

PRIME MINISTER INTERVIEWED ON ABC'S "NATIONWIDE" BY  
RICHARD CARLETON

---

Carleton

Here in Canberra what happened was that at 11:15 this morning Mr. Fraser, Mr. Anthony, Mr. Viner, Mr. Macphee and Mr. Ellicott were joined by Mr. Peter Nolan, the Secretary of the ACTU, Mr. Petersen, of the Manufacturing Group in the ACTU, Mr. Scott of the Metal Group, Mr. Bob Gregory of the United Trades and Labour Council of South Australia and Mr. Ray Geitzelt of the Services Group of the ACTU, and also Mr. Cliff Dolan the ACTU Vice-President. These gentlemen all together had lunch in the Cabinet room, the discussions continued all through the afternoon. At one stage Mr. Fraser had a break I understand to speak to the Chairman and Chief Executive of Caltex Oil. The discussions continued after that and they had sandwiches for dinner. The discussions continued after that and they broke a little before 9:00 EST. Mr. Fraser has since had a press conference and has been kind enough to come down to the studios here in Parliament House.

Mr. Fraser, I would like to ask you simply, what has been achieved since 11:15 this morning?

Prime Minister

I think a good deal has been achieved. As you know the ACTU resolution that was passed yesterday was calling for a day of protest tomorrow and then also indicating the very strong possibility of continuing bans on the exports of major commodities and indicating that if the TLC in Western Australia requested it, there could be a blockade against the State of Western Australia. It wasn't just a question of a day of protest that was confronting Australia. It was also a question of a continuing situation of deep industrial turmoil that would have done grievous and great harm to this nation. We've had discussions today which have been undertaken, I believe, with goodwill, on all sides. I also believe that those members of the ACTU who were with us today were concerned about the consequences of the proposed action on Australia and therefore we were working to see how we could prevent that happening. Now, as a result of discussions, as a result of discussions that the ACTU representatives had with Peter Cook of the TLC in Western Australia; that Ian Viner and myself had with Des O'Neil, Acting Premier in Western Australia; and also as a result of discussions that were being undertaken between Mr. O'Neil and the TLC in Western Australia, very late in the afternoon we got to a situation in which Mr. O'Neil wanted to amplify a statement that he made earlier in the day about the nature of a review of the laws of assembly in Western Australia and other States.

.../2

Carleton

Let me just reiterate here; Mr. O'Neil is the Acting Premier of Western Australia.

Prime Minister

The Acting Premier of Western Australia.

Carleton

He is taking the place of Sir Charles Court whilst he is out of the country?

Prime Minister

That's right. So he issued a further statement indicating that the Commonwealth Attorney-General and the Attorney-General of the State would jointly conduct a review. Now it is our understanding...

Carleton

What are they reviewing?

Prime Minister

They are reviewing the laws of assembly in Western Australia and other States.

Carleton

This is the Attorney-General in Western Australia

Prime Minister

And of the Commonwealth

Carleton

And Senator Durack the Commonwealth Attorney-General - are to review the laws of assembly?

Prime Minister

They are the laws that are in question. This section of the Police Act which has caused this controversy is right at the centre of it. They will be reviewing the situation; the law as it is in Western Australia, the equivalent sections in the Acts of other States and obviously making recommendations to the Western Australian Government. I haven't got any doubt at all that in that review the Attorney-Generals will be wanting to reach a situation which prevents a continuation of these difficulties.

Carleton

To take it step by step sir, what happens tomorrow when the unionists go into court in Western Australia?

Prime Minister

Tomorrow, it is our understanding that the cases will be deferred. There is no position being put by the Western Australian Government in relation to that, but on all the advice available to us and in the normal practice, the case will be deferred and it is the intention to use the period of adjournment of the case - of deferrment of the case for the two Attorney-Generals to encompass their review. It will be the objective to have the report of the Attorney-Generals in the hand of the Western Australian Government before the case is resumed. Again, that position was put to the ACTU representatives. As a result of that, they are prepared to recommend to the ACTU Executive tomorrow that any question of continuing bans and limitations on the export of commodities from Australia or bans on Western Australia as a State be put aside.

Carleton

Could I summarise what you have said? You correct me where I am wrong. That tomorrow morning the court case goes ahead in Western Australia.

Prime Minister

Well, it will start.

Carleton

Sorry, it will start. Right. And also the day of national protest, the psuedo national strike, goes on tomorrow?

Prime Minister

They go on tomorrow.

Carleton

Right. Now the expectation is that the court hearing tomorrow will be adjourned.

Prime Minister

That's right.

Carleton

And then whilst that court hearing is adjourned, then your Attorney-General and the West Australian Attorney-General will get together to review the laws of assembly?

Prime Minister

Yes.

Carleton

And that review of the laws of assembly is expected to be complete before tomorrow's anticipated adjourned case is resumed.

Prime Minister

That's right.

Carleton

That's the compromise?

Prime Minister

That's the position that we reached this evening. As a result of that any question of further industrial action is put aside.

Carleton

THat's some achievement, isn't it?

Prime Minister

I think it's a very significant achievement.

Carleton

Not just on your part - I mean just in the negotiating process between you and Mr. Nolan.

Prime Minister

I think it was a very significant achievement. We had a joint press conference at the end of it all. I believe that the representatives of the ACTU who were with us today did have a wish to reach a compromise. If you compare what we have arrived at with the initial demands of the TLC or the union movement, it was very different. I think also there is a recognition on the part of the Western Australian Government that a question of a national stoppage to be followed by bans on the export of major commodities was going to cause a very very serious situation indeed. If I could just make the point, it started as a Western Australian matter - one of Western Australian responsibility, of Western Australian law and all that is perfectly true, it doesn't involve us at all - but when you start to talk about bans upon a whole State by the rest of Australia, bans upon the export of Australian goods to markets right around the world, then very obviously the Commonwealth is involved and has to be involved.

Carleton

I don't want to throw up a nasty issue when this air of compromise is around. Do you think you could have got this far if Mr. Hawke had been in the country.

Prime Minister

I would prefer not to comment about that. Let me only say that I think the representatives of the ACTU who were with us today believed that there was a job to do. They were representatives of the industrial movement, representing the industrial interest, with a concern for the right of assembly because they felt that was threatened - whether that was a valid fear or not it was a fear that they had - and they are people with one objective and one purpose and as a Government we were able to sit down with them and have a discussion that was sensible. There was no grandstanding, not grandstanding at the press conference afterwards. It was productive and I think it's the way relations ought to be conducted between a union movement and a Government.

Carleton

Are you going to turn those skills now, those negotiating skills, to solving the problems that exist in N.S.W. for the oil industry, and where are we now with that from your point of view?

Prime Minister

Representatives of the Kurnell Refinery - company people - came down to see me today because they wanted to report directly on the seriousness of the situation in N.S.W. About 60 percent of the oil used in N.S.W. is for industrial purposes or important essential services. With the Kurnell shut N.S.W. has available to it with the Shell Refinery only about half the oil that is necessary for essential purposes and for industrial purposes. That just emphasises the enormous seriousness of the present position. I don't want to comment on what has been happening in N.S.W. today because there have been discussions involving elements of the N.S.W. Government, as I understand it, all the people involved, including Sir John Moore. I only hope that having regard to the enormous severity of this issue, that they do reach a satisfactory and a reasonable and an equitable solution.

Carleton

Everyone has hope, but is there expectation on your part that the solution to the oil industry dispute is ...

Prime Minister

We've obviously been having reports through the course of the day. But as I was advised just 10 or 15 minutes ago the discussions are still going on and I am afraid that I don't want to make any comment about that. I can only express a hope at the moment because it is sensitive and it is delicately balanced and it again just shows the enormous harm that can come, in this case to a whole of State, to tens of thousands of people.

Prime Minister (continued)

If you just think for a moment what's going to happen to --

Carleton

Everyone knows they can't get --

Prime Minister

I don't really know that they do. You might think that they know they can't get petrol to put in their car, but think of the person whose business depends on being able to get petrol. There are many small business people in that particular position. Their businesses can be destroyed as a result of this continuing. Many larger businesses that can ultimately survive find that they just have to stand people down. They can't keep operating. The hardship -- if you say you think you understand -- but I think the hardship that would be involved if this continues is almost beyond our comprehension.

Carleton

That's why all the efforts, I suggest - maybe impertinently - but all the efforts should be directed towards a solution rather than --

Prime Minister

They are being today. I haven't got the slightest doubt of that. That's why I don't want to comment on negotiations that are so important, that are still continuing, that I do know from reports that have come through the day are sensitively balanced at this moment.