

PRESS STATEMENT

By the ACTING PRIME MINISTER, Dr. J.F. CAIRNS
MELBOURNE, 20 DECEMBER, 1974

The Acting Prime Minister, Dr. J.F. Cairns, today deplored the action taken by the Victorian Government to challenge in the High Court the validity of Australian Government unemployment relief and welfare schemes.

This is the worst example of playing politics at the expense of deprived people that we have seen, Dr. Cairns said.

If the States had considered there was anything wrong with the Government's schemes it was open for them at any time to make constructive suggestions and these would have been immediately taken into account.

They did not avail themselves of that simple opportunity.

The destructive action of the Victorian Government threatens the Australian Government's entire welfare programme and hits directly at the aged, the handicapped, the homeless and the unemployed.

How any Government could contemplate such a body-blow to this section of the community is beyond comprehension.

Programmes that are in jeopardy if the Victorian Government's move succeeds include Government subsidies towards housing the elderly and the handicapped, assistance to sheltered workshops and handicapped children's training and accommodation centres, the vital meals-on-wheels service, and the Government's new programme to assist organisations which provide accommodation for homeless people.

Some of these programmes were in existence when we took office. The political nature of the challenge is thus confirmed.

The Victorian move is also destructive because it can only delay the application of re-employment measures which the Australian Government considers to be of prime importance.

Despite the action of the Victorian Government, the Australian Government will continue to administer the schemes fully and adequately.

If the States are adamant about persisting with their obstructive application it is to be hoped that the High Court once and for all will uphold the right of the Australian Government to assist directly anyone who may be unemployed.