



PRIME MINISTER

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OIL INDUSTRY DISPUTE

Statement by the Prime Minister, the Rt.
Hon. William McMahon, CH, MP

Following discussions yesterday with senior Ministers in Sydney about the oil industry dispute, I announced that the Minister for Labor and National Service, Mr. Lynch, the Minister for Shipping and Transport (Mr. Nixon), and the Attorney General, Senator Greenwood would have immediate discussions with oil industry employers and the ACTU.

The Ministers met last evening with senior representatives of the oil industry and this morning with ACTU officials, Mr. Hawke, Mr. Petrie and Mr. Souter.

The purpose of these discussions was to enable the Ministers to obtain a first-hand appreciation from the employers and from the ACTU of the strike situation, possible developments and their consequences. The Ministers have now reported the substance of these discussions to Cabinet so that steps might be taken as appropriate.

The ACTU representatives informed the Ministers that they were not prepared to say whether the ACTU wanted or could get the striking union members back to work, except under conditions which could be seen as inconsistent with the decision of Mr. Justice Moore.

The strikers are to hold meetings in the four States directly affected, Victoria, N.S.W., South Australia and Queensland tomorrow morning (Friday). This gives them the opportunity and the responsibility for deciding to return to work immediately under the terms of the recent decision of Mr. Justice Moore of the Conciliation and Arbitration Commission. The Government wants a full resumption of work and the lifting of any bans or restrictions on the work to be performed.

The termination of this strike would make possible an early resumption of proceedings by the Conciliation and Arbitration Commission for hearing and determining the unions' claims in full. The employers have consistently maintained their willingness to proceed without delay to arbitration provided that normal work is resumed.

The Government for its part is firmly convinced that when matters in dispute between employers and unions cannot be resolved by negotiation or conciliation, there can be no alternative but to proceed with arbitration. That is precisely the situation which has been reached in this particular dispute.

It is in the interests of all sections of the community that our system of arbitration be maintained and that any efforts to undermine it must be resisted.

The situation is becoming increasingly critical. The oil companies have now put forward reasonable proposals for an emergency plan that would minimise inconvenience to the public.

Unlike the plan proposed by Mr. Hawke the companies' plan would not discriminate between companies but would involve the participation of all of them.

The ACTU officers have been prepared to recommend that some men return to work. It is a test of their authority and concern for the public interest whether they now recommend that all men go back to work. This is the only sure way in which the unnecessary hardship and suffering by countless members of the community as well as the threat to their welfare by the needless disruption of industrial and commercial activity can be avoided.

I emphasise the ACTU carries a heavy obligation for the continuation of the strike.

CAMBERRA,

27 July, 1972.