PRESS STATEMENT BY THE HON. MALCOLM FRASER, M.P.

PARLIAMENT PAYS ITS LAST RESPECTS TO HAROLD HOLT

The new Parliament with John Gorton as Prime Minister began this week. The first real business of the House of Representatives was to pay its last homages to Harold Holt. Probably no Prime Minister has disappeared in such dramatic and moving circumstances as did Mr Holt and certainly no Australian Prime Minister has had the respect shown to him that was demonstrated at the memorial service in Melbourne when leaders of many Asian countries, the President of the United States, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom and Prince Charles as special envoy from the Queen, all gathered for the service.

The Leader of the Opposition paid a generous tribute to the late Prime Minister. I would like to quote a few of his words. He pointed out that Mr Holt was the first Prime Minister to make it possible for the Leader of the Opposition and his Deputy to travel at public expense at regular intervals overseas so that they may be well informed. Mr Whitlam said that when he subsequently did go abroad early this year, and I quote, 'it was made very clear to me that Harold Holt had been incomparably the best known, the best liked Australian in all the Asian countries I visited. The regard in which he was held extended well beyond the heads of State and political leaders with whom he had been in closest contact. The genuine regret at his death went far beyond the natural sense of shock and horror at the manner of his death. Harold Holt possessed a very real presence in Asia. He made Australia better known in Asia and he made Australians more aware of Asia than ever before.' This is widely recognised.

While this may well have been the greatest contribution of his Prime Ministership, it should never be forgotten that he always had a progressive view of our own domestic affairs. Again, Mr Whitlam pointed out that one of his first acts as Prime Minister was to announce liberalisation of our immigration regulations regarding Asians. Mr Whitlam also pointed out that as Minister for Labour he had established more harmonious relations with the trade union movement than any non-Labour holder of that post has ever done.

Again, on the domestic front the Prime Minister indicated that in his first Ministry of Labour and National Service he was responsible for introducing child endowment into Australia. The House of Representatives is the poorer because of his death and the last words spoken in respect to Harold Holt by the leaders of the three parties and by a number of individual members will be remembered for a long time.

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