

FOR PRESS :

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BIDAULT T.V. FILM

Statement by the Prime Minister, the Rt.Hon. Sir Robert Menzies

I have today discussed with senior colleagues and with Mr. Davidson the question of the showing of the Bidault television interview.

It transpires that no restrictions exist upon newspaper publication - which is beyond the control of the Commonwealth - or upon the showing of the film in picture theatres. Under these circumstances, we have all agreed that the continuance of the television ban would amount to discrimination against the television stations. It has therefore been agreed that the Postmaster-General will withdraw the directions to the television stations. The Postmaster-General had ample statutory power to give his directions, and in fact he gave them after consultations with some senior colleagues and myself. We all felt that the television interview was, from the beginning, a great mistake. It undoubtedly gave rise to strong feelings in France. France is a friendly nation and is in fact our own ally in SEATO.

However, having indicated our own critical view - a view to which we strongly adhere - it would be useless to pursue a prohibition which is extremely limited in its operation.

It has therefore, as I have stated, been decided to cancel the existing orders. Perhaps the whole incident will serve to make it plain outside Australia that the ABC is not an organ of the Australian Government, and that our power to direct it is one that we would not wish to exercise except under exceptional circumstances. To exercise it in relation to television alone would, as the events in the present case have shown, sometimes turn out to be ineffective.

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CANBERRA,

17th March, 1963.