



EMBARGO: 7.00 p.m.

PRIME MINISTER

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ELECTORATE TALK

The figures just released by the Commonwealth Employment Service show that tens of thousands of Australians were put out of work by the Victorian power strike. Jobs were lost because strikes and other disruptive action sent companies bankrupt, and unable to keep producing.

A handful of union leaders created conditions that led to social and economic dislocation throughout Australia.

The most damaging strikes in recent months have been designed to break wage indexation guidelines, flout the authority of the Arbitration Commission, and boost the inflationary wage spiral. The power strike in Victoria was a classic example of this tactic.

More than 450,000 people were laid off in Victoria and other States, and as the latest unemployment figures show, 37,000 are still registered as unemployed as a direct result of that strike. Strikes in other areas - the Builders Labourers Federation in Victoria, Norwich Park, and the Queensland Meat Workers strike - also caused dislocation and unemployment.

This attempt by some extremist union officials, in a few key unions, to attack our system of arbitration will be resisted by your government. We will not wash our hands of this kind of behaviour, as the Leader of the Opposition does. It is Mr Whitlam who refuses point blank to condemn these extremists in their attempts to deny thousands of Australians the right to work. The reason is clear. Those extremists all run unions that are affiliated with the Labor Party - unions whose delegates vote on Labor Party policy which is binding on all Labor parliamentarians. They are the so-called industrial wing of Mr Whitlam's own Party. Yet as leader, will he take the responsible course and repudiate their tactics? No, he remains silent.

My Government has not stood by idly. We have acted firmly and fairly. We have passed laws that make sure the public interest is more easily protected in times of industrial disruption, and that give rank and file unionists a greater say in how their own union is run.

Last year we passed laws for secret postal ballots for union elections. Our Industrial Relations Bureau is now working to make sure that the law is observed. We have provided for breaches of industrial law, and we have created the conditions where - for the first time - effective action can be taken under the Conciliation and Arbitration Act to deal with demarcation disputes. We have also established the circumstances in which trade unions must report to their own members about their financial affairs.

What did the men of the Labor Party - the self-styled guardians of the working man - do when we introduced our industrial legislation? They condemned it, they opposed it, they tried to stop it becoming law. They were running scared behind their so-called industrial wing. The Labor Party has condemned every piece of industrial legislation we have introduced. They have opposed secret ballots which are designed to give union members a real say in the running of their union. They opposed legislation which will protect the right to work. They opposed it - not because they thought it would not work - but because it is official Labor Party policy to place trade unions above the law. Mr Whitlam is bound by that policy. When Mr Hayden or even Mr Uren takes over, they will be bound by that policy.

And that is why, a year ago Mr Whitlam defended political strikes by trade unions. That is why a few days ago he refused to say what a Labor government would do if a union refused to accept an Arbitration Commission decision. He claimed that no government ever solved an industrial dispute. That is nonsense - and he knows it.

It was the Commonwealth Government that brought the crippling air controllers strike to an end, and that ended the postal dispute at Redfern. It was the strong stand of both the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments that led to the ending of the Victorian power dispute. The Western Australian Government has recently ended a damaging dispute in that State.

Labor failed to control the extremist unions when it was in government. Given another chance, it would still surrender. Mr Whitlam claims concern for the unemployed, Yet he was the man who has refused to disown the extraordinary statement of his Shadow Minister for Industrial Relations, when he publicly supported the 2,000 Victorian power workers who held the State to ransom, and caused massive additional unemployment.

Mr Whitlam's record shows he knows nothing about creating jobs. His government produced a record rise in unemployment - 15% in one year. He'll never get a chance to do that again. because I don't believe Australians will ever again want him in a position of authority.
