THE HON. MEMBER FOR WANNON - MALCOLM FRASER

Bass has been a Labor held electorate for most of the past forty years and I certainly am not prepared to forecast an easy win for the Opposition at this stage.

I have been campaigning hard in the electorate and so has our candidate, Kevin Newman. I have visited much of the electorate in addition to Launceston. I have visited Flinders Island, where the farmers have been hurt by the Government's rural policies, and the timber and farming towns of the North East of Tasmania, such as St. Helens, Weldonborough, Scottsdale, Derby and Branxholm.

I have talked to railway workers and to textile and timber workers who are suffering because of the Government's economic policies.

Despite the allegations of parochialism which the Labor Party is making against the people of Bass, I have been finding them as concerned as any other Australians about the national issues of unemployment, inflation and economic mismanagement, and which affect them as they affect all other Australians.

The latest allegation by the Labor Party that the people of North Eastern Tasmania are motivated by parochialism instead of proper consideration of issues has come from the Party's Federal Secretary, Mr. David Combe. He says that the Bass by-election has no national implications and suggests that the people of Bass should vote for the Labor Party candidate because he was born in the electorate, although he has not lived there for eleven years.

This sounds to me like a party which is on the run and on the defensive. It would be foolish to proclaim victory in advance of polling day, but it is encouraging nevertheless that the Labor Party is resigning itself to defeat by preparing its rationalisations in advance.

Political Appointments

The mistake which the Labor strategists are making is about the very real personal attachment which the Bass electorate developed for Lance Barnard, who, as their Member, was a son following in his father's footsteps.

Mr. Barnard has resigned his seat to become Ambassador in Stockholm, and it is certainly legitimate to ask why he has chosen to do this at such a critical time for the Government. I can only say that it must have been because of a very secure disillusionment.

I have criticised the appointment of the Prime Minister's Principal Private Secretary, Mr. Jim Spigelman, to head the Government's propaganda department, but I do not criticise Mr. Barnard's appointment.

Within limits, it is acceptable practice to appoint leading political figures who have given long and loyal service to ambassadorial positions. This Government has done it in the past and so have Liberal/Country Party Coalition Governments.
But these appointments are for fixed terms, and they are without political influence.

The appointment of Mr. Spigelman to head the Government's propaganda department is different from the appointments of Mr. Freeth to be Ambassador in Tokyo or Mr. Armstrong to be High Commissioner in London.

It is also more serious than people realise. It is a permanent appointment, and it is highly influential.

It strikes at the fundamental principle of an impartial public service giving impartial instead of political advice, and thus makes it easier for ministers to justify decisions taken for political reasons.

The Prime Minister has now appointed three former Principal Private Secretaries as permanent heads of government departments. Mr. John Menadue is head of the Prime Minister's Department, and Dr. Peter Wilenski is head of the Department of Labour & Immigration.

As head of the propaganda department, Mr. Spigelman is in charge of an apparatus which is spending hundreds of thousands of dollars promoting party political policies, such as welfare services, Medibank and legal aid services, through an intensive advertising campaign.

No matter how good the private secretaries in my office, they are not going to be appointed heads of government departments. I am committed to maintain the independence of the public service. That is why I have undertaken to restore to the C.S.I.R.O. the Mineral and Solar Energy Research Divisions which have been taken away from it in the interests of building up Mr. Connor's empire.

The Opposition Parties will seek to bring down legislation to ensure that assaults of this nature on the C.S.I.R.O. cannot take place in future without an act of Parliament.

It will be our prime aim to restore and protect the integrity of the Public Service.