

6 December 1980

An Electorate Talk to Radio 3HA Hamilton, by the
Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Hon. A.A. Street

The Australian Government is closely following developments in and around Poland. We are aware of the very widespread international concern about the trend of events in that country and about the possible reaction to them by the Soviet Union. As I told the Parliament on Tuesday, this concern has led to clear warnings being given to the Soviet Union. Since my remarks to the Parliament, the Heads of Government of the European Community, the President of the United States and the President-elect, Mr. Reagan, have all given very clear warnings to the Soviet Union that it should not intervene. If the Soviet Union did intervene with force we and our Western partners have no doubt that very serious consequences would arise for East/West relations, for US/Soviet relations, and for the wide range of interdependent cooperation that exists, particularly in Europe.

Given the Soviet Union's record of behaviour in such matters, most recently of course in relation to Afghanistan, it is not surprising that there should be widespread apprehension about the situation in Poland. I cannot say whether or not Soviet intervention in Poland is imminent or indeed inevitable. All I can do, as I did in the Parliament, is express in the strongest possible terms my hope that it does not. At the same time, however, we would be unwise to ignore that ominous possibility.

We in Australia do not accept that the Soviet Union has an automatic right to intervene in any country whether or not it considers that country to be in its sphere of influence. This point has been brought home to the Soviet Government.

Against this background, I asked the Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs to bring to the attention of the Soviet Ambassador and through him to the authorities in Moscow Australia's concern about the current situation. We did this so that the Soviet authorities would be in no doubt about what might be at stake for the international community and for Australia. Australia would not be immune from the consequences which would flow from a Soviet intervention. No country would be. The Soviet Ambassador was informed of our views on 3 December.

As for Poland itself, we firmly believe that it is for the people of Poland to solve the current difficulties themselves. In the present circumstances I can appreciate and sympathise with the understandable concerns of the large community of Polish born people in Australia.

We are hopeful that Poland will be able to overcome its present difficulties in keeping with its great tradition of independence. Australia has sound relations with Poland. We value those relations and we look forward to developing them. It is for these reasons that Australia has made its position abundantly clear to the Soviet Union in the same way that many of our Western partners have. We shall continue to watch developments in Poland very closely.