

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE RT.
 HON. SIR ROBERT MENZIES, ON TELEVISION
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Ladies and Gentlemen :

This is not a policy speech. That, no doubt, is a pleasure to come. What I want to do on this occasion is to answer a question which is being fairly widely put as to why we are to have an election now when the Parliament, theoretically, has another twelve months to go. I want to answer that by reminding you of a few things.

Before the last election - that was in December, 1961 - my Government had a majority of something over 30. When the last election finished, we had a period for about six or seven days in which nobody quite knew who had won. It looked at one stage as if the vote would be 61 all and, of course, that would have meant, inevitably, another election almost immediately. Well, then, when finally the counts were completed, it turned out we had 62-60 and by the time a Speaker had been elected, that meant 61-60 on the floor of the House - a majority of one. A majority of one in a House of 122, I think it might properly be said, was a pretty narrow majority. It couldn't be narrower.

And I think that at that time - but you can think for yourselves and remember for yourselves - most people thought we would be out in a matter of months. The Opposition certainly thought so because when Parliament met, for the first time after the election, in February in 1962, the Opposition at once launched a No-Confidence motion which was defeated by one vote. Since then, as you know because I have mentioned it publicly - we have had four other No-Confidence motions, all designed, no doubt, to bring about the defeat of the Government. And we have survived - mostly by a majority of one.

Now, right through this period - it's getting near two years now - we have had to live on the very edge of a political precipice. Two of my supporters, staying away from a division, not hearing the division bell or being otherwise engaged, could mean the defeat of the Government; one member on the Government side feeling very strongly about something, crossing the floor of the House and the Opposition wins and the Government is defeated. This is an eminently unsatisfactory way of conducting the business of the country.

At that time, of course, the Opposition wanted an election and let me remind you that at all times that would have been an election for the lower House, not for the Senate, because under the constitutional arrangements, there can't be a Senate election before July of 1964, and therefore, had the Opposition succeeded in any one of these repeated attacks, there would have been an election for the lower House only and we would not have been hearing all this nonsense about the extravagant waste of money involved in a single House election. That, after all, was what the Opposition wanted. They can scarcely complain now that they have got it. Well why have they gone cold on this election? Why is it that people who wanted to have one so frequently have now taken up an attitude of protest about having one. Well, the answer is quite simple.

They were quite certain early in 1962 that if they could force an election they would win it. I'm a bit inclined to think they were right because our popularity - if I may say so - had fallen very considerably and the 1961 election was followed by a period of time in which I wouldn't have rated our chances very high. But, of course, today the position is quite different. The Opposition knows that an election is not likely to be a successful one for it; knows that the position of the Government has strengthened; that there is an increasing realisation in the country of the prosperity that we see around us, a prosperity which bears out the policy of the Government for stability and for growth because we have had both in full measure and therefore the Opposition now finds that it is a wicked thing to have an election. Well we are going to have one and you will be the people who will determine whether it is wicked or not. You will be the people who will decide whether you want this precarious situation to go on, with a Government devoting quite a bit of its time to preserving itself, to discussions with the Whip, to finding whether the full numbers are present. All these things take a lot of time and I regard my duty to you as one to use my time and the time of my Ministers in attending to the serious problems of the Government of the nation.

Now, why is it, I wonder, that the Opposition has this fear, apart from what they know about public opinion. Why do they now fear an election? I think the answer to that is quite simple. First of all, last year they were talking vociferously about unemployment, whipping up the unemployment issue, magnifying whatever unemployment existed. Today they know that this has practically disappeared. They know, indeed, as well as I do and as well as you do that it won't be very long now before it will become increasingly difficult to find employees for jobs. We are almost at the point where there are more jobs than there are people looking for them. And the result is that the eager cries about unemployment have now faded away and anyhow you wouldn't be very much impressed by them if they were resumed, would you?

In the second place, they know quite well that people are more conscious than they ever were before that the issue is not so much between the Government and the Opposition in Parliament as it is between the Government and those who control the Opposition in Parliament - the thirty-six men, most of whom you have never heard of, who sit on the interstate body of the Labour Party which lays down ironclad rules as to what policy they are to pursue. That is something that is very well worth remembering. We have had quite a few instances of it, haven't we, in the last twelve months.

Again, the Labour Party knows that on matters of foreign policy, matters of our relationship with the United States of America - a very vital relationship because America is our ally in this part of the world - that on all these problems of defence, on which they now profess to be having second thoughts, on all of these matters they are extremely vulnerable, and they are vulnerable because they are ambiguous. Do you know what side they are on in these matters? You take a simple illustration: Do they really believe in Malaysia? Just up to our North, lying there in the path of southward Communist aggression, the expanding and aggressive activities of China; do you know what their attitude is? Do they really believe in Malaysia? Do they believe in it sufficiently to support it? Would they be willing to carry out the undertaking that I have given publicly that if Malaysia is attacked, then we will join with Great Britain in helping to defend her? Is that something on which you feel you

clearly understand what they have in mind? Because I don't. I know they've said, "We support the concept of Malaysia." Yes, well, that's right. I may support the concept of a neutral Sweden. I may support all sorts of concepts around the world, but the real problem is what are we going to do about it. That's the thing, and that is where you are entitled to ask any any Government where it stands and what it will do. Well, of course, the reason for the ambiguity that they suffer from is quite clear. You just remember that it's only a little while ago that their outside authorities told them that their policy was to withdraw Australian troops from Malaya, to say nothing of Malaysia. They have now gone through the form of abandoning that, so it said, and yet the President of the A.L.P. only the other day went on public record as saying that that was still their policy, that Malaysians didn't want Australians in and Australians didn't want to be there.

Now, nobody talks lightheartedly about the possibilities of hostilities but, believe me, this country needs, over the next three years a Government that knows where it stands, that can speak with authority and can act with authority on behalf of Australia. Other countries are entitled to know where we stand and what we mean to do, and that's fair enough. Therefore, we must have an election. No Government with a precarious majority of one can speak with power and authority for our nation in all these difficult matters that now surround us. And therefore there's an election. You will decide it. All I can say is - and this is, I think, a rather magnanimous statement for a politician to make - if you are going to put us out, well see that our opponents, whoever they may be and however they may be controlled, get a real majority and can speak for Australia and if you are going to save us in office, if you are going to affirm your belief that we are the most competent people to speak for Australia in these matters, then give us a decent majority. Let us be able to speak with a plain voice. You see, the overriding interest in all this matter is the welfare of Australia. If the electors - you, and all your friends - will have that consideration in mind to the exclusion of all others, then the election will be admirably justified and, if I may say so, I think the result might well turn out to be pretty satisfactory for you, and of course in a small way, for me.
