

From the Press Office

SUMMARY OF ABC'S "P.M."

In the aftermath of the scrapping of the Federal Narcotics Bureau, a confidential document has been leaked which highlights the intense bureaucratic power play that has been so much a part of the battle between the Commonwealth Police, the State Police Forces and the Narcotics Bureau. The document is a defence by the Department of Business and Consumer Affairs against the allegations made by Mr. Justice Williams in his Interim Royal Commission Report to the Federal Government.

Julie Flynn

Defenders of the Narcotics Bureau are particularly bitter at what they see as a set-up job to get rid of it. I understand that the Department of Business and Consumer Affairs itself prepared a strong detailed defence of the allegations contained in the Interim Report. The Department requested that the defence be included as an appendix to the report when it was due to be released. But I understand that it wasn't. Rivalry between the Narcotics Bureau and the Commonwealth Police and to a lesser extent, State Police Forces, has been intense since the Bureau was set up in 1969 by the then Minister, Mr. Don Chipp. The former head of the Commonwealth Police, Mr. Davis, and the head of the Bureau, Mr. Bates, have waged a long-standing power battle, and while the Commonwealth Police has now been absorbed by the Australian Federal Police, it seems that the final victory belongs to Mr. Davis, who besides being an academic is now a special adviser on police matters to the Minister for Administrative Services, Mr. McLeay. I understand that in its defence, the Department said it was hardly surprising that the report recommended that the Bureau be disbanded, especially when seen against the background of the inquiry. It pointed out that in October 1977, long before allegations against the Bureau surfaced, it offered to provide expert assistance to the inquiry, but that offer was rejected. In contrast, the Commonwealth Police had 16 of its officers attached on and off to the inquiry. The Department argued that it was on trial without any opportunity to refute the allegations. The situation had become so bad that it had been forced to hire senior counsel to protect its interests when giving evidence to the Commission. Furthermore, it noted that at no stage did the Commission why the Australia Federal Police would handle the responsibilities of the Bureau better, except to say that it was a larger body. The Department said that no alternatives were proposed or canvassed in the report, nor was an assessment made of the improvements that might be expected from such a transfer. It also said that it remains to be seen if the efficiency of the Federal Police will be any greater than that of Compol as evidenced in the Greek social security case. It questions whether the force could handle the additional responsibilities without additional resources. The document details a point by point comment on all the allegations against the Bureau. It says that allegations that there was distrust between it and other agencies should take into account the difference between distrust and jealousy and that the law enforcement working part was evidence that various forces co-operated and exchanged information regularly with the Bureau. And allegations that the judiciary, quote generally speaking, unquote, thought that the Bureau was less efficient than State forces was it said, not

supported by evidence from N.S.W. where most Bureau cases were heard. On the allegations that the Bureau's arrest and seizure record was indictive that it was not doing its job properly, the Department said that this ignored the fact that most of its work was surveillance and that it often passed this on to State forces who then acted upon it. It said that allegations that the Department spent too much time defending itself were based on a paper by a bellicose young junior officer written eight years ago. It said that if it did have to defend itself, that was largely because of the Commission itself. On the allegations that the Department was inefficient, the document said that this was a subjective judgement and did not attempt to take into account the relative efficiency of other police forces. It is not known why the document was not included in the Interim Report, but supporters of the Department are angry that Ministers were not given the opportunity to hear their defence. The document raises some interesting questions about the Minister, Mr. Fife's role in the ultimate decision to disband the Bureau. Knowing that his Department had so strongly rejected the Commission's criticisms, it appears that Mr. Fife was either defeated in Cabinet or is in dispute with his Department.

The role of the Business and Consumer Affairs, Mr. Fife, who is responsible for the administration of the Narcotics Bureau, came under strong attack today in the Federal Parliament when the Opposition launched a censure motion against him for what they alleged was his incompetent administration of the Bureau and what the leader of the Opposition, Mr. Hayden, claimed was a cover-up. Report from Geoff Duncan.

It seems the criticism of the Federal Department of Business and Consumer Affairs is not limited to the activities of the Narcotics Bureau. Submissions to the Federal Royal Commission into Drugs have also made strong attacks on the administration of the Customs Bureau. The submissions claim that Customs has lost control of its law enforcement functions, particularly in the area of the importation of drugs. Interview with a number of senior customs officers who asked to remain anonymous.

An interesting insight into the operations of those involved in drug trafficking has come from an interview with Bruce Stewart, who is a former associate of a man now being held by British police who is facing charges of murder in connection with a New Zealand-Australian drug syndicate: interview reported.

Tonight Jimmy Carter is facing one of the greatest challenges of his Presidency with the news that Iran may be preparing to cut off all oil supplies to the U.S. CIA reports are saying that workers at Iran's only crude oil port have gone on strike in support of the Tehran students who overran the United States Embassy.

Eight members of the Townsville Unemployed Worker's Union were arrested at noon today after refusing to leave the town's Department of Social Security office. They were charged under the Federal Public Order Protection of Persons and Property Act with disobeying a lawful order.