The Parliament was stunned at the news of Senator Gair's appointment as Australian Ambassador to Ireland. The Prime Minister obviously thought that this was a stroke of genius. Because of the coming Senate election the Prime Minister and Senator Murphy believed that this would greatly increase Labor's chances of controlling the Senate. In other words, Mr. Whitlam plainly believes that he is unlikely to gain a majority in the Senate through normal democratic processes and therefore he took a course of action which is likely to provide him with an additional Labor Senator from Queensland - a course of action which is quite unprecedented since William Pitt The Younger decided it was time for Irish Parliament to disappear in 1801. That might be the only thing that the present Prime Minister has in common with William Pitt, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. In case our memories are short, the United Kingdom could not achieve its will with the Irish Parliament and so William Pitt The Younger considered the master stroke of buying out all the members who were in the Irish Parliament in 1801. It was probably the most infamous chapter in British Parliamentary practice.

However, after a fairly short while Mr. Whitlam ceased to smile over this incident. The Premier of Queensland acted with characteristic speed and before Senator Gair's resignation from the Senate became effective caused the writs for the election
of the Senate to be issued in Queensland. This in effect beats the purpose of the Prime Minister's manoeuvre. This comes about because normally there would be an election for 5 Senators in Queensland. Mr. Whitlam hoped to achieve an election for 6 by Senator Gair's appointment. It is widely accepted, having in mind the political climate in Queensland, that the Liberal, Country Party or D.L.P. will between them win 3 seats and Labor 2. If there were an election for 6 Senators for Queensland it would then be expected that Labour would win 3, effectively giving them an additional Senator. As you can imagine these quite unprecedented events involved the Senate and Members of the House of Representatives and a great deal of discussion and speculation occurred.

Other important matters, as a result, have been put very much in the sidelines. The present Government can't make up its mind whether it wants a Russian scientific station or base in Australia or not. There ought to be no difficulty for this matter. There ought to be a short and sharp refusal.

Whatever the present Australian Government might feel, the great majority of Australians do not want to belong to the socialist third world. They do not want to forego old friends. A Russian scientific station or base in Australia could well frustrate
the purpose of other joint space or defence communication facilities in Australia which are jointly operated between Australia and the U.S. At the worst the U.S. could regard agreement with the Russian request as so unfriendly that the U.S. could consider withdrawal from ANZUS. I certainly hope that the U.S. will show patience over this matter, because the oddities of the present Government do not respect the wish of the Australian people in matters of this kind.

The same thrust has been shown in the Government's attitude to the U.S. base at Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean. Recently Admiral Alan McNicoll one of the most distinguished former Chiefs of the Naval Staff asked why Mr. Whitlam seeks to frustrate the plans of our major ally.

Soviet supremacy in the Indian Ocean is without question in manpower and in tonnage. The Suez Canal is likely to be opened in a measurable period, and this will bring the Indian Ocean within a week's sailing of the Russian Mediterranean and Black Sea fleets. It will enable her to link up this fleet with the Pacific fleet in Vladivostock. In recent years the Russian fleets have been expanded and modern ships have been introduced. The American fleet has been aging. The Soviet Union already has the infra-structure available to support a much greater Soviet force in the Indian Ocean. The U.S.
does not have that infra-structure. They might once have hoped to be able to use in part our base at Cockburn Sound which in earlier times I had discussed with them.

Quite consistent with its past actions, the Government's original proposals in this area were made against the U.S. It was only when the nature of that approach became evident that the Government began to say that they would approach both the U.S. and the Soviet Union to try and establish a zone of peace in the Indian Ocean. But that will deceive nobody. We have discouraged our major ally in this area from maintaining effective surveillance and patrols in the Indian Ocean. In addition we have no defence ourselves. We have an under-developed, unuseful base at Cockburn Sound. There are some docking facilities at Darwin with nothing in between. In all this vast area there may be 3 or 4 patrol boats which have no endurance at all once they leave the sheltered waters of the Australian coastline. They are not blue water ships and their range is almost non-existent.

The Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Snedden, has been active in pointing out the dangers of the Government's actions and in emphasising the Opposition's serious objection to the course that the Government has taken. Unfortunately travellers overseas now find that Australia is often regarded as a member of the third world. Travellers in Eastern Europe often find we are welcomed to the socialist fraternity.
Our foreign policy dismays our friends whether they are close to Australia or further afield. The Government has certainly won support in Russia and China and in some part of the third world. But how many people believe that makes Australia safer or more secure. There ought to be a way, and there is a way, of maintaining Australia's essential interests, while at the same time establishing friendly relationships with more and more countries in the world. The Government has chosen a much easier path and that of selling out old friends in its effort to gain new ones.
Library Digitised Collections

Author/s:
Fraser, Malcolm

Title:
Gair's appointment to Ireland, foreign policy

Date:
7 April 1974

Persistent Link:
http://hdl.handle.net/11343/40619

File Description:
Gair's appointment to Ireland, foreign policy

Terms and Conditions:
Copyright courtesy of Malcolm Fraser. Contact the University of Melbourne Archives for permission requests.