ELECTORAL STATEMENT BY THE HON. MALCOLM FRASER, M.P.,
MEMBER FOR WANNON - SUNDAY, 31 MARCH, 1974.

During this last week the Prime Minister was involved in a nasty demonstration while speaking at Forrest Place in Perth. Traditionally Forrest Place has been used by politicians of all parties as a great open-air forum for political discussions and debate. I hope that tradition remains.

The demonstration against the Prime Minister was certainly one that can give no Australian any cause for pride. It ought not to have occurred. Initially farmers were blamed for the demonstration. Farm organisations, I am quite sure, had no part in it and both the Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Snedden and the Leader of the Country Party, Mr. Anthony, dis-associated themselves from the demonstration and deplored the fact that it had occurred.

But I want to go further behind the scenes and ask why did this demonstration occur in this particular way. Even if we assume that it was largely farmers involved in that demonstration, and I do not concede that, it is not enough to assume that the people became so annoyed as a result of the very anti-rural and hostile policies of the present Government. Certainly Mr. Whitlam has been provocative. He has told farmers that they have never had it so good, when many of them have been destroyed by floods and many others are still in debt as a result of ten years of low world prices and some years of very severe drought in Australia.

So what Mr. Whitlam said was tactless and incorrect. But provocation is still not sufficient to cause people to prevent free speech and to prevent political arguments being put.

I believe that what happened in Forrest Place can be related to events in other places and I also believe that the leaders of the present Government have a very significant responsibility for those events.
In the last years in Opposition members of the Australian Labor Party were quite often taking to the streets organising mass meetings of thousands of people to demonstrate a point and to demonstrate power. "Democracy has had its day", was one famous phrase used by a person whom we would all know well.

People were led to believe that demonstrations of strength would change the course of government irrespective of what the elected majority had determined, and thus it came into vogue that a noisy and radical and disruptive minority could compel the majority to adopt its views. I believe that that is the philosophy that the Labor Party in the last few years created. Now Mr. Whitlam is reaping the benefit of what he and his own party founded.

We have seen the same approach in matters that affect the aboriginal people. Coming through all of this is a very clear lesson that if our system of government is to work effectively it can only do so if the great majority of people are prepared to accept the decisions of government.

We have an elected system and a democratic means of changing government. There used to be the view that if people not in government wanted to have their policies prevail they would work to have people change their votes, and that was the best and most appropriate means of getting policies adopted. However, once a person starts to advocate the view that minorities, by the selective use of disruptive tactics or by force, can compel the institutions and organisms of government to change their minds or give a decision they would not otherwise have given, then that society is threatened with a serious breakdown in the fabric and structure of democracy.

We saw the demonstration before the Arbitration Commission which caused Mr. Justice Moore to postpone for a short while the hearing in the National Wage Case. We saw how Mr. Halfpenny gave praise to those demonstrators and indicated that next time the placards and the disruptions would be bigger and better.

We have seen how the Arbitration Commission now will continue a hearing even though a union may be on strike. If my memory is correct, some years ago a hearing would be suspended while a union was on strike.

Through all of this comes the view that violence and disruption are more common than they once were, and to a much too large a number of people are the accepted means of gaining an objective. Australians need to make it very plain that...
no matter what the circumstances, no matter what the cause, violence is not an acceptable means of changing policies and must be rigorously rejected. That means that minorities must accept the decision of majorities.

It means that when a government has been duly elected citizens will consent to the decisions of government. If they do not like the decisions they have their own recourse at subsequent elections and through advocacy and persuasion, but not through violence. The rash of strikes that has beset Australia since the present Government took office finds its base in part at least, in the same cause. Radical union leaders have spread and promoted the philosophy that industrial disruption will gain greater rewards than from voluntary negotiation or arbitration. Indeed, I would believe that there are some radical union leaders who are not content until their has been disruption preceding an agreement or an award from the Arbitration Commission, and that they would believe they had not put adequate pressure on employers unless that happens.

What they do not realise, of course, is that they are putting pressure on the whole community and damaging the whole community adding to the cost of inflation and perhaps hurting their own members most of all. The radical union organiser or secretary does not forego his salary when his union members go out on strike as a result, very often, of his decisions and recommendations.

Coming through all of this is a need to get back to the view that our system depends upon the consent of the governed. For that consent to be full and broad across the whole of society government at all times needs to be sensitive and tolerant of the views of minorities, and I would believe that by and large Australian Governments have shown that tolerance of minorities.

The radical violent fringe of the left and of the right has no place in our society. The great majority of Australians need to make that very plain at each and every opportunity.