

FOR PRESS:



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CORIO BY-ELECTION : MR WHITLAM'S CLAIMS

Comment by the Prime Minister, Mr Harold Holt

Mr Whitlam, as Members of the Federal Parliament well know, has little regard for the truth when it stands in his political path. In his eagerness to score in Corio, he has again resorted to fabrication. He alleged last night that, prior to the last Federal Election, a "deal" had been made for Mr Opperman to go to Malta as High Commissioner. Not only - so the allegation runs - were Mr Opperman and I party to the arrangement, but the Government of Malta was also aware of it. In all these particulars, Mr Whitlam's statements are untrue. On the basis, however, of this piece of fiction, he makes the accusation that a confidence trick has been perpetrated on Corio electors. There was no discussion between me and anybody else - and this includes Mr Opperman and the Government of Malta - until after the results of the general election were known and I had been able to give thought to the composition of the Cabinet.

A moment's analysis will show how silly, as well as unfounded, the allegations are. The Government had a comfortable majority in the Corio area at the last Senate election, and subsequent public opinion polling had clearly indicated that we were again set for a good win in that seat. It would have been much more convenient for the Government to win the seat, as we would confidently have expected to do, with a new candidate, than subject ourselves to the inconvenience, effort, expense and hazards of a by-election.

His loose and unsupported charge that my speech to the World Affairs Council in Los Angeles, supporting the United States Administration's bombing of North Vietnam, had embarrassed the Johnson Administration, is equally baseless and silly. Apart from my direct contacts with President Johnson personally, my Government is in constant communication with his Administration at the diplomatic level. We can claim a deeper insight and closer knowledge of what that Administration is thinking than Mr Whitlam can possibly possess.

CANBERRA,
13th July, 1967.