

PRIME MINISTER

27th July, 1962.

My dear Leslie,

I refer to our conversation this afternoon about your stated and published views on the Common Market negotiations.

You confirmed to me that you had stated your views, not only in Canberra on Wednesday night but in Melbourne on Thursday, and that when asked last evening by the representative of the A.B.C. you had indicated that you stood by your statements.

You made it quite clear to me that you were on these occasions speaking solely for yourself and were not prompted by any other Minister or, for that matter, by any official.

As I pointed out to you, your estimate that the impact of British entry into the Common Market would be of minor importance to the Australian economy runs counter to the views formulated and expressed by Cabinet and pursued by Mr. McEwen and myself in two sets of heavy negotiations overseas this year.

You told me with your usual candour that you could not honestly retract the views which you had expressed, because they were views which you had held for some time.

I need hardly tell you that I respect your views and your attitude. But Ministerial responsibility and Cabinet solidarity are of the essence of our system of Government. They are always important. They are no less important when a Government has a narrow majority. They are supremely important when a Government is engaged in advocating the legitimate interests of Australia in a series of negotiations which we have repeatedly declared to be the most important in our time.

I cannot allow a state of affairs to continue in which those of us directly concerned with the negotiations and with the forthcoming Prime Ministers' Conference can be met by the argument that our own Government contains and retains a Minister whose views are not those of the Cabinet.

I am sad about all this as you know. I have done my best to try to devise some middle course, but I cannot find one. After all, the very integrity with which you hold your opinions would make it impossible for you to change them or to let it be thought that you had done so.

Under all the circumstances, I must, with unfeigned regret, ask you for your resignation.

Yours sincerely,

R. G. MENZIES.

The Honourable L.H.E. Bury, M.P.,  
Minister for Air.