

PRIME MINISTER INTERVIEWED BY MIKE PETERSEN, CHANNEL 7,

CANBERRA

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Question

Prime Minister, for the moment it seems we have averted another crisis. But how far is the Government prepared to go to see that Mr. Laidely and others like him survive in their business?

Prime Minister

We are prepared to go a very long way indeed to see that small business, individuals, have economic freedom in this country. This is what it is all about. We have had a situation where under the auspices of the Commission, and in a sense -- well, we condemned that as something that ought not to have happened - but under the auspices of the Commission agreements were reached in which AMOCO said it was not going to supply petrol and the Transport Workers' Union certainly did not want Mr. Laidely to get supplies. If we are going to have a situation in Australia where large business and large and powerful trade unions can come to an agreement - explicit or implicit - that a certain person is not to be supplied products, it might be oil one day it might be groceries the next, then something very precious and important to Australia is lost. The Government is not prepared to see it lost.

Question

How far are you prepared to go in the event that another petrol strike happens?

Prime Minister

We will uphold the law. We will support the law. We will strengthen the law, if it is necessary to support the right of small businesses in this country. Nobody wants confrontation. We do not want confrontation. But it was people who were wanting to shut off Mr. Laidely's lifeline that led to confrontation in the first instance. Then a situation arose as a result of that where people must have said: "well, it's easier to sacrifice Mr. Laidely than to have an argument about a principle". So far as the Government is concerned, we are prepared to have an argument about that principle because it is about a principle that is of fundamental importance to the kind of country this is. Let's take it another step. If you are going to say a trade union can say where Mr. Laidely can get his product, or whether he can get it, you would have a trade union saying to you what you can put on this television screen and what you must not put on this television screen. That would not be a power that you would accept very willingly. You would fight it I believe, very hard, and so you ought. But the Government is in the forefront of this battle and has to be. Because when you have large and powerful bureaucracies of different kinds - a private one, the corporation, a trade union - which is another bureaucracy of a kind - then, it is the Government that has the responsibility

Prime Minister (continued)

to defend the interests of people, small businesses, that may not be able to stand without Government support.

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