

FOR PRESS:

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PRIME MINISTER'S REPLY TO MR. BARTON

The Prime Minister this afternoon sent the following reply to Mr. Gordon Barton in Sydney :-

"I have your telegram, despatched on Sunday, which reached me at my Melbourne office this morning. Frankly, I find an 'Alice in Wonderland' quality about its timing and its terms which makes it difficult for me to regard it as intended other than for propaganda purposes.

"It invites me personally to make fundamental changes in my Government's firmly -established defence and external policies. These go to the heart of Australia's security. You say, without evidence or justification, that I entertained doubts about the Government's intervention in Viet Nam from the outset and I tolerate what is being done there against my private convictions and out of what I believe to be sheer political necessity.

"All this so seriously mis-states my own fully-publicised attitude and the position I have consistently adopted on these matters that it brings critically into question the bona fides of your approach. I have repeatedly stated my belief that the decisions the Government has taken on Viet Nam and on the participation there of National Servicemen are right.

"You can question, if that is your view - and however wrong-headed I may believe your view to be - the wisdom of these decisions, and if you disagree with them, stand in opposition to my Government, but you have no cause to question my sincerity. Even my opponents of the Labor Party have not done that. It is because my colleagues and I believe these policies to be right that we accept the challenge of the Labor Party to make them critical issues of this campaign. If you feel so strongly hostile to these policies that you and those associated with you are determined to contest individual electorates, then it would be more honest and less mystifying to the public if you were to offer yourselves either simply as Independents or as Independent Labor candidates. To the best of my knowledge, very few if any of you have been active members of the Liberal Party. By your decision to support a socialist party which would run out on our allies and which, in so many other directions, is fundamentally opposed to the policies of the party I lead, you have revealed yourselves as without entitlement to include the word 'Liberal' in the description of your group.

"I have noted your denial that you are in any way a Labor front organisation. There can be little difference in substance if you masquerade as Liberals and recommend support for Labor in preference to support of a Government which has led Australia to its present strength, prosperity and international standing.

"I need hardly add that your offer of withdrawal is rejected as are the terms on which you state it to have been based.