



# PRIME MINISTER

MACQUARIE NETWORK WEEKLY BROADCAST

BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE RT.HON.

WILLIAM McMAHON, CH, MP.

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## OIL INDUSTRY DISPUTE

Interviewer: Paul Lynch

- Q. Prime Minister, the oil strike is now officially over. I think the first thing we would like to know from you is where does the Government go from here?
- PM: I have already given the Presiding Officers of the House and of the Senate advice that because the strike is over it is not necessary to call Parliament together.
- Q. It has been suggested over the last week or two that perhaps the Government did not do the very best job it could do to settle this strike, that your Government could have done something more positive. How would you answer these suggestions?
- PM: I deny that. You first of all have to ask yourself what power we have under the Australian Constitution. And the simple fact is that we have only one power, and that is arbitration and conciliation, and that is in the hands of the Conciliation and Arbitration Commission. When it appeared as though the Commission might have failed, I resorted to the only alternative that was available to us -- to prepare emergency legislation as Mr Chifley had to do in 1949, and I had to do in the case of the Stevedoring Industry in 1966. Consequently, I gave instructions for this emergency legislation to be prepared and I made arrangements, too, to call the House, that is the Parliament, together in order that the legislation could be put on the statute books. This was done in the interests of the community.

Q. This emergency legislation was prepared for possible use tomorrow morning. Now by that I would assume that it is all ready whenever you need it from now on?

PM: Yes, it will be.

Q. Can you enact it without there being an emergency in the first place? In other words, can you add it to your armoury of laws to help out, or must you wait for the emergency before you can pass the law?

PM: We could make it permanent legislation and therefore it would not be necessary to introduce it as an emergency measure. But usually this is regarded as an affront to the trade union movement, and for that reason, we prefer to handle it on an emergency basis.

Q. Prime Minister, there have been very strong suggestions...  
. Mr Whitlam particularly on this programme last Monday night suggested that there has been collusion between your Government and particularly the foreign-owned oil companies in this country. The suggestion is that your Government, as part of its attempt to curb inflation has tried to force the oil companies to refuse to negotiate with the unionists. What do you say to that?

PM: That is false, even dishonest. There has been no collusion. In fact, I have remained separated from this. I have believed it was a matter for arbitration itself. So I can't agree with them, and Mr Hawke himself last night on television had to say that he couldn't prove there was collusion, but he thought because of a combination of circumstances there might have been. He answered for me the accusation made by Mr Whitlam. I say emphatically - and I would say it over and over again - there was none. But I would have to go a stage further. We were acting in the public interest, we were acting in accordance with our constitutional power, and we were determined that we would do all in our power, first to end the strike, and secondly, to prevent too much unemployment and too much damage to the Australian people and to the Australian economy.

Q. Apart from forming this emergency legislation, have you learnt anything in terms of possible Constitutional change or have you in retrospect decided that there was something else your Government could have done in the last two weeks which wasn't done?

PM: I am what they call a federalist and consequently I have never been what could be regarded as a very strong believer in drastic changes to the Constitution. But I have learnt, not only as Minister for Labour and National Service but now as Prime Minister that there is one change to the Constitution that must be made in time, and that is to give the Commonwealth power to legislate in respect of industrial disputes when they are of a national character. And I believe the oil dispute and the failure in the transport industry is a clear indication that this is a national problem and that the Commonwealth Parliament should have the constitutional power to legislate.

Q. And looking back over these last two disturbed weeks, do you think there is anything the Government could have done that it didn't do?

PM: I don't think so. The only action we could have taken was to call the Parliament together and to introduce emergency legislation to deal with the kind of problem that emerged as a result of the strike. We did that, and importantly, it has to be remembered that from the moment I announced that we were prepared to recall Parliament, so, too, did all the other activities commence. As for example, Mr Justice Moore then decided that he would make recommendations to the two parties for a resolution of the dispute and to get the men back to work. So, too, did you find other members of the trade union movement, particularly leaders of the trade union, and in one case, a leader in the Trades Hall Council in Sydney, were prepared to make recommendations to the Australian Council of Trade Unions that they should let the men go back to work. In other words, I believe that our action was the beginning of a process, and that process ended today when the men decided overwhelmingly to go back to work and to accept arbitration.

Q. Thank you very much Prime Minister.

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