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A.L.P. TACTICS ON POSTAL CHARGES

Comment by the Prime Minister, Mr. Harold Holt

Increased charges by Governments are never popular, and it is not surprising that the Labor Party should attempt to turn the announced increases in postal and telephone rates to its political advantage. But the decision to use its numbers in the Senate to defeat the Government on a substantial financial matter reveals the depth of political opportunism to which the Labor Party, under its new leadership, will allow itself to sink.

It is one of the most firmly established principles of British Parliamentary democracy that a House of review should not reject the financial decisions of the popular House. The terms of the Commonwealth Constitution reflect this principle.

It has long been a cherished principle of Labor policy that the Senate should not frustrate the financial policies of a Government possessing majority support in the House of Representatives. This was consistently adhered to by the former Leader of the ALP, Mr. Calwell; it has been repeatedly emphasised by Labor's Shadow Treasurer, Mr. Crean, and given clear expression by Mr. Whitlam himself. He is on public record as having stated Labor's belief that Senate powers on financial matters should be only those of consultation. He made this statement at a time when he was acting Leader of the Labor Party. Labor's attitude on this matter is carried to the point of maintaining as a plank of policy in its platform, the abolition of the Senate.

There will be many staunch Labor supporters disgusted by this cynical abandonment of a long-held principle and this blatant exercise of political opportunism in the teeth of so many firm and clear public declarations of the past. If this is the new look in Labor leadership, then it is revealed as having no basis of consistency or principle nor any respect for historical democratic tradition and practice.

CANBERRA,
10th May, 1967.