

TASMANIAN SHIPPING CRISIS

Statement by the Prime Minister, Mr. William McMahon

A deputation led by the Acting Premier of Tasmania, the Honourable K. C. Lyons, M. H. A. had discussions with the Commonwealth Government in Canberra this morning.

In addition to the Acting Premier, the deputation included the Leader of the Opposition, Mr. E. E. Reece, M. H. A., Mr. A. N. Currie, President of the Tasmanian Trades & Labour Council and Mr. M. J. Overland, Secretary/Manager of the Tasmanian Chamber of Manufactures. Commonwealth Ministers present were the Prime Minister, Mr. McMahon, Mr. Nixon, Minister for Shipping & Transport, Mr. Lynch, Minister for Labour & National Service, and Senator Wright.

The fundamental purpose of the deputation was to take up with the Commonwealth the need to seek arrangements which, recognising the special position of Tasmania, would be directed to providing the Tasmanian community, in the longer term, with some assurance that employment and business activity, and thus the welfare of the community, would be protected from the serious damage which would otherwise occur as a result of disputes involving shipping services. The Acting Premier and his colleagues stressed the vital place of shipping in the Tasmanian economy - over 90% of the State's trade being dependent on shipping services and threats to the maintenance of these services constituting a problem for the entire Tasmanian community.

The deputation asked that, at an appropriate time, the Commonwealth should call a conference representative of the unions, the shipowners and the two governments to see whether some formula could be devised and adopted to give Tasmania some immunity of this kind. It was accepted, however, that the calling of such a conference must await the outcome of discussions which had been initiated by the Tasmanian Trades & Labour Council with the ACTU and the maritime unions in connection with this objective.

The Commonwealth Government, acknowledging the particular vulnerability of Tasmania to maritime industrial disputes, indicated that it wished to assist where it could in overcoming the problem. Against the background of recent developments, and taking note of the case presented by the deputation, it would be prepared at the appropriate time, and subject to the outcome of the initiative now being taken by the Tasmanian Trades & Labour Council, to propose a conference on the lines suggested, it being understood that the agenda for such a conference - and any action foreshadowed by it - must, of course, be a matter for agreement between the parties concerned.

As regards the immediate problem of the present shipping strike involving the Marine Stewards' and Pantrymen's Association, it was noted that the strike was already affecting employment and business activity in Tasmania in a substantial way and that large-scale unemployment and disruption of trade would follow if the dispute were prolonged. However, it was also noted that this dispute is now at a most sensitive stage and that there are grounds for hoping that the talks between the unions and ship-owners now taking place in Sydney could lead to a settlement.