



CZECHOSLOVAKIA

COMMENTS BY THE PRIME MINISTER, MR JOHN GORTON FOR TELEVISION AND RADIO

22 AUGUST 1968

I want to talk to you tonight about a matter which, though it does not immediately impinge on the Australian people yet is of great moment to them and to other free peoples throughout the world.

At approximately eight o'clock yesterday morning, Canberra time, large forces of Russian troops, together with forces from other satellite nations crossed the borders of Czechoslovakia in force against the wishes of the Czechoslovakian Government and while most of the citizens of Czechoslovakia were asleep. By the time morning came, they were in military occupation of the country.

The Russian Charge d'Affaires called on me this morning in order to present to me a message, the gravamen of which was that these Russian troops and other troops had entered Czechoslovakia at the request of the Czechoslovakian Government.

On behalf of the Australian Government, I informed him that I found this impossible to believe, and impossible to believe particularly in view of the protests of the Czech Foreign Minister and of the broadcasts from Prague indicating clearly, before the broadcasting station was overrun, that this invasion was against the wishes of the legal Czechoslovakian Government.

I said that I believed that the Australian Parliament and the Australian people would share my disbelief. I asked him to convey to the Russian Government this feeling on behalf of my Government, and I asked him also to express to the Russian Government the distress and the revulsion which my Government felt at this action by the U. S. S. R.

This, I was told, is the message that would be conveyed.

The Parliament of Australia will be debating this matter tonight, and while a Parliamentary motion may be a frail weapon to set against the tanks and tommy-guns of the invaders, nevertheless, there has been a message from the Parliament of Czechoslovakia before it was overthrown, asking for the mobilisation of support from parliaments and peoples throughout the rest of the world. This we are trying to do.

NOTE: The PM undertook this recording at the request of TV and radio stations, to provide them with the substance of his comments in Parliament this morning.