PRESS STATEMENT:

Malcolm Fraser:

November 3rd, 1963

DIFFICULTIES OF PARLIAMENT

This last week saw the dissolution of the twenty-fourth Parliament. I was trying to cast my mind back over the Parliament to see which events stand out most clearly. The first which came to my mind was the fact that immediately following the last election, the newspapers, the general public and our opponents were all predicting that the Government would fall within a matter of a few weeks or, at the very most, a few months. At that time, there seemed to be a general conclusion that a Government with a majority of one could not survive in the Federal Parliamentary scene. This prediction has been proved wrong. The Government has survived. It has not been defeated on a major issue although there have been difficulties from time to time and uneasy moments.

It is symptomatic of the strain which Federal Parliamentary duties place upon individuals that three Members of the Opposition have died in these two years and two other Members are ill. One of these Members is not contesting this forthcoming election. In addition to this, the Postmaster-General, Mr. Davidson, is retiring - largely for health reasons.

A narrow majority falls particularly heavily on Ministers. When a majority is clearly defined, the normal procedure is for Ministers to be able to undertake their Ministerial duties and not worry about answering the bells every time they ring. With a majority of one, the Ministers have to go running, just as the Private Members do. This clearly entails difficulty and slows down their work. If they are having discussions with their departmental officers or meeting with a deputation that may be introduced by a Member of Parliament they would clearly find the business slowed down and delayed. In this Parliament one would almost have thought that the Opposition called for quorums and divisions merely to put pressure on Ministers. However, since the death of Eddie Ward, this practice has not been followed to the same extent.

Nevertheless, despite the difficulties, the Government has survived relatively unscathed for two years.
The major issues that have been thrown up in this election, as I have already said, are ones of foreign policy. Even though foreign policy issues were important in the last election, the question of our Treaty with the United States over the Radio Base, the question of our commitment to the new Malaysia, and the continued advocacy of a Nuclear Free Zone by our opponents are matters which have come into prominence in this Parliament. The first two of these are matters that had not arisen before the last election. The Agreement with America had not been formulated and the new Malaysia had not been brought into being.

The differences between the Government and the Opposition on these two issues, which are both vital to the security of Australia, will be brought out clearly during the election debates. It is perfectly correct that the Australian people should be asked to give a judgment on these matters. As things stand, the Government could not rely upon Opposition support for its policies in either of these two questions. We could easily be caught, therefore, if some emergency arose over Malaysia (which I do not think anyone would suggest is impossible) and if we had illness on the Government side. Under these circumstances the Opposition would be able to defeat the Government at a time of national crisis. As I understand it, this is one of the most powerful reasons for the election. Indeed, the Government would be neglecting its duty if it left the government of Australia in this vulnerable position with these issues unresolved.

EVICTION AVERTED

This last week has generally been a good humoured one, although in the last day, Fred Daly from N.S.W. was nearly evicted from the House because he called the Speaker a bushranger. Members are allowed to call their opponents many things but they must, at all times, have respect for the person in charge of the House, and that is the Speaker, otherwise it becomes like a schoolroom which pays no attention to its master. I think we all appreciate that no progress would be made under such circumstances. However, at the suggestion of Mr. Calwell and Mr. Holt, Mr. Daly apologised to the Speaker and withdrew his remarks and was allowed to remain. The incident arose because Peter Nixon from Gippsland had reminded the House of Mr. Daly's advocacy of the margarine industry and Mr. Nixon had pointed out how detrimental this was to the dairy farmers who have a great investment in their industry and upon whom the prosperity of many areas of Australia depend including, for example, large areas in Western Victoria.

R.A.A.F. BOMBER

For the first days of the last week, the Opposition kept up a concentrated attack on the Prime Minister on the choice of the American TFX. This matter should have been put at rest when the Minister for Air said that the TFX is faster; that it could fly higher; that it could carry a greater pay load and fly further than the supposed British equivalent. In addition to this, the TFX was going to be much, much cheaper than the TSR.2, the British 'plane. The reason for this is a very simple one. The Americans are going to order about 1,000 of these and the British about 30, so the Americans will get the advantage of large scale production. We are indeed very fortunate to have been able to make an agreement which will place this machine in service in Australia at the same time as initial deliveries are made to the United States. In addition to this, we will be able to draw on American supply sources for any spares that we might want for this 'plane as they will have them operating in many areas in the Pacific. This will be a tremendous advantage to us. It would be very unlikely that the British would be operating their machines out here at any time in the future.
FORCED RETIREMENT

One other matter must be mentioned and in some respects, it casts a little sadness over the dissolution of this 24th Parliament. Mr. Norman Makin and Mr. Bert Thompson from South Australia have both had their last day in the Federal Parliament. These are men who have both served Australia well. They are both among the moderate Right Wing of the A.L.P. Mr. Norman Makin was at one time Australian Ambassador to Washington. He was a Speaker of the House and has had a distinguished career of service to his Party. At one stage, he was also Minister for the Navy. While Mr. Thompson has not had a career quite so distinguished, he has nevertheless given good and loyal service. These men are not retiring voluntarily. They have been axed by the South Australian A.L.P. The reason given for this decision is that they are both too old. It is true they are elderly but they are both in good health and vigorous and I am certain that none of their constituents have suffered from any lack of representations or thought. Even though I am one of the youngest Members of the Parliament I recognise that experience stands for a great deal and it is doubtful if the representatives who experience these two will be able to make as good a contribution to the Parliament for many years.

There are many people who think that the real reason for their abandonment by the A.L.P. is the fact that they have both consistently voted with the Right Wing of the A.L.P. and the Executive of South Australia, under the influence of Clyde Cameron, is controlled by the extreme Left Wing, therefore we can expect to see these two moderate Labour Party Members replaced if their seats are still won by the A.L.P. by men representing the extreme Left.

Norman Makin and Bert Thompson had many friends in the Parliament. They will be missed.

TELEVISION EXTENSION

The other matter of some importance that was discussed last week revolved around the amendment of the Television Act introduced by the Postmaster-General. The amendment is designed to enable country stations like Ballarat to apply for what, in the technical term, is called a translator service which is, in fact, a small booster station so that it can improve the quality of the service to areas that are not now getting a first-class service. I know that Ballarat is interested in translators to serve possibly Warrnambool, Portland the the southern Wimmera. I hope they will be granted translators for these areas.

The Australian Broadcasting Control Board will make its inquiry about this matter and come to its conclusions in an informal way. The Opposition moved a completely incomprehensible amendment to this small Bill which was to the effect that any station within 200 miles of a proposed translator service could object. If they did object, there would have to be a full scale inquiry which would involve Counsel for a long time and at great expense, an expense that country stations possibly would not be prepared to undertake.

Since the purpose of the amendment is to improve television in areas that cannot support a full independent station by themselves, and since it is designed to build up the strength of country television stations, some of which have not been all that profitable, it seems strange for the Opposition to move this amendment. It would have made it possible for the city stations to lodge objections, for example, to any application that Ballarat may lodge and this would involve inquiries that might take months. It could delay, if not postpone, indefinitely the introduction of this improved service in certain areas.

If Mr. Calwell had not always opposed the commercial metropolitan television stations I would have thought he was playing right into their hands and doing precisely what they would have wanted. Be that as it may, the Bill was passed as introduced by the Postmaster-General and it will now be open to the Board to grant translator services in areas that it thinks fit.