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THURSDAY, 13 AUGUST 1981

WAGE DETERMINATION AND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS STATEMENT FROM THE PREMIERS' CONFERENCE

The Premiers' Conference meeting in Canberra today expressed strong support for Australia's established system of wage fixation involving Commonwealth and State tribunals.

It was the responsibility of all Governments and all parties involved to make the system work.

The Commonwealth and State tribunals provide an avenue through which wage and other claims can be appropriately processed and in which due regard is given to equity and fairness and by which protection is provided to the lowest paid workers.

There is a system in place already. It will work if it is allowed to and if it is supported by all parties. Until such time as a national wage case is concluded, an industry claim needs to be brought forward quickly to enable principles to be determined following the abandonment of wage indexation.

The Conference asked the ACTU and the CAI to consult about the orderly handling of claims to come before the Conciliation and Arbitration Commission. In doing this they should have regard to the need to resolve some of the sharper pressures presently in the system, notably the need to establish conditions that would contribute to maintenance of living standards while ensuring the interests of the less industrially strong were appropriately safe-guarded.

The Commonwealth informed the conference that the CAI had expressed the view yesterday that the Metal Industry Award could be brought forward speedily for listing and hearing before the Commission. This could clarify principles on which industry cases would be based. It would also be a clear demonstration that the current system is working and can contribute to an orderly and equitable resolution of disputes.

The Governments committed themselves to seeking common principles so that there can be orderly processing of claims and consistency of treatment in both Commonwealth and State tribunals. They agreed that they would ask the presidents of their various tribunals to meet as soon as possible in order to assist in this process.

They also committed themselves to working for the establishment of agreed principles which can be put to a national wage case. All Governments have asked their Ministers for Labour to meet in an endeavour to resolve this matter.

It was also agreed that there was an urgent need to establish machinery to resolve demarcation disputes more effectively and expeditiously.

The Premiers' Conference indicated that the major parties, the employers and the trade unions, must accept significant responsibility for the orderly settlement of disputes within the framework established by Governments and called upon the parties to contribute to achieving that end.

Governments recognise that they all have obligations to see that the benefits of economic growth are distributed throughout the Australian community and that the large and powerful, be they corporate or union, should not be in a position to gain unfair or unreasonable advantage. They also recognise that there are limits to the growth of wages possible in any one year. Claims for wage increases need to be balanced against other calls on resources such as those from welfare beneficiaries and the need for investment funds by businesses.

All Governments supported the concept of a wide-ranging national enquiry into wage determination and industrial relations, but recognised that this was a longer-term exercise. It did not detract from the need for all parties to work to ensure the present system operated effectively and equitably.

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