PRESS STATEMENT

MALCOLM FRASER

October 10th, 1965

MR. WHITLAM AND THE GLASS OF WATER

In this last week the debates were marred by one of those incidents which should not occur in the Federal Parliament. The debate concerned an amendment to a Repatriation Bill which would have extended benefits to certain people. The Government had made up its mind concerning the limits of any possible extensions when the Budget was formed earlier this financial year and, therefore, it felt unable to accept the amendment which would have involved some additional millions of pounds. It was an amendment that affected members of the Salvation Army.

During the debate in the House of Representatives, when Mr. Hasluck was seated at the table, Mr. Whitlam made some remarks concerning Mr. Hasluck's parents who were Salvation Army people - a matter of which, I am sure, Mr. Hasluck is rightly proud, but the implication of Mr. Whitlam's remarks was that, because Mr. Hasluck agreed with the Government's decision opposing the amendment, he was betraying his own parents. This sort of remark is quite unnecessary.

When people enter the political arena they know full well that all sorts of things are going to be said about them, especially if they become successful politicians and make their mark in their own Party. Politicians, as a body, accept this, but the great majority of us become more than a little annoyed when the attacks against us are broadened to cover friends or family of one kind or another. It is usually the politicians who are subject to attack and, from the nature of our profession, we must expect it, but we also have a right to expect that people who may be close to us can remain immune from such attacks.

Mr. Whitlam, as a leading member of the Opposition, should know of these customs, but it is unfortunately typical of the sort of petulance which sometimes breaks through in a manner I am sure he would deplore, as much as the rest of us, once he has done it but at times he seems unable to restrain himself.

This was the incident, of course, which ended with Mr. Whitlam throwing a glass of water across the table of Parliament House into Mr. Hasluck's face.

The papers probably built this up into much more than it really is. The Melbourne "Herald" had some headlines which might have been large enough for a declaration of war, and one of the papers had a cartoon of Mr. Whitlam, speaking at the table with the Prime Minister sitting opposite in a bathing suit with a towel over his shoulder, with Mr. Holt in his skin-diving outfit with a snorkel attached, and with other front-bench members protecting themselves with umbrellas and raincoats.

I think the incident has probably quite severely damaged Mr. Whitlam in the eyes of his own close supporters, because they believe that a potential leader should not be open or vulnerable to this kind of unfortunate temperament.

Unluckily, this was not the only incident of this kind during the week, although the second one was of a much more minor nature, but it did reveal the same outlook.
The Prime Minister spoke on the Bill concerning the waterfront and Mr. Whitlam was to follow. When Mr. Whitlam got up he said something to the effect that he would not start speaking until the Prime Minister had finished ambling out of the Chamber. Again, Mr. Whitlam knows that the Prime Minister has many duties and appointments and functions, apart from listening to speeches in the Parliament. Mr. Whitlam may have been peeked that the Prime Minister was not staying to listen to him. On this particular occasion, the Prime Minister returned to announce that he had an appointment with Mr. Monk, President of the Australian Council of Trade Unions.
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