

Prime Minister interviewed by Press on Oil Tanker Drivers dispute.

Question: (L. Wilson)

P.M. why have you decided to ask the Arbitration Commission to adjourn the National Wage Case?

Prime Minister:

Well I think we need to understand that there is a particularly unreasonable dispute on, which is now tying up oil supplies right throughout Australia. This isn't an argument really between employees and an employer, it is an argument within a union - within one union, it's not even a demarcation dispute between two unions - and the Transport Workers Union's Melbourne branch are virtually saying that members of the same union in the country, in Victoria but employed by a distributor in Victoria, are not entitled to drive petrol trucks. This is the height of absurdity, and it is the height of unreasonableness when you get a situation in which the whole of this nation can be held up by the executive act of one union because they want some members of their own union not to be able to do certain work. I think this particular dispute highlights in a way that we haven't seen for a long time the utter irresponsibility and the total selfishness of some people in the union movement, and it's hard even to say that they are putting their own self interest first, because it's difficult to see any interest in this particular case. But their action will certainly result in a number of people becoming unemployed for different periods as oil dries up, and it makes a farce of trade union claims to be concerned about unemployment.

Question: (L. Power)

Mr Fraser, is the Government considering other options to deal with the dispute?

Prime Minister:

Tony Street and myself commissioned a report from officials the middle of yesterday afternoon, and I think they were working on that late last night, and I expect the reports on my desk and Tony Street's desk now.

Question: (L. Wilson)

What will you gain by having the Wage Case adjourned though, Sir?

Prime Minister:

I think it will show that we are serious about these particular matters. It will be up to the wage case to determine whether it will be adjourned or not, but the Victorian Premier has told me that he will certainly support us in that particular move, and maybe other people will in addition. We need to

understand the seriousness of the situation in which one union says oil supplies to Australia must cease. That's not just oil supplies to motorists who use petrol to get to work, it's also oil supplies to all industries, small industries and large industries, and it's an act that can tie up this nation. Let's get back to the reason why, because this particular union in Victoria is saying that members of the same union, but who happen to live in the country part of Victoria instead of in Melbourne are not entitled to do the same work as their union brothers who live in Melbourne are entitled to do. Now, surely that is about one of the most unreasonable causes for a stoppage that one has ever heard. If it was a local stoppage affecting one small part of Australia it would be bad enough, but take a stoppage of that kind and make it a national strike, I believe it is the height of absurdity. The tragedy of it is it can do a great deal of harm, and as we have seen on other occasions, when you have a major dispute of this kind many businesses, small businesses, can be so grievously hit that people who are stood down as a result of the dispute sometimes fail to regain their jobs because the businesses are unable to re-employ as a result of the financial damage.

Question: (L. Power)

Mr Fraser, do you support Mr Hamer's action in asking Mr Gorman, the Seymour Services proprietor, to withdraw his actions?

Prime Minister:

If all bans were withdrawn that would not be an unreasonable action, that is the basis of Mr Hamer's request. But there should be no suggestion that that action should be withdrawn, and the union win in relation to this issue, because the Seymour proprietor is taking this action not necessarily in defence of his own financial interests, but in defence of his own employees who have been driving his petrol trucks and who are members of the Transport Workers Union. So this again gets back to the crux of the issue. It is in this particular instance the section of the law, section 45B, is being used to protect the rights of Trade Unionists against the predatory and unreasonable actions of their fellows in the same union. If the union withdraws all its bans, if the union indicates that Mr Gorman's employees, members of the T.W.U., are entitled to do the work, then I would believe there is no further cause for Mr Gorman's action to continue. But in the face of a continuation of union's bans I would believe that Mr Gorman has no alternative, and certainly nobody should suggest to him in those circumstances that he should withdraw his action. I know that what Mr Hamer has said is on the basis of all bans being withdrawn.