers' Union and the oil companies.

The Government has a duty to uphold the rights of individuals and a duty to maintain an effective industrial relations framework.

It is always possible to solve disputes by giving strikers what they ask for. Because of wider and fundamental implications for the Australian economy, disputes must be ended in a responsible and reasonable manner

The price of peace today should not be more industrial strife, higher inflation and greater unemployment tomorrow.