



PRIME MINISTER

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SENATE INTERROGATION

The Opposition's actions in the Senate over the past three days have been deplorable. In an exercise they knew would achieve nothing they subjected senior and respected public servants to an unnecessary and humiliating experience. They tried to turn the Senate into a Star Chamber. They made a mockery of proper parliamentary practices. The Opposition knew on Tuesday that senior public servants would be protected from harassment about activities for which they bore no responsibility. Public servants advise Ministers; Ministers alone are responsible for the Government's actions.

Having failed to persuade public servants to disobey their instructions, the Opposition is now turning its might on private citizens.

It has called Mr Karidis, an Adelaide builder, to appear before it on Tuesday. Would it then call Mr Harris, the Melbourne dentist? It seems unlikely, because Mr Harris, has had dealings not only with Mr Lynch, according to published affidavits, but also, whether the Victorian Premier knows or admits it or not, with the Chairman of the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works, Mr Croxford, and the head of the Melbourne Underground Rail Loop Authority, Mr Roscoe.

The Opposition is hell-bent on finding evidence of misconduct by the Government. The Government's opponents have resorted to the use of confidence men, men with histories of mental instability and crooks to uncover evidence of Government misconduct but they have failed. They will find no evidence because the Government has done nothing which is illegal or improper.

All relevant documents concerning the loans have been tabled in Parliament. They don't suit the Opposition because they do not support their innuendoes of impropriety. So the Opposition chooses to ignore the facts in its mindless and desperate search for headlines.

The activities of the Senate, in the past three days, have wasted the time of senior public servants and produced nothing of value. They have already delayed the Government's work on this year's Budget, a Budget which will be one of the most important to be brought down since the War. The Cabinet and its Committees could not get on with the job of framing the Budget while Senate Ministers and senior officials were tied down in the Opposition's fruitless continuation of the Senate sitting.

Although the Opposition was told repeatedly that public servants had been ordered not to answer questions, it proceeded with the farce of questioning them knowing they would not answer. The Opposition's aim was clear: it wanted to attack the Government by attacking the public servants. As the Leader of the Opposition said in one of his revealing asides to Government members, "It's you fellows I want - not them. And I'll get you". But Senator Withers and his colleagues are not prepared to attack the Government directly. They have asked many questions in the Parliament, most of which have already been answered, and the remainder of which will be. They are not prepared to use proper parliamentary forms. They have still not formulated any charges against the Government.

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