Many extraordinary things have been happening in recent days. Senator Murphy has apparently visited, or raided, ASIO headquarters in Melbourne and Canberra. He has not tried to explain why.

Every country, particularly a democracy such as ours, needs to protect itself against those who would destroy that democracy. To do that they need information concerning the activities of certain foreign powers or of people within Australia who do not believe in a democratic system of government.

The Australian Security Intelligence Organisation was established by an earlier Labor Government to do just that. The Director of the Organisation has a heavy responsibility. I find it hard to believe that he would not carry out those responsibilities conscientiously.

It has been suggested in the media that ASIO would not provide information which could have been related to the safety of a visit from the Yugoslav Prime Minister. Does anyone really believe that?

Senator Murphy will need to explain his actions. He will need to tell Australia why he undertook this extraordinary action, and we will need to ask ourselves whether or not this is not part of a concerted and deliberate attempt to destroy the reputation of ASIO, as the socialist left of the Labor Party would want.

Senator Murphy would need to be able to prove that he asked for legitimate information and was refused. I do not believe he would be able to prove that.

This is almost, for Australia, an Alice in Wonderland situation. But it is much too serious for humour. Until we have an explanation people will speculate.

Last Thursday night, Marshall Cooke, the new Member for Petrie, joined in the fight to save decentralised ports.
He pointed out that a number of Queensland ports, in his own State, are seriously affected. The levy in Cairns is much higher than in Portland, while Mackay and Rockhampton are also affected. Coffs Harbour and Hobart are seriously affected, and run the risk of losing a good deal of port trade.

The same can be said of other ports around the Australian coast.

In case people don't remember what this is all about, let me say that there's a minimum wage for waterside workers. If there is not enough work through a particular port, that minimum wage must be made up from levies collected through various port charges.

Until a few weeks ago, there was a national levy of 40¢ per man hour. Then, the Association of Employers of Waterside Labour - a body which is alleged to be controlled by overseas shippers and by the container consortium, which is dedicated to the centralisation of trade - made a decision that each port would be entirely responsible for its own levies, and that the system of national averaging would be abolished.

The effect of this has been to reduce levies in larger ports. In Geelong the levy is reduced from 40 cents to two cents per man hour. In Portland it is increased from 40 to 115 cents per man hour.

In terms of general cargo this means the additional levies for loading 5,000 tons of bagged wheat in Portland would be over $7,000. In Geelong the equivalent levy would be under $200. This is inequitable, it is unreasonable and it will make the life of the outports such as Portland very hard indeed. It is against the National Interest.

Marshall Cooke from Queensland raised matters, as I had done on earlier occasions. The Minister for Labour, Mr. Cameron, responded with a personal attack on Mr. Cook. After that I also entered the debate again.
I repeated the very serious nature of the situation, and told Mr. Cameron and the Parliament of the decisions taken and unanimously supported at the meeting I initiated in Portland last weekend. The Portland Harbor Trust already has responses from a number of other ports indicating their concern. I emphasised that I was confident that if Mr. Cameron was prepared to ask the head of the Association of Employers of Waterside Labour to come to Canberra, and to tell him that what had been done was contrary to the Commonwealth Government's policy, and contrary to the spirit of the Stevedoring Industry Charges Act, then I believe the decision could be reversed.

Mr. Cameron has responded by saying that he will send a representative to Portland.

I pointed out that the information was known, that there is no need for Mr. Cameron to collect additional information, merely a need to exert his undoubted influence to achieve a reversal of the decision.

The request has been put to him in the name of all of those who were at the meeting convened in Portland over the last weekend, which included Labor Members of Parliament. The meeting recognised that the responsibility was Mr. Cameron's. I fail utterly to understand why he would not express a national Australian point of view to the foreign interests alleged to control the Association of Employers of Waterside Labour.

We haven't heard the end of this story by any means, and I will be pursuing it further.
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