



PRIME MINISTER

PRESS STATEMENT NO. 576

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PRIME MINISTER'S STATEMENT ON A.B.C. TELEVISION

Opposition Threat to Budget

Recall these words:

"The basic principle which I adhere to strongly is that a Government that continues to have a majority in the House of Representatives has a right to expect that it will be able to govern."

Fine words...fine principle...The basic principle of our Australian parliamentary democracy. That man of principle is the present Leader of the Opposition, Mr Fraser. He said those words just a few days after he replaced Mr Snedden as Leader of the Opposition. He has asserted that principle again and again. He knows the course of honour, of decency, of democracy. Yet today he has made statements which can only mean that he is willing to overturn his principles and overturn the basis of our system. He has said that he intends to use the accidental numbers he thinks he controls in the Senate to delay passing the Budget until the money runs out. In other words he intends to produce chaos in order to prevent the Government being able to govern. This is not just what Sir Robert Menzies has described as a falsification of democracy, not just the pursuit of what Sir Robert Menzies described as "the purely opportunist demands of those who find constitutional convention irksome" - it is constitutional revolution.

The House of Representatives - the people's House - alone determines who shall govern Australia. Only seventeen months ago, the people for the second time in less than eighteen months, elected the Australian Labor Party to govern for a further three years.

I state again the basic rule of our parliamentary system: Governments are made and unmade in the House of Representatives - in the people's House. The Senate cannot, does not, and must never determine who the Government shall be.

That principle has been upheld since federation. It has never been broken or challenged except during this Government's life. It has been scrupulously observed on at least twenty occasions since federation when the Opposition had the numbers in the Senate to reject Supply.

Our majority in the House of Representatives has never been threatened. The House of Representatives has passed the Budget. Budgets and all money bills must originate in the House of Representatives. The Senate cannot even amend them but it can delay them. And this is what Mr Fraser proposes. And how will he do this? By using the numbers in a stacked Senate which is not even the same Senate which the people elected only seventeen months ago.

It is in the words of Mr Killen, the Liberal Member for Moreton in Queensland "a tainted Senate". In May 1974 the people of Australia elected a Senate in which the Government had twenty-nine Senators and the Liberal and Country Party also had twenty-nine Senators, there were two Independents. The Labor Party - the Government - received 200,000 votes in the elections for the Senate over all our opponents combined. But because two State Premiers flouted another great constitutional convention the Government now has only twenty-seven Senators.

It is this unrepresentative Senate, this tainted Senate, which Mr Fraser intends to use as a weapon to strike down the democratically elected Government of Australia - to render it incapable of carrying out the program which it was elected to carry out.

A week ago it was generally thought that Mr Fraser would stick to his principles. Last weekend the Liberal Party Council - the faceless men of the Liberal Party - met in Canberra and apparently gave Mr Fraser his riding instructions.

I make it clear that the Government will not yield to pressure. We will not yield to blackmail. We will not be panicked. We will not turn over the Government of this country to vested interests, pressure groups and newspaper proprietors whose tactics would destroy the standards and traditions of parliamentary government.

The business of Government will go on.

Mr Fraser has no credible answers to the great problems that Australia shares with all other comparable countries. As the elected Government we will continue our fight against the effects of world-wide recession and unemployment. For that reason our Budget must be given a chance to work. There must be no disruption to the process of economic recovery.

Let there be no mistake about the gravity of Mr Fraser's intention. Parliamentary democracy is a complex and fragile thing - around the world it is under challenge. And now it is being challenged in Australia - by the very man who professes to be a man of principle.
