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RESIGNATION OF MR ANDREW PEACOCK

1. MR PEACOCK, AUSTRALIA'S MINISTER FOR INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS, (MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS IN THE LAST FRASER MINISTRY,) TODAY RESIGNED FROM MR FRASER'S GOVERNMENT. IN AN UNUSUALLY BLUNT STATEMENT (TEXT IN MIFT) WHICH APPARENTLY DELIBERATELY ECHOED PHRASES FROM A STATEMENT MADE TEN YEARS AGO BY MR FRASER WHEN HE HIMSELF RESIGNED, AS MINISTER FOR DEFENCE, FROM MR GORTON'S MINISTRY, MR PEACOCK SPOKE OF QUOTE ACTS OF GROSS DISLOYALTY UNQUOTE TO HIM BY THE PRIME MINISTER, WHICH HE FOUND QUOTE INTOLERABLE AND NOT TO BE ENDURED UNQUOTE. HE CLAIMED THAT EFFECTIVE INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS IN AUSTRALIA HAD BEEN PUT AT RISK BY THE CONSTANT UNDERMINING OF HIS AUTHORITY, AND CRITICISED MR FRASER'S QUOTE DANGEROUS RELUCTANCE TO CONSULT CABINET, AND OBSTINATE DETERMINATION TO GET HIS OWN WAY UNQUOTE. MR FRASER ACCEPTED MR PEACOCK'S RESIGNATION QUOTE WITH REGRET UNQUOTE IN A TWO LINE STATEMENT.

2. MR FRASER'S RESIGNATION IN 1971 SET OFF EVENTS WHICH LED TO MR GORTON'S REPLACEMENT AS PRIME MINISTER: ASKED AT A PRESS CONFERENCE WHETHER THIS WAS HIS AIM TOO, MR PEACOCK SAID THAT A CHALLENGE TO MR FRASER QUOTE DID NOT EVEN COME INTO QUESTION AT THE PRESENT MOMENT UNQUOTE. CERTAINLY MR PEACOCK IS NOT THOUGHT TO HAVE THE NUMBERS WITHIN THE PARTY TO UNSEAT MR FRASER AS LEADER. MR PEACOCK'S RESIGNATION LOOKS FAR MORE LIKE A REACTION TO EVENTS FORCED UPON HIM THAN A CRISIS ENGINEERED TO ALLOW A LEADERSHIP BID.

3. MR PEACOCK'S EMPHASIS THAT IT WAS NOT SIMPLY QUOTE ACTS OF RECENT DAYS UNQUOTE THAT LED TO HIS DECISION IS A REFERENCE TO THE ENFORCED RESIGNATION YESTERDAY OF HIS PRIVATE SECRETARY, MR BARRY SIMON (AN EX-LIBERAL MP, WHO LOST HIS SEAT AT THE OCTOBER 1980 ELECTION), WHO AT A PRIVATE MEETING OF BUSINESSMEN LAST WEEK, HAD CRITICISED THE GOVERNMENT'S HANDLING OF THE 35 HOUR WEEK CAMPAIGN, AND FOUND HIS REMARKS REPORTED IN THE PRESS. SIMON'S BEHAVIOUR WAS LESS OUTRAGEOUS IN AUSTRALIAN POLITICAL TERMS THAN IT WOULD BE IN OURS. MR PEACOCK PUBLICLY REPRIMANDED HIM. MR FRASER APPARENTLY TOOK THE INDISCRETION SERIOUSLY ENOUGH (OR SAW IN IT A SUFFICIENT OPPORTUNITY TO CHASTEN MR PEACOCK) TO RAISE IN FEDERAL CABINET YESTERDAY.

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4. MR FRASER AND MR PEACOCK ARE MEN OF CONTRASTING STYLES. AS MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS, MR PEACOCK GOT OUT OF LINE WITH MR FRASER JUST BEFORE THE FEDERAL ELECTION LAST YEAR, CALLING FOR EARLY DERECOGNITION OF POL POT. HE WAS REPORTED AT THE TIME TO HAVE OFFERED HIS RESIGNATION. AGAIN, MR PEACOCK'S UNSUCCESSFUL CHALLENGE TO SIR PHILLIP LYNCH FOR THE DEPUTY LIBERAL LEADERSHIP AFTER THE OCTOBER ELECTION WAS SEEN AS REGISTERING HIS CANDIDATURE AS HEIR APPARENT.

5. ALTHOUGH MR PEACOCK HAS A HEALTHY FOLLOWING IN THE PARLIAMENTARY LIBERAL PARTY, HE HAS FEW ALLIES IN CABINET WHERE HE HAS FOR SOME TIME ALIENATED HIS COLLEAGUES BY FITS OF PIQUE AND A SHORT TEMPER. MR ANTHONY AND SIR P LYNCH HAVE TODAY PUBLICLY EMPHASISED CABINET SOLIDARITY BEHIND MR FRASER. MR PEACOCK WILL PROBABLY BIDE HIS TIME ON THE BACK BENCHES UNTIL HE CAN CONTEST THE LEADERSHIP ON FAR FIRMER GROUND THAN THIS WEEK'S FRACAS HAS OFFERED HIM.

6. MR VINER (WHO WAS MINISTER FOR EMPLOYMENT AND YOUTH AFFAIRS) HAS TAKEN MR PEACOCK'S PORTFOLIO. HE IN TURN IS SUCCEEDED BY MR NEIL BROWN, A VICTORIAN BACK BENCHER.

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TO PRIORITY FCO

TELEGRAM NUMBER 186 OF 15 APRIL

REPEATED ROUTINE WELLINGTON

MIPT: RESIGNATION OF MR PEACOCK.

1. FOLLOWING IS TEXT OF MR PEACOCK'S ANNOUNCEMENT TODAY:

I WISH TO ANNOUNCE THAT I HAVE TODAY RESIGNED FROM THE FRASER GOVERNMENT. THIS DECISION IS IRREVOCABLE.

I BELIEVE THE PRIME MINISTER HAS ENGAGED IN ACTS OF GROSS DISLOYALTY TO ME AND MY OFFICE. THE PRIME MINISTER HAS CONSISTENTLY ALLOWED FALSE AND DAMAGING REPORTS TO BE PUBLISHED ABOUT ME IN MY CAPACITY AS A SENIOR MINISTER. HE HAS BYPASSED THE SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT BY ACTING WITH A MANIC DETERMINATION TO GET HIS OWN WAY. I FIND THE CONSTANT DISLOYALTY AND ERRATIC ACTS OF BEHAVIOUR INTOLERABLE AND NOT TO BE ENDURED.

IT IS QUITE IMPOSSIBLE TO CARRY OUT EFFECTIVELY THE DUTIES OF A SENSITIVE AND EXTREMELY IMPORTANT PORTFOLIO WHILE THE PRIME MINISTER BOTH OVERTLY AND COVERTLY SEEKS TO UNDERMINE THE AUTHORITY OF A SENIOR MINISTER.

I HAVE BEEN GRAVELY CONCERNED FOR SOME TIME THAT EFFECTIVE INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS IN THIS COUNTRY HAVE BEEN PUT AT RISK BY THE CONSTANT UNDERMINING OF MY AUTHORITY. THE NATION REQUIRES STEADY AND RESPONSIBLE CONDUCT OF ITS AFFAIRS AND ESPECIALLY IN THIS EXTREMELY SIGNIFICANT AREA. I HOPE MY SUCCESSOR WILL RECEIVE THE COOPERATION NECESSARY FROM THE PRIME MINISTER.

IT SHOULD NOT BE THOUGHT THAT ACTS OF RECENT DAYS ALONE HAVE FORCED ME TO THIS POSITION. THE PRIME MINISTER HAS CAST ASIDE THE STABILITY AND SENSE OF DIRECTION OF THE GOVERNMENT. INDEED HE HAS A DANGEROUS RELUCTANCE TO CONSULT CABINET AND AN OBSTINATE DETERMINATION TO GET HIS OWN WAY. AS STATED THIS DECISION IS IRREVOCABLE. I WILL SEEK LEAVE OF THE HOUSE TO GIVE MORE DETAILED REASONS WHEN THE PARLIAMENT RESUMES.

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