PRESS STATEMENT:

MALCOLM FRASER:

THE WATERFRONT

May 12th, 1963

In the last two or three weeks several matters of interest to the different sections of the community have been debated in Parliament or have been the subject of Ministerial statements.

WHARF STRIKES:

As a matter of urgency, several Government members raised the question of stoppages on the waterfront, especially in Melbourne and Sydney - Sydney being by far the worst.

After the death of Jim Healy, the former Communist boss of the waterfront, there was a period of relative calm. It was hoped that Mr. Fitzgibbin, who succeeded Mr. Healy, would be able to maintain a tighter discipline over his waterside workers. Mr. Fitzgibbin was a candidate who had been backed by the Australian Labour Party against the communist candidate during the election to succeed Jim Healy. Several times during its term of office the Government has introduced legislation to improve conditions on the waterfront, to achieve a greater degree of continuity in the employment of waterside workers and to make Long Service Leave available to them. This has had some effect in achieving a greater efficiency on the wharves. However, in the last two or three months it appears as though the communist element on the waterfront, in Sydney especially, is once again gaining the upper hand.

In February of 1963, 10,500 man-hours were lost as a result of unauthorised stoppages. In March, 1963 156,000 man-hours were lost. This represents a 15-fold increase. These hours lost apply to unauthorised stoppages. Under the Award, waterside workers are allowed a certain number of authorised stoppages in each year. In addition, they have only to apply to the appropriate authority with a just cause for complaint and permission for the additional stoppages would be given. Because of the frequency and irresponsibility of the stoppages under the Communist leadership on the waterfront a limit was put on the number of authorised stoppages that can be held without special permission from the authority.

Many of the stoppages that are held by the waterfront are not related to proper industrial complaints. Stoppages have been held to discuss the question of abandoning the Atom Bomb, the United States Policy to Cuba and many other matters which are remote from the industrial waterfront.

One of the most unfortunate results of this turbulence on the waterfront is found in the heavy freight rates that Australians have to pay to export their major commodities - wheat, meat, wool, butter to name but a few. Indeed, the exporter is hardest hit of all people by this. He pays for them and Australia pays for them in expensive freight rates.

On the other hand, the waterside workers are not hurt at all. If there is a stoppage at a certain Port, ships bank up. Then, when the stoppages are over, the ships are still there to be loaded or unloaded. Very often this means overtime for the men. Thus it is possible for the waterside worker to achieve a higher pay packet as a result of wharf strikes, because he becomes involved at overtime with penalty rates to clear the back-log of cargo.

Happily this kind of industrial unrest has not become usual in many ports other than Melbourne and Sydney. The industrial record at Portland for instance is excellent and should be a significant factor in expanding Portland trade.
Last week the Minister for Supply presented a report to Parliament concerning the installation of Safety Belts in all vehicles operated by the Department of Supply. Since road safety is such a serious concern to all of us, I thought that comments on the report might be of interest.

Safety belts have been used by various Government authorities for some time. The Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Authority pioneered this field by making the installation of safety belts compulsory in 1960.

Since that time five vehicles have run over banks from a distance of five feet to one hundred feet. There were no serious injuries. Six vehicles have rolled over on turns or because of speed. In five of these vehicles there were no serious injuries. In one, the driver dislocated his shoulder but the passenger was unhurt.

The Ford Motor Company has also conducted tests. The cars were driven at thirty miles an hour into a brick wall, the driver - protected by a safety belt - escaped injury, but his dummy passenger, representing a 14 stone man, sustained severe damage.

Cornell University in the United States examines 8,000 to 10,000 accidents each year. These investigations have shown that the risk of being killed in an accident is five times greater if a driver or passenger is thrown from a car than if he remains with the car. It was found that seat belts represent the best way to keep a person inside the car during an accident. Because the connection between the use of a belt and the non-ejection from a car was so high, the Cornell University group stated that the widespread use of safety belts would greatly mitigate injuries and conservatively save 5,000 lives a year in the United States.

A special sub-committee on Traffic Safety held by the United States Congress endorsed these findings. In the United Kingdom, it was found that twelve of the thirty-three deaths in car accidents examined were due to the occupants being thrown from the vehicle. It was believed that these deaths would have been prevented by the use of seat belts or safety harness.

Sweden research groups have concluded that the use of safety belts have a protective effect of 50% to 60% in actual accidents.

Overseas the use of seat belts is expanding rapidly. Two million seat belts were sold in the United States in 1961, eight million in 1962. Legislation to make seat belt fittings compulsory is being introduced in some States of the United States.

Many authorities use safety belts as a matter of course in Australia. These include the Snowy Mountains Authority, the Department of Works in 300 vehicles, the Department of Civil Aviation in 200 vehicles. The Victorian Civil Ambulance Service uses safety belts as do many private companies.

The Report recommended that safety belts, conforming to proper standards, be fitted to all vehicles operated by the Department of Supply.

The evidence of the protective effect of safety belts is overwhelming. I have personally used them on the front seats of my car for several years. I now feel almost undressed if I have to drive a car without them. I would personally recommend that anyone who spends much time in a car should fit safety belts.
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