



**PRIME MINISTER**

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ELECTORATE TALK

At a time of economic difficulty, the jobs of thousands of Australians are in jeopardy because of the calculated activities of a section of the union movement.

Existing jobs are now at risk, while opportunities for the unemployed are being shut out because of the continuing drive by key unions for wage increases clearly outside Conciliation and Arbitration guidelines.

This selfish campaign is an attempt to frustrate the Government's efforts to restore economic health to Australia and is directly contrary to the interests of Australian workers.

Latest official figures show that inflation in the 12 months to March was running at an annual rate of 8.2 percent. In that same period, wages, salaries and supplements are shown in the national accounts as having grown by 9.5 percent. Figures also show that average minimum wage rates for the March quarter, 1978 were over 9 percent higher than for the March quarter last year.

This evidence exposes the union claims as an exercise at running full steam ahead in an "I'm all right Jack" attitude.

If this campaign succeeds, more jobs will be lost and others put at risk.

In talks I have had with factory, office and farm workers it is clear that this kind of activity simply does not have rank and file support. They know from bitter experience where this kind of mad exercise leads - industries become uncompetitive and jobs are lost.

In 1974 and 1975, wages increased by over 50 percent. This priced industry out of business, and put thousands of people out of jobs.

That is why we have, from our first days in office, argued strongly and consistently before the Arbitration Commission for wage restraint.

Clearly, in this kind of climate, the ACTU must be prepared to stand up and accept responsibility for the strike damage. The ACTU invited these disputes by passing official resolutions

in March and July this year, urging affiliated unions to carry out on-the-job campaigns for more money in defiance of decisions of the Conciliation and Arbitration Commission.

This shows a disregard for the responsibility the ACTU should have to its members - those with jobs, and those looking for jobs.

It is hypocrisy for the ACTU to talk about high unemployment and to blame Governments and employers while it condones this kind of behaviour.

The ACTU is in a position to step in and stop this needless disruption. It has previously said it will not support wildcat strikes which disrupt public life.

The Government hopes - and I am sure we are supported by most Australians - that the ACTU will show it is genuinely concerned to protect the interests of all Australian trade unionists.

They can do this quite easily by calling a stop to these damaging strikes.

The disputes I am talking about have been all too familiar. They have hit in key areas, with a minimum number of people involved and causing maximum disruption.

The current list of industrial disputes demonstrates this point. The Metal Trades Unions have imposed a series of work bans; The Vehicle Builders Employees Federation have joined them with bans including an indefinite overtime ban. This is despite a warning by the Arbitration Commission that they would threaten the jobs of more industrial workers by so doing; Railway and Transport Unions are campaigning for wage claims clearly outside the guidelines; The umbrella Central Mining Unions are involved in wage disputes with the Utah Company.

One recent invidious practice is that of "guerilla" action where selective and discriminatory pressure is put on a company that refuses to negotiate outside indexation guidelines. The Storeman and Packers Union seems particularly disposed to this tactic.

Such pressure must be resisted if we are to prevent a renewed outbreak of wage escalation and inflation in Australia. Companies involved deserve our unanimous and whole-hearted support and encouragement.

The Builders Labourers Federation also continues to engage in senseless guerilla tactics. In recent days it has placed bans on a \$150 m. bank building project in Melbourne. Building work has now stopped and workmen have been stood down. On top of that, there are other building projects not proceeding because of the tactics of that particular union.

Clearly, that union is continuing with deliberate attempts to thwart the Government and to stop builders labourers from working and from keeping jobs.

While this kind of attitude persists within the trade union movement - and irrespective of any Government's industrial relations policies - the job of reducing unemployment will be made very difficult.

How can employers take on new workers when unions take action to raise excessively the price of their own labour?

This kind of selfish campaign not only hits at their own membership but at the heart of national interest.

Australia will not overcome economic problems and reduce unemployment until all sections, all groups work together in a common commitment.

Every Australian - and especially every leader, every government - has a part to play in arousing that spirit.

At this time, as a nation, we cannot afford to put selfseeking sectional interests on a pedestal - and pursue them regardless of cost or consequence.

What Australia has built and achieved - what our country promises - is too precious, too rare to risk losing.

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