



EMBARGO: 5.00pm

PRIME MINISTERFOR MEDIA29 AUGUST 1982PRIME MINISTER'S ELECTORATE TALK

The findings that emerged from the tabling of the Costigan Report in Parliament last Tuesday must be a matter of the utmost concern for all Australians. Indeed, the initiative taken by the Federal Government and the Victorian Liberal Government in commissioning Mr. Costigan to investigate the activities of the Federated Ship Painters and Dockers Union has been fully justified by what his report has revealed.

Much has been said about the revelations concerning tax avoidance and the deficiencies of the Crown Solicitors Office. The Government has acted with vigour and determination on both of these matters. Even before this report was completed, the Government had taken action on 26 occasions through over 20 pieces of legislation against over 50 schemes of tax avoidance and evasion. This is indeed in sharp contrast to the record of Labor when it was in office and indeed when Mr. Hayden was Treasurer, a period which saw the explosion of the tax avoidance industry and its encouragement by the inaction of the Labor government. Perhaps one ought to reflect for a moment on the boost the tax avoidance industry was given by Labor's refusal to act on the Curran Scheme.

But the aspects of Mr. Costigan's findings which are of equal concern are those which relate to the activities of the painters and dockers themselves. Mr. Costigan noted that "in Victoria, the Union is under the control of hardened criminals". He referred to "some 15 murders that took place between 1970 and 1979", "their answer to any interference with their activities is not to use the processes of law but rather threats, violence and intimidation", and "in this way the painters and dockers have assumed for themselves a position outside the law and have maintained that position by violence".

However, the criminality of the organisation and the contempt that it treats the most basic institutions in our society was most acutely demonstrated by an assertion that the Union's Federal Secretary, Mr. Gordon made at the Sweeney Royal Commission. He said "We catch and kill our own". Those six words speak for themselves.

The Commonwealth Government has acted with great vigour in responding to the findings of the Royal Commission. We have already instituted a number of far-sighted and effective measures including the decision to appoint a special prosecutor and task force, the suspension of two officers of the Crown Solicitor's Perth office named in the Report, the commissioning of the President of the Law Council of Australia to examine the Perth office, the appointment of counsel to assist in advancing particular prosecutions and the urgent examination of S.16 of the Income Tax Assessment Act relating to secrecy.

It must therefore be obvious that in response to the Costigan Report the Commonwealth has now acted swiftly and effectively. Not so the Victorian Government.

The Report brings to the fore the most horrifying picture of an organisation whose activities Australians would think belonged to another world. The Victorian Government has before it a most grave and serious challenge. I can only hope that Mr. Cain pursues the cleaning up of the painters and dockers, "the hardened criminals" as Mr. Costigan refers to them, with the same enthusiasm and endeavour that he has talked about pursuing tax avoidance.

Mr. Cain must not allow the fact that the Union is affiliated to the A.L.P. to influence his actions. It is indeed of immense concern that the Union should to this day remain an affiliate of the Victorian A.L.P., sending representation to the State Conference and being a participant in the supreme policy making body of that A.L.P. branch. If such an organisation were affiliated to the Liberal Party I would immediately act to ensure that such association was repudiated.

It is also disturbing to note that two Labor senators revealed last Thursday that the painters and dockers are also an affiliate of the NSW and Qld branches of the Labor Party. Indeed, Senator Georges' statement "that he was aggrieved by some wild remarks made about the Ship Painters and Dockers Union" would be listened to with horror by every decent Australian.

In the light of such revelations, the threat made by the Leader of the Opposition on Thursday to table the reports supplied to him in confidence by the Royal Commissioner is all the more remarkable. It should be made clear that the Government has not tabled these reports at the request of the Royal Commissioner in order that his continuing investigations are not prejudiced.

Mr. Hayden's statement that "if the Prime Minister seeks to associate the Labor Party with the painters and dockers in the way in which he is about to I will find myself no longer bound to confidentiality" is most curious. His own senators tell us of this affiliation.

Is it then to be presumed that the Leader of the Opposition was prepared to endanger the important continuing investigations of Commissioner Costigan on the basis of seeking to suppress information which his own senators made public?