PRESS STATEMENT:

MALCOLM FRASER:

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MR. WENTWORTH SUSPENDED FROM THE HOUSE.

Last week the Parliament experienced its first stormy and difficult moments.

Mr. W. C. Wentworth, who is always controversial and often interesting, had risen in support of another member on the adjournment. Mr. Wentworth stung the Leader of the Opposition, Arthur Calwell, to reply. Mr. Calwell spent most of his time talking about the family of Bill Wentworth and talked about an earlier William Charles Wentworth, who was a leading figure in the New South Wales Parliament something like 100 years ago.

A group of people, of whom the earlier William Charles Wentworth was one, had tried to buy all the South Island of New Zealand, and the then Government of New South Wales introduced legislation into the New South Wales Parliament to prevent this. This was round about 1840. It is reported that Mr. Wentworth the first had bought all the South Island and 200,000 acres in the North Island for £400 and some small gifts to the Maori Chiefs. The sale worked out at something like 400 acres for a penny. This land sale did not go through. It was, of course, frustrated by the New South Wales Government as anyone would expect. What it has to do with the present William Charles Wentworth is a little difficult to understand. If we were all blamed for the alleged sins of our ancestors there's probably no saying where we would end up. Mr. Calwell's remarks were additionally unfortunate because they besmirched the memory of a great pioneer Australian who was one of the most powerful fighters for democracy in the then colony.

Mr. Calwell ended his speech by saying - "They just rake it over all the time, hoping as Hitler hoped that if you tell a lie often enough and make it big enough somebody will believe it." The implication in this was obvious, and Mr. Wentworth, as was his right, rose and asked for the withdrawal of the word "lie". This is one of the words that you aren't meant to use although it is quite Parliamentary to say "the honourable member is a fibber" or "treats the truth roughly" or something of this kind.

The difficulty arose because as soon as Mr. Wentworth, in accordance with his right, asked for the withdrawal of the word, the Opposition made such an outcry that the Speaker was not able to hear what Mr. Wentworth was saying. He therefore tried to get Mr. Wentworth to resume his seat so that he could bring the whole House to order and then hear what Mr. Wentworth wanted to say. The Speaker was in a difficult position, and he asked - indeed ordered - Mr. Wentworth to resume his seat. Unfortunately, Bill Wentworth I think misunderstood the Speaker's motives and thought that he was not being given an opportunity to take his point of order and, therefore, he kept bobbing up and down at the same time as the Speaker was on his feet. He was warned once and then he was named because he was not conforming with the instructions from the Chair.

When a member is named the Minister in Charge of the House, in accordance with Standing Orders, must move that the honourable member who has been named be suspended from the service of the House.

It was most unfortunate that all this happened, because although Mr. Wentworth was technically wrong it was the outcry from the Opposition (which prevented him or the Speaker from being properly heard) that led to the misunderstanding.
Anyway, Mr. Alan Hulme, the Minister in Charge of the House, moved Mr. Wentworth's suspension. Government members are all committed in these circumstances to support the Minister who has moved the motion. The Opposition were, of course, jubilant, and they all came crowding over on to the Government benches, all of them to assist in removing Mr. Wentworth from the House for twenty-four hours.

After the vote some semblance of justice was done because the Speaker then asked the Leader of the Opposition to withdraw the remark that he made in relation to the member for Mackellar—that's Mr. Wentworth. Mr. Calwell rose and did so.

It was an interesting and stormy quarter of an hour, and it demonstrated once again how it is impossible to predict the course of what will happen in the Parliament. A chance remark or an inflammatory or provocative speech can sometimes bring a quiet and peaceful House to a state of uproar. It is fortunate that this doesn't happen very often or the reputation of the Parliament would suffer.

Implementation of Government policy:

In the weeks since the last election the Ministers, particularly the new Ministers, have been very busy learning their new jobs and making the preparations necessary to the implementation of the Government's election promises. Some of these matters are easy to implement and others will require some administrative changes and quite lengthy discussions with the States.

However, the first Bills have already been introduced into the Parliament to give effect to the increased rate of child endowment and also to the endowment of 15/- a week for all student children between the ages of 16 and 21 years. The first payments for both these matters will be made on April 7th. It has already been announced that the payments will be retrospective to January 14th, so the first payment will cover 12 weeks arrears. The increased rate of child endowment, that is 15/- a week for the third and subsequent children, will be paid in the normal way after this, but the payments for student children will be made at twelve-weekly intervals. 900,000 children from 520,000 families qualify for the increased rate of child endowment. This alone gives some indication of the administrative and staff work involved in making these increased payments.

There is no means test for either of these payments. If a student is lucky enough to have a scholarship or some other educational grant it will not affect the endowment to his parents or guardian. The Minister has also said that spare-time employment undertaken before or after normal school hours or during vacations would not be inconsistent with full-time studies so, therefore, this also will not affect the education endowment. This, of course, would only apply if this part-time employment did not affect full time studies.

If parents are already getting endowment for their children, if they qualify for the higher payment it will not be necessary to apply—the higher rate will automatically be paid. However, the parents or guardians of student children should make their application to the Director of Social Services in their State to qualify for student endowment payments. Application forms are now being prepared.

Last week the Prime Minister also announced the terms and conditions that would apply and the machinery that will operate to give effect to the Government's promise to provide £5,000,000 a year for the provision and extension of science facilities in secondary schools, both private and State. Since the provisions of this statement are quite technical and detailed I will deal with this matter in a later talk. In particular, I hope any secondary schools that are interested in the matter will contact me so that I can let them know the machinery which will be established. This is a matter that has and will involve further discussions with the States.