This week I would like to talk about the arrival in Australia of the new Phantom F-4E aircraft for the RAAF ... my concern over some conditions in our Services ... the hijacking of civil airliners and events which led to certain actions by the ALP Federal Executive against the Victorian Branch.

At Amberley Air Base in Queensland I welcomed the arrival of the first flight of Phantom F-4E bombers. Five aircraft we have leased from the United States, flown by mixed RAAF and US Air Force crews, completed the last leg of a 9,500 mile flight across the Pacific from the United States.

The aircraft which arrived this week are the first of 24 that the Government has leased to give the RAAF an effective strike aircraft. The Phantoms have been leased because of further delays in the F-111 project.

The Phantom is one of the most successful aircraft ever built and over 4,000 have been produced. They have proved themselves not only as tactical bombers but also as air-to-air fighters. Different versions are used by the RAF, Japan, South Korea and Israel. They have performed with distinction in the Vietnam War. Australian pilots I spoke with at Amberley this week praised the performance of the aircraft. It was described to me as a very fine aircraft as modern and effective as any military aircraft of its type operating in the world today.

The 24 Phantoms we are getting are the latest models and are new aircraft taken from the current production. The decision to lease the Phantom was made because the F-111 does not yet meet RAAF operational and technical requirements, as I made clear in my Parliamentary statement on May 12th this year. The considerable delays in the F-111 project and the lack of definition concerning future delays were prime factors in the Government's decision to lease the Phantom aircraft. We realised that we had to give the RAAF a modern and effective strike bomber force as quickly as possible and that the aircraft chosen had to be almost as good as the F-111. After exhaustive evaluation and research in the fighter bomber field the Phantom F-4E was selected.

The leasing of these aircraft was one of the options I negotiated with the United States. The initial lease can continue for five years and is, I consider, couched in highly flexible terms which are to Australia's advantage. The lease can be cancelled at any time or can be extended beyond the five years by negotiations or it can be converted to a straight out purchase.

Importantly in Australia's Defence interests a necessary modern and effective strike bomber force is being provided for our Air Force.

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Although the Government has made and will continue to make decisions concerning new equipment and materiel for defence purposes there is one area at this stage that gives me cause for concern. It is the area which covers the conditions of service.
for the men and women of our Armed Forces today.

First, let me make it clear that the basis on which any defence force rests is that body of men and women who are dedicated to the service of their country... in all ranks and in all three Services.

Without highly skilled personnel manning our three Services ... without tight discipline ... our modern sophisticated weapons systems would be useless.

You will no doubt agree that adequate well-trained manpower is fundamental to defence today. But more than this is the need for servicemen and women who are highly motivated to a Service career. I believe the basic desire or motivation to serve in the forces can decay if conditions of service are not all they should be.

With this in mind, I am convinced that the morale and well being of Servicemen and their dependents is an area that needs more attention and it is an area that causes me great concern.

In the past week I had informal discussions with a number of Servicemen in three States. These discussions, together with other specialist advice, convinces me that while pay rates are an important factor in retaining the highly trained service personnel there are other factors in the conditions of service that need urgent attention.

These factors concern the married Serviceman with family and relate to disruptions of family life, particularly in relation to housing, education and too frequent postings or moves.

After discussions with the Prime Minister and after advising Cabinet, I now emphasise that as a matter of great importance I am preparing a paper seeking a major enquiry into conditions of service.

If I am successful in my bid for a major enquiry I believe it would need to be carried out objectively by men or women with relevant experience. Its terms of reference would need to be carefully drawn.

I must make the point that there has never been a comprehensive in-depth analysis of what officers, for example, ought to be paid in the light of modern principles of salary fixing following study of all aspects of duties and responsibilities throughout the three Services.

My Department is aware of this and that more comprehensive investigation is desirable.

Meanwhile, at my direction, the Department of Defence is seeking to act with all speed on such matters of importance to the morale of Servicemen as education allowances, removal allowances and rental allowances.

I am concerned about the posting policy of the Services. I am not yet convinced that servicemen or women need to be moved as often as they are with ill-effects on families and school aged children.

I am not convinced that the provision of housing for servicemen is adequate.
The review, which concerns a number of Departments, will be concerned with reducing the delays in getting service housing to a minimum, the adequacy of arrangements under the Commonwealth/State Housing Agreement, whether the Commonwealth should go outside that Agreement to a greater extent than it now does in the provision of service housing, whether standards adequately reflect modern conditions and requirements for all ranks. Also included in the examination is a hiring system of houses as is used in the United Kingdom.

However, the Enquiry will not be restricted to these matters. I hope that it may be prepared to make imaginative recommendations for the provision of housing to meet the needs of servicemen, who must be moved around at frequent intervals.

Hi—jackings of civilian aircraft in various countries have given rise to a great deal of concern by governments and the general public throughout the world. These acts of air piracy have caused grave discomfort and danger to passengers and cost millions of dollars in aircraft losses. The current spate of hi—jackings by Arab guerrillas and the political demands they made on governments involved brought the world's condemnation.

This peculiar phenomenon of modern travel has caused a great deal of worry, and there were some questions asked in the Parliament in Canberra during the week. What were the Australian authorities doing to ensure as far as possible that order prevailed with respect to Australian airlines and that all necessary precautions were taken?

The Minister for Civil Aviation, Senator Cotton, said in common with other governments the Australian Government had taken steps at an international level to protect the security of aircraft, their crews and passengers. We had joined with other nations in the Montreal Declaration which condemned all acts directed against the safety of civil aviation. Parliament had passed laws providing very severe penalties for offences against civil aircraft. We would continue to collaborate with other countries to find an international solution to the problem. In the meantime civil aviation and airline authorities would collaborate in maintaining the highest possible security standards.

The continuing struggle for power by one Labor Party faction against the other was headline news over the past weeks. The Federal Executive of the A.L.P. — the body once referred to by Mr. Whilam as '12 witless men' — has announced that the Victorian Branch has now been 'dissolved' and had authorised officers of the Federal machine to be interim administrators. The very moves themselves by the Federal Body revealed deep divisions among those who were seeking to dissolve the Victorian Branch. The Federal camp had hopes of carrying out a manoeuvre that would place a new shine on the Party's face in Victoria and thus produce new prospects in future elections. A council of 12 men was appointed to recommend ways of re—building the Victorian Branch. One of these men is Dr. J. Cairns, the Victorian Labor member, who it might be recalled recently invited the North Vietnamese Paris negotiator, Madame Binh, and Viet Cong representatives to come to Australia and put their case at the Moratorium. It is clear that one cannot foretell what later events will bring. We shall just have to wait and see.
Airforce, Defence Services, Federal Labor Party intervention into Victorian Branch

4 October 1970

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