



## PRIME MINISTER

PRESS STATEMENT NO. 574

14 October 1975

MR CONNOR

Today I advised the Governor-General to accept the resignation of Rex Connor as Minister for Minerals and Energy.

I took this course in order to uphold a precise and fundamental principle of parliamentary government. The principle is that the Parliament must be able to accept assurances given to it by a minister, and if those assurances prove to be misleading, the minister concerned must be held responsible.

Last Thursday, in answer to a question from the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, I gave a written reply: "I am assured by the Minister for Minerals and Energy that all communications of substance between him and Mr Khemlani were tabled by him on 9 July 1975."

Yesterday I received from solicitors in Melbourne a copy of a statutory declaration signed by Mr Khemlani and copies of a number of telex messages between Mr Khemlani's office in London and the office of the Minister for Minerals and Energy. In my judgment these messages did constitute "communications of substance" between the Minister and Mr Khemlani.

I was therefore driven to conclude that I had been misled by Mr Connor and that, in consequence, my own answer to the Deputy Leader of the Opposition had been misleading. It was in these circumstances that I advised the Governor-General to accept Mr Connor's resignation.

I have made it clear throughout the life of this Government that there is one standard which, if departed from, must carry the heaviest penalty. It is a principle on which the integrity of Parliament itself depends. There was, I believe, a departure from that principle.

I want to make the clearest possible distinction between the conduct of Rex Connor in his capacity as Minister, the manner in which he fulfilled his duties, including all his involvement in overseas loan raisings - and this one precise principle. It is not the contents of those telex messages which constitutes any breach of propriety. It was his failure to tell me about them. It is because that failure led to a breach of parliamentary standards last week that I accepted the resignation of the Minister.

At no time has there been any allegation of improper conduct, of dishonest conduct, of reprehensible conduct, of illegal or corrupt conduct by any member of the Government. No such allegation or charges were made at the special sitting to discuss this matter on 9 July. No such charges were made in the Senate for all the Senate's abuse of Parliamentary privilege. No such charges are made now. My own painful duty in this matter has been twice to defend and preserve a great and fundamental parliamentary convention. It is because of my insistence on preserving such standards and conventions that a great minister and a close friend and colleague has fallen.

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