



## PRIME MINISTER

24 August 1978

### STATEMENT ON THE TELECOM DISPUTE

This morning the discussion between Telecom and the Australian Telecommunications Employees Association before Commissioner Clarkson, broke down.

Commissioner Clarkson had been working on a compromise proposal to settle the Telecom dispute. Telecom had accepted his proposal, as indeed it had his earlier proposals. The union *executive* has rejected the proposal. The proposal was reasonable and fair, and would have protected the interests of all parties. It would have allowed a review of A.T.E.A. classifications. It would have provided adequate and proper consultation on the development of the new technology necessary to protect the interests of the Australian consumer.

The dispute, which has been going on for the best part of a month, now enters a most serious stage. On Monday and Tuesday, union officials will be seeking endorsement of their rejection of Commissioner Clarkson's proposals. It is time for the Government to state its own position in this dispute. The continued industrial action by the A.T.E.A. is causing great inconvenience and harm to tens of thousands of people throughout Australia. It is gravely disrupting business right throughout Australia. Communications are bound to deteriorate further, causing more hardship to individuals and more damage to business, and to Australia's international reputation.

The Government fully supports the decisions taken by Telecom. It believes that Telecom has been reasonable in a very difficult situation. Telecom has fully supported Commissioner Clarkson's proposals for settlement. The Government fully supports Telecom's policy of no work, no pay.

Over 3,000 employees are already off pay because they have refused to do the work they are paid for.

The number will inevitably increase significantly.

Wages are now being lost at the rate of \$1.6 million a fortnight, and so the hardship on A.T.E.A. members alone is considerable, and is bound to increase. They will not regain that pay.

The Government also endorses the decision of Telecom to commence de-registration proceedings against the A.T.E.A forthwith.

The union has resolutely rejected not just one, but three, sets of proposals by Commissioner Clarkson.

The members of the A.T.E.A. have a responsibility to Australia. They are in a service industry which is essential to this nation. Australia needs them. They need Telecom for their jobs and their security. They are unlikely to find other jobs as well paid for which they are qualified.

I suspect the public is not aware that Telecom has given a ten-year guarantee to A.T.E.A. members against any retrenchment as a result of technological change.

What other industry, what other employer, has achieved that in terms of security for its own employees?

Against this background, I think it is necessary for me to be more specific.

The Government supports Telecom, and it will continue to do so because in supporting Telecom it is supporting the interests of all Australians.

We have a long-standing tradition of arbitration in this country. The union officials are now seeking to throw that tradition aside. They refuse to accept the umpire's decision. Commissioner Clarkson said that he was "bitterly disappointed at the lack of leadership shown by union officials." They are saying "It must be our decision and on our terms."

That view is not acceptable to the Australian community, and it is not acceptable to this Government.

The Commonwealth has a range of legal powers available to it, and it will not hesitate to use these powers if members of this union do not accept their responsibility to the community.

The longer that this dispute continues, the more the families of A.T.E.A. members will suffer; the more wages they will have lost.

Commissioner Clarkson expressed the hope that A.T.E.A. members would be given the opportunity to consider his recommendations and see the sense of them.

Members will have that opportunity on Monday and Tuesday.

I ask the members of the union to reflect upon these matters, to consider what is in their own interest, and what is in the interest of their own families, and the interest of this nation.

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