PRESS STATEMENT BY

WEEK ENDING 30TH APRIL, 1961.

Last week, the Victorian Chamber of Manufactures placed a full page advertisement in every Victorian State-wide newspaper. I say at the outset that this advertisement arouses my deep concern, as I believe it would yours, because although every person or group has the right to criticise any government in its own terms, this costly attack can do nothing but help to deceive the Australian public as to the true position. For instance, the fall in employment quoted in the advertisement appears much greater than the comprehensive figure of the Department of Labour or of the Commonwealth Statistician. They were apparently figures compiled by the Chamber to prove a particular point and their accuracy is more than questionable.

It is worth recalling that last week in the Parliament, the Treasurer, Mr. Holt, said that representatives of the Victorian Chamber of Manufactures had seen him recently and had said quite plainly that if they did not get what they wanted from him, they would embark on this particular campaign.

A Member of the Liberal Party was given copies of other full page advertisements which the Chamber was thinking of using. These advertisements would have distorted much further the picture of the Australian economy at the present time. They would have done much, as have the advertisements that have gone in, to destroy confidence in Australian industry and confidence in Australia's future. It is worth noting that the business world is far from united in this approach to Australia's problem. The Chamber of Commerce has, for a long time, been highly critical of the view taken by the Chamber of Manufactures which was also firmly condemned in an editorial in "The Age" of Friday, April 21st. In view of this, I felt some clarification of the position might interest you.

The plain fact of the matter is that, in this regard, the Victorian Chamber of Manufactures is acting on behalf of narrow sectional interests and in so doing has disregarded the overall good of Australia.

It is worth recalling that most of the companies represented in the Victorian Chamber of Manufactures operate behind tariffs that can be as high as 50%. For the last 8 years, these companies have had the double protection of import licensing imposed not to protect industry but to protect the balance of payments. Because of this double protection, many manufacturers have been able to raise prices much more than they would have otherwise done. Ever since import licensing was taken off 14 months ago, the Chamber has conducted a campaign designed to destroy confidence in the Government's measures and with the object of creating conditions under which import licensing would again have to be imposed. The only reason that the Chamber has for this is that the Chamber enjoyed the double protection conferred by import licensing in addition to the tariff and the Chamber does not enjoy any breath of outside competition that has come in since import licensing was lifted.

It is worth noting that the great bulk of Australian industries are not harmed and it is also worth noting that the Commonwealth Government has taken particular action in regard to other industries to make sure that they would not be seriously jeopardised.
Last year, the tariffs on certain textiles were heavily increased as a result of Tariff Board recommendations and last year the Government created special machinery which would enable secondary industries to gain a quick emergency hearing by the Tariff Board which would help until a full Tariff Board hearing could be held. This was designed specifically to prevent circumstances that might arise if the relaxation of import licensing led to undue hardship inside Australia.

Many industries have taken advantage of this legislation and apparently Mr. Gordon More who, in this regard, has acted as spokesman for the Victorian Chamber, proposed to use other methods which amount to the attempted pressuring of politicians into support of sectional interests.

It is worth remembering that when import licensing was lifted it was done specifically as an essential element in a campaign to try and control inflation because it had been felt that manufacturers in many instances were raising prices more than they should have and that the only way to stop this was to allow some outside competition.

It is worth remembering also that these industries operate behind extraordinarily high tariffs.

I would only ask that if anyone has seen these advertisements which could not have failed to catch the eye or if anyone has read them to ask themselves seriously whether they know of anyone who has been affected by these things. If they do not, they should discount the advertisements put in by the Chamber as so much propaganda.

There is only one other thing that I would like to say. One or two companies in Western Victoria have approached me because they have been apprehensive of excessive imports affecting their trading position. One of these industries, a member of the textile industry, has been in contact with officers of the Department of Trade and the particular industry, as a whole, has elected a panel which will be collecting evidence to place before an emergency hearing of the Tariff Board.

Another small industry at Portland is in very much the same position. If a case can be shown that imports are affecting the future of these industries, then I am sure that the emergency procedures passed by this Parliament will operate effectively. However, the shock tactics of using full page advertisements in the press which do a great deal to destroy confidence in Australian industry and in the future of Australia and which are designed to arouse fear in the minds of people working in the industries, will not deflect the Government or its supporters from what they believe to be right.