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With the Compliments

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The political year is nearly over and the holiday season is now with us. Over the last week or two there has, however, been a good deal of speculation about the results of the last Senate election and what, in fact, it means. Some people have even suggested that the swing against the Government was so great that if an election has been held for the House of Representatives, the Labor Party would have won. This, of course, is not so. Even on the votes as cast for the Senate the Government would have had a workable and adequate majority. But it is quite true that there was a swing against the Government in a number of states and this especially so when the vote is compared with the extraordinarily large Government vote of 12 months ago. At the present time, the Government majority in the House of Representatives is 38 and I do not think that anyone expected this overwhelming Government vote to be maintained. It had never been achieved before and it was an accumulation of circumstances last year that led to a flood away from the Labor Party. And so it was inevitable that some of this swing would be reversed.

There are those who say that this reversal is due to one thing — the replacement of Arthur Calwell by Gough Whitlam. In part they may be correct because little else has been changed over the last 12 months except the leadership. This has involved a change in presentation of policies but the policies themselves are not really different. The ultimatum that the policy would present to the United States over Vietnam is still virtually the same policy of withdrawal that Mr. Calwell espoused in blunter terms throughout last year and although there have been some minor changes to the structure of the ALP Executive and Conference these changes in themselves are not substantial. They mean that the Leaders and Deputy Leaders of the House of Representatives and Senate have been made members of the Federal Executive, and that they, together with the State Leaders and a representative from the Northern Territory, have been made members of the Federal Conference.

For that matter the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party have been members of the Liberal Party Executive since its inception and State Premiers or Leaders have, whenever they have wished, come to Federal Conferences as members of their State Delegation.

If the swing away from the Government is due to a greater or lesser extent to the change of leadership, let us have a look at this change to see how much it has meant. I will be comparing these figures with the Senate election figures for 1964. The Labor Party vote went up in N.S.W., which of course, is Gough Whitlam's home state, but even there
it went up by only 2.52%. In Queensland, the Labor Party vote went up by 1.4%. It also went up in Western Australia, but let us look at the other three states. In Victoria the Labor Party vote went down by 1.9%; in South Australia it was down by 3.3% and in Tasmania, it fell by over 9%. Does this look like a great victory for the Labor Party?

While in General terms the vote has been depicted as being one against the Government, the percentage of our vote has still increased in at least one state and that is South Australia.

If we turn to Victoria, we find that the Senate vote we have just had showed a reduced support for the Government of 2.1%, but the Labor Party was also down and the DLP increased its vote by 3.41%. Indeed, this was typical of DLP votes in most states. Their vote increased substantially in Queensland and Western Australia, as well as in Victoria. As a result, the DLP candidate in Victoria has achieved a quote in his own right, and the DLP candidate in Queensland is also assured of Victory. This will give that party four seats in the Senate and also the balance of power. So far as I am concerned, if there had to be a swing against the Government I was glad to see that it was a swing to the DLP, which by and large supports the foreign affairs and defence policies of the Government parties. Thus, in no way could these results be seen as a swing against the Government on its defence policies.

I also looked at the Senate figures for this electorate, and it was interesting to note that despite a slightly increased number on the roll, about 500 fewer people voted for the joint Government Senate team, but 1300 fewer voted for the Labor Party, while about 500 more voted for the Democratic Labor Party. So on these figures, compared with the 1964 Senate figures, the vote was a good deal worse for the Labor Party.

Throughout, you will notice that I have compared the Senate figures with the last Senate election in 1964, and I believe this is much more realistic than comparing them with the quite overwhelming vote that the Government achieved 12 months ago.

It is clear that the DLP will have the balance of power, and dependent upon the final outcome in South Australia and Western Australia but assuming the Government wins both, which appears to be likely, the final figures will be 28 seats for the Government, 27 for the Labor Party, 4 for the Democratic Labor Party and Senator Turnbull from Tasmania looks like being returned as the one Independent.

Well, I think this is enough of the Senate.
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This will be my last talk until the Parliament resumes for its Autumn session next year.

Everyone in this area must be extremely concerned at the way the season has turned out and at the damaging effects that this is having on the economy of Western Victoria. The drought is, of course, not exclusively ours. Very large areas are involved and it is too early to foretell what its final effects will be. This is a matter that I am watching with real concern, not only as your representative but also because I have a personal knowledge of what it means.

My best wishes to you all for Christmas and the New Year.