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PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

25 MAY 1989

AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLERS

JOINT STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS AND THE MINISTER FOR INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

The Government will no longer tolerate the continuing campaign of industrial disruption and abuse of sick leave entitlements by Air Traffic Controllers at Sydney Airport and other airports.

If this disruption continues the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) will immediately process the provisions already in the award which allow for individual fines and/or stand-downs.

Further, to ensure our capacity finally to resolve this unacceptable behaviour we have commissioned Mr George Polites, Mr Peter Newman and Mr Bernie Frawley* to provide us with an immediate report on other action available to the Government to put an end to the disruption at these airports.

Following receipt of the report, the Government will, in consultation with the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), take whatever steps are necessary to give the travelling public the best service Sydney Airport is capable of providing.

The Government's decision follows a series of attempts to end the disruption co-operatively. These include:

- . agreement to process the Air Traffic Controllers' award restructuring as a special case, providing early access to wage increases;
- . agreement to provide, earlier than planned, equipment to overhaul the Sydney and Melbourne air traffic control system;
- . acceptance in principle of the need for increased staffing, a position which will be firmed up once a report is received from the CAA on specific needs, due shortly.

The Government and the CAA have attempted to negotiate with the Air Traffic Controllers and their union in good faith and with considerable patience. It appears that some controllers are not prepared to follow their union's advice - nor do they appear to care about the welfare of passengers, or the economic health of tourism or the aviation industry in this country.

Let there be no mistake - the disruption at Sydney Airport is caused principally by the attempts of a group of self-interested individuals seeking to use their position in the industry to obtain very large wage rises outside industrial relations guidelines and the wage-setting principles which have been agreed with the ACTU.

- * Mr George Polites is former Executive Director of the Confederation of Australian Industry and is currently a member of the Board of Australian Airlines; Mr Peter Newman is Consultant to the Minister for Transport and Communications; Mr Bernie Frawley is a First Assistant Secretary in the Department of Industrial Relations.