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[Handwritten note: Sent the newspapers & Radio speech list]
THE SENATE ELECTIONS

On 25 November Australia will be voting for the Senate. At nearly every election politicians have some reason for believing that the election is important and should attract the close attention of the Australian people. It is often more difficult to impress this upon electors in a Senate election than it is in an election for the House of Representatives. It is not quite so easy to make the sharp contrast between one party and another. This may be because people feel that the results of a Senate election will not necessarily alter the party in power in the House of Representatives and nor will it alter the policies under which the country is being governed.

In the short term this is of course true, but it is equally true that a hostile Senate can frustrate the policies of the party in power. A hostile Senate can hold up legislation and undermine the authority of a Government, and can lead to a situation in which firm and resolute Government becomes very difficult indeed.

To a certain extent this is what the Senate has tried to do over the last year. In the last elections for the House of Representatives we promised a change in the policy under which grants would be made for the building of homes for old people. Up to that time, grants had been made on a basis of £2 for every £1 collected by an eligible organisation but funds made available by shire or municipal councils were not eligible for the grant. Our promise was to make such grants eligible.

The legislation to provide for this was passed in the House of Representatives on 13 April 1967 but was rejected by the Senate on 3 May. It was rejected not because the Senate opposed what we were doing but because they wanted a still wider extension of the policy which would have involved additional funds. This is not something that any Government could allow. You work out your own budget and you divide it up as best you can in the interests of the whole country. Of course it is always very easy for an opposition to say "We want more of this and more of that — more funds for social services and national welfare, and more for national development." But it is quite another thing to have the responsibility of providing funds for all these different purposes. Thus, if a Government says that it is a policy to extend a benefit in a certain field, it would find its financial power completely destroyed if it were put in a position in which it had to accept Opposition amendments that extended financial obligations even further. We would
therefore not accept the Senate amendment and thus the legislation as we had proposed it was held up until this session, when it was again submitted to the Senate. This time they passed it without amendment.

The same kind of frustration was felt over the postal charges. The increases to these were unpopular, and of course we knew they would be. Everyone wants better and improved postal and telegraph services but they have to be paid for somehow. They must be paid for either by general revenues collected through taxation or from the revenues that are collected from the use of the services themselves. The only real argument in this matter has been what proportion should be paid for by taxation and what proportion should be paid for from general postal and telegraph revenue. Charges had been held steady for some time and early this year the Government decided that if the rate of development of postal and telegraph facilities was to continue as we had planned and if the burden on the general taxpayer was not to be substantially increased the charges would have to be noticeably higher.

The Opposition used its power in the Senate to reject these increased charges in a special meeting of the Senate held in the middle of the winter recess. One might well ask what was their purpose in calling the Senate together to block these increases when the same increases were allowed to go through the Senate on 19 September without amendment. Was the first rejection a cynical use of power to embarrass the Government? Or was it a stand made on principle? If it was the latter, how had the principle changed 13 weeks later?

I instance those two things to show how policies can be upset by a hostile Senate and one of these policies was a direct result of an election promise which was fully endorsed in the elections for the House of Representatives. In reality, a Government cannot do what it has promised to do, it cannot carry out the mandate it has received from the people, unless it can control a majority not only in the House of Representatives but also in the Senate.

So this election is important — not perhaps so vitally important because of policies that might involve domestic issues, but because of policies that concern foreign policy and defence. If a mistake is made within Australia on a purely domestic issue there is a reasonable chance that that error can be made good. I do not say this to justify mistakes in domestic policies but to point out that if you make a mistake in foreign policy, if you alienate your friends, your allies and your neighbours, you may well find that it is beyond your power to make good the mistake. It is in this field, above all, that the policies of the Government and the Opposition are diametrically opposed and with all the knowledge that I have been able to gain in three visits
to Asia, in meeting Asian diplomats in Australia and other visitors from Asia, I am still utterly convinced that the policies of the Government are essential for our own security and for the security of the whole area in which we live. Next week I will develop this point of view further.

If the Government is to have a majority in the Senate after the next election we need to win five of the six states. With proportional representation this is no easy task. Of the members who do not retire at this election we have 14, the Labor Party has 14 and there are two members of the A.C.P. Thus, we need to win 17 seats to give us a total of 31 votes in the Senate out of 60.

If you believe that the policies we have followed in Asia are right, if you believe they are important, I ask you to have this in mind when you cast your vote on the 25th.