



PRIME MINISTER

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Mr Anthony and Constitutional Conventions

Mr Anthony's latest outburst suggests that his memory as well as his principles are on the down-turn.

It is only a little more than a year since Mr Anthony was an ardent defender of the principle of Senate vacancies being filled by members of the same party as Senators who had died or resigned.

So concerned was he about this principle that in 1973, before the retirement of Senator Prowse, he telephoned the Premier of Western Australia to see whether the principle would be followed. He was assured by the Labor Premier, Mr Tonkin, that a Country Party replacement would be appointed to replace a Country Party Senator who wished to retire.

Mr Anthony's rejection now of this very proper Constitutional convention must be related to his desire to break yet another.

It is quite apparent from the rush by the Country Party to embrace Mr Lewis' indefensible stand on the issue of finding a replacement for a NSW Labor Senator, that they are not at all sure of their numbers in the Senate.

Even without putting a Liberal or Country Party Senator in Mr Justice Murphy's place, the Opposition has the power to reject any Senate motion, including the provision of funds for the Government to continue in office.

It is clear that the Opposition is not at all certain that it can control its own numbers. It fears that there may be one Senator within its own ranks who has a real respect for the Constitution and its Conventions, and who would stop short of voting outright for a rejection of Supply.

In April last year some of the Liberal Senators were able to tell themselves that they had not actually voted against Supply. This time Mr Anthony is making sure that he will have the numbers to go the whole way, so that he can strike a determined blow at one of the most fundamental Constitutional Conventions: that the Senate does not determine who should be in Government, or when elections should be held.