



PRIME MINISTER

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ELECTORATE TALK

Over the last few months, industries in New South Wales have been disrupted and threatened because of the actions of a group of refinery workers at Kurnell.

Although they are part of a national industry, they have acted to try and get more money for themselves under a State award. They have refused to accept the ruling of the Conciliation and Arbitration Commission that they had to work under the Federal Award.

They have set out to deliberately defy the Commission - the independent umpire.

In this they have been aided and supported by the New South Wales government. That is irresponsible government.

By such support, the government of that State has contributed directly to the prolonging of that dispute. It has caused the people of New South Wales needless hardship and inconvenience.

The men at Kurnell - members of the State branch of the Australian Workers Union, which operates separately from the Federal body which covers the rest of the industry in the State - don't care about disruption or hardship.

They don't care about extra money they think they can squeeze from another award. Their motives are purely selfish.

But what are the motives of the New South Wales government in supporting them? Just what will the people of New South Wales gain from their government supporting this kind of tactic?

The answer is obscure. Maybe Mr Wran will let his constituents into his secret.

The oil industry is a vital and sensitive one. Surely Mr Wran could see that his government's actions were going to lead to damage in this sensitive area.

Because of the national implications of this kind of action, I have been in touch with Mr Wran to make the point that his

government has a responsibility to uphold the decision of the Full Bench of the Council of the Arbitration Commission.

The New South Wales Government has a clear obligation to convince the men that they should abide by the decisions of the Commission to continue to work under the Federal award.

Regrettably, I'm afraid, much of the present industrial unrest in New South Wales stems from the State government's decision to legislate for a 37½ hour week in the power industry.

It was predictable that that irresponsible decision was bound to unleash a number of other claims outside of indexation.

Naturally, the unions believed that if the State government was prepared to support one group, it should also support another.

We can now see the folly of the power industry decision.

All governments have a responsibility to accept the decisions of arbitral tribunals. No government can afford to get into the business of encouraging groups of trade unionists to reject the industrial relations framework that has grown up in Australia over the last 75 years.

As a large employer, the Federal Government is attempting to lead by example. Where wage claims - and other claims - are being pressed by unions with bans and strikes and other actions, our policy is clear, and it is fair. Refusal to work means no pay. I cannot put it any more clearly, any more bluntly.

We have been advising employers in industry to make the same stand.

If a settlement is made outside the guidelines, we have made it clear that the Governemnt will instruct the Prices Justification Tribunal to carry out an immediate inquiry into the industry.

So employers have responsibilities also.

This whole question of strikeing and causing disruption - in the face of the Conciliation and Arbitration Commission - gets to the heart of the issue.

What's in it for the union to go out on strike? Loss of wages and harm to the community.

There seems to be a myth that the Conciliation and Arbitration Commission will not hear the workers' case until it gets headlines in the press because of strike action.

That is absolute nonsense. The Commission looks at the merits of a case - and the merits alone. A strike is not part of that process.

There is no need for such strike action. No one wins. Just ask the families and children during the recent milk tanker drivers' strike when they were denied milk supplies.

The Federal Government is using all the powers that it has to make all parties work within the system - and abide by the decision of the umpire.

And that is why we are seriously concerned - and disappointed - by the action of the New South Wales government in supporting a group of men who have set out to defy the Arbitration system.

This kind of action, this kind of support from a State government, is simply not in the interests of the people of New South Wales. It is not in the interest of the people of Australia.

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