



PRIME MINISTER

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ELECTORATE TALK

In June 1976, in a statement on the world situation, I informed the Parliament of the Australian Government's serious concern about some aspects of the Soviet Union's activities.

I noted that:

"The Soviet leaders now have a strategic and political reach, a capacity to influence and even intervene well beyond the periphery of the established zones of Soviet security interest.

"The time has come to expect a sign from the U.S.S.R. that it understands this, and that it is serious about reaching global accommodation with the West."

During the two years since that statement, the Soviet Union has not only failed to give such a sign, but its current behaviour is a source of increasing international concern.

We are witnessing a new phase in the Soviet Union's persecution of leaders of the human rights movement. The Soviet Union has established a considerable presence in the Horn of Africa. And there is a continuing major build-up in the military power of the Warsaw Pact.

These are all disturbing signs of the Soviet Union's failure to moderate major aspects of its international behaviour - aspects which exacerbate world tensions.

This week, in the area of human rights, the trials of two leading Soviet human rights defenders, Anatoly Shcharnsky and Alexandr Ginsburg, have been strongly condemned by the Australian Government and by the leaders of almost all Western democracies.

We will continue to express our concern to the Soviet Union.

We urge the Soviet Union to implement the important principles of human rights embodied in the 1977 Helsinki Accords, to which they solemnly agreed. We urge it to consider the adverse effects of the present campaign of repression of those who have attempted to monitor Soviet compliance with an international agreement.

It is hard for us to believe that Soviet leaders intend to honour international commitments and understandings if they can allow such persecution to proceed.

Our concern at the Soviet Union's recent action on human rights is all the more acute since it is jeopardising areas of arms control in which there has been some progress.

The trials occur in the very week in which the United States and the Soviet Union are continuing major negotiations designed to reach new agreement to limit strategic arms.

The Soviet Union's placing in jeopardy of these negotiations is even more disturbing because while it has been concerned with measures of nuclear disarmament, it has also displayed a disturbing attachment to the utility of military power as a means of expanding its own influence.

In 1976 I said:

"People can reasonably conclude that the Soviet Union still seeks to expand its influence throughout the world in order to achieve Soviet primacy. Its actions all too often appear inconsistent with the aim of reducing world tension.....The build-up of the Warsaw Pact far exceeds the object of requirements of defending eastern Europe."

Australia is not alone in its attitude. Just recently, President Carter said that the Soviet Union's military build-up "far exceeds the Soviet Union's legitimate security needs."

This apprehension has also been plainly and forcefully voiced by the British Prime Minister, Mr Callaghan, as he repeated and endorsed President Carter's statement.

Other western leaders have expressed their concern.

One current example of the destabilising effects of the Soviet pursuit of power is the situation in Africa. There, the Soviet Union has established a considerable presence, both in its own right, and through its surrogate, Cuba.

Despite the loss of its Berbera facilities, the substantial number of Soviet advisers and Cuban troops in the Horn of Africa, estimated at some 18,000, has an effect on the balance of power in the area as a whole, including the Indian Ocean.

There is also a large number of Soviet and Cuban personnel in Angola. Their presence has wider implications for Southern Africa.

Soviet Union activities in Africa have been instrumental in halting the discussions between the United States and the Soviet Union, designed to achieve agreement about balance of power in the Indian Ocean - designed to achieve a lowering of naval force levels in the Indian Ocean.

What the Soviet Union has done does not contribute to the search for peaceful solutions to the problem of the areas.

The Soviet Union today still has an immense responsibility to use its power and influence to strengthen international peace and security. It has an opportunity to use its position to help build a stable and humane international order, and to end the arms build-up.

I am sure all Australia joins me in expressing the hope that the Soviet leaders will meet this historic responsibility.

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