PRESS STATEMENT:

MALCOLM FRASER:

END OF AUTUMN SESSION

May 27th, 1962

Last week, the autumn session of Parliament ended. After the first few weeks of uncertainty, the Parliament settled down to its normal routine in the conduct of its business. I say the first few weeks of uncertainty because, to start with, there was a threatened Opposition censure motion and everyone was wondering what would happen as a result. The censure motion came and it was then defeated by the Government's narrow majority of one without the Speaker voting.

After the censure motion the attack on the Government was very greatly reduced and now there are many observers who believe the Parliament might well go its full term. This would be by no means unique. As I pointed out before, several Governments have survived in Australia with a majority of one or two and while you maintain that majority it is as effective as a majority of ten or fifteen even if it is uncomfortable from the Government's point of view. Of course, there can always be accidents. A person can become sick and unable to attend and it would never be possible to predict what might happen under such circumstances.

In the last weeks of the session, the Government's majorities in divisions have been raised to three, to four, to five and in this Parliament we regard a majority of five in a division as a large majority. It just shows how your thinking alters, because in the last Parliament if our majority in a division was reduced to as little as ten or twelve we thought something was very wrong.

PRIME MINISTER'S VISIT OVERSEAS

Two or three matters of importance occurred in the last week. The Prime Minister announced that he is going to go abroad to speak to President Kennedy and Prime Minister MacMil' n of the United Kingdom concerning the problems that will arise for Australia if the United Kingdom should enter the Common Market. This is in accordance with the Government's policy of doing everything possible to protect and safeguard the interests of our own exporters.

In addition to these informal meetings that will be held the Prime Minister will, of course, have to be away in September for the official Prime Ministers' Conference, by which time England's course and decisions may be known. In addition to this, because the Common Market presents Australia with problems which may be greater than any that have ever arisen in peace-time, the Government feels that the Leaders of the Opposition should be enabled to go abroad to examine the matter for themselves at first hand. Australia's policy in regard to a matter as important as this should be bi-partisan. Both political parties should - and I believe are - hoping for the same results.

As I understand it, Mr. Whitlam and Senator McKenna of the Opposition will be going abroad in this coming recess, and Mr. Calwell, Mr. Crean and Mr. Pollard will go abroad in September. Thus, the Opposition Leaders will have the opportunity to learn Australia's problems at first hand. As a result, when there are debates in Parliament their criticisms should be more constructive than they might otherwise have been.

While they are abroad, the Australian Government will do every-thing possible to make it easy for Opposition Leaders to meet the appropriate people in England or in European countries to which they would like to go. The Opposition Leaders will be completely independent while they are abroad

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and able to do what they want. They would be in no way attached to the official visits of the Prime Minister. That is the offer that the Government has made and which has been accepted by the Opposition. This offer is nearly unique in Australian political history although, I think, during the formative years of the United Nations, two Opposition Members did go abroad with the official governmental delegation. This action may lead to a basis of co-operation between the Government and the Opposition which could ultimately lead to better debates and more constructive proposals being put to the Parliament. When I say co-operation, I do not mean that the vigour and the bluntness of Australian politics will be in any way diminished. Certainly it will not.

SOUTH-EAST ASIA

Other matters of great national importance have arisen in this last week. Despite the intensive efforts of diplomats to achieve some degree of stability in Laos, the Communists appear to be renewing their military offensive in that country. As I understand the problem, there had previously been agreement that the three Princes of Laos, one of whom is a Communist, one of whom is a neutralist and one of whom is anti-Communist, were to form a neutral government and that foreign military forces of all kinds were to be withdrawn. I understand again that matters had been deadlocked because the three Princes had been unable to form an adequate government. In this context, the Communists recently renewed their offensive and have captured further areas of Laos. Thus, there is not only a threat to Laos. There is a threat to the whole of South-East Asia.

The next country concerned is Thailand with its border adjacent to Laos. Thailand is a member of SEATO and is bitterly anti-Communist and anti-Chinese. 2,000 years ago the Thai people fled from China proper and established themselves in their present country. They travelled south at that time to escape Chinese domination. They would relish Chinese domination no more now than they did then but they cannot travel further south because it would mean going into the sea.

It is most important that the Communist advance in this part of South-East Asia shall be stopped. If Laos goes, Thailand will be open to danger because of her long adjacent boundaries with a Communist country. In addition, South Vietnam, the country that has for years been waging a war against Communist guerrillas much in the same that Malaysia had to do some years ago would be open to further danger. At the moment, South Vietnam only has a short boundary adjacent to a Communist-held country. If Laos becomes Communist there will be hundreds of miles of country difficult to police, difficult to patrol, adjacent to South Vietnam but under Communist control.

The one thing that is likely to avert a conflict in this area is the obvious and clear determination of America and the SEATO powers to resist Communist aggression. If the Communists for one moment feel that we will not fight to save a country from Communism then they will attack that country.

It is my belief that the Communists have eased tensions in Berlin because the United Kingdom and the United States made it quite clear that they were not going to be forced out of West Berlin, and made it quite clear that if the Russians tried to force them out the result would probably be a nuclear conflict. In the result, the tensions over Berlin have become reduced, because the Russians know as well as we that there will be no winners in a war involving nuclear weapons.
Another minor matter occurred which is of great significance for Australia and which is important. The Prime Minister has announced that the United States is going to construct a satellite tracking station in Western Australia. This will gain much valuable knowledge of satellites which are put into space for various purposes. The construction of the station will cost £33M. In addition, the construction of homes and shops and facilities for the technicians involved will involve a similar amount. The station has been planned for construction at a place where nothing at present exists.

The Australian taxpayer need have no fear that this will involve him in any expense because the United States Government is going to pay the full cost of this tracking station.

When the station is operation it will make it possible to obtain greater knowledge of space which we all hope can be used for purely peaceful purposes.
Author/s: Fraser, Malcolm

Title: End of Autumn session

Date: 27 May 1962

Persistent Link: http://hdl.handle.net/11343/40043

File Description: End of Autumn session

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