

Q: Sir, you've expressed confidence that the Budget is going to go through. Now why?

P.M.: I believe that basically the consequences of the action which they've threatened, the Liberal Party in the Senate will allow the Budget to pass. You'll notice at this stage they've only passed a motion to defer debate on it. They haven't come to the crunch of rejecting the Budget.

Q: It was a very confident Mr Fraser at this afternoon's meeting in Melbourne, he showed no sign of ...

P.M.: Well, I haven't seen the film.

Q: Do you think it will come from Mr Fraser, this failure of nerves?

P.M.: I don't know. All I'm saying is what my determination is - I will not ever again allow the Senate to stand over a Government which has a majority in the House of Representatives, Governments are made and unmade in the House of Representatives, Budgets and money Bills generally are initiated only in the House of Representatives and I'm going to ensure that never again do we, does any Australian Government, have this threat from the Senate. The Senate's money power is going to be broken for good as a result of this crisis.

Q: Very strong words, Prime Minister ...

P.M.: I've never been so certain in my life of the necessity of doing this.

Q: What's going to happen if this deadlock isn't resolved?

P.M.: The Budget will go through. I expect that, but I am certain that my Government will go its full term.

Q: What will you do if the non-Labor States refuse to issue the writs?

P.M.: Well that depends when I advise the Governor-General to ask the State Governors to issue writs for the Senate election. There doesn't have to be a Senate election until the end of June next.

Q: You would favour a half Senate election?

P.M.: Well there has to be a half Senate election, there has to be. It's not just whether I favour it or not; half the Senators have their terms expired at the end of next June and obviously there has to be an election for their replacements before the end of June and on top of that, of course, there have to be replacements for the two former Labor senators whom the New South Wales and Queensland Governments replaced with non-Labor Senators and there also has to be two Senators elected from the Northern Territory and two from the Australian Capital Territory - those Territory senators being elected for the first time. Now, all that has to take place before the end of June and I haven't yet decided when I will ask the Governor-General to ask the Governors to issue the writs.

Q: This has been described as the gravest constitutional peril that Australia has ever faced.

P.M.: I think that's a correct description. That is why it is essential that the Government wins it. Not just my Government, but I cannot sell the Pass on this issue. This could not happen in any other country in the world. Australian parliamentary democracy is already under very serious threat; the fact that in the middle of last year for three months we were without a Parliament shows how serious this sort of disruption can be. Now this is not going to happen again. I'm standing firm this time.

Q: It's obviously a little simplistic to say somebody's to blame - Whitlam or Fraser, but surely there must be some fault or some blame on your part. Do you accept...

P.M.: No, not a bit, I sought and Mr Snedden sought, last May, election for three years as a government. The people chose my Government for another three years. It is my duty to govern, therefore, for three years. The losers now decide that they'll blackmail us into having an election for a second time halfway through our term. Never again.

Q: You would dismiss the argument that there would appear to be considerable public support for another double, or for another election, another general election.

P.M.: Well I notice a poll today which said a considerable majority of people were against having another election.

Q: Considerably less support for you than the Opposition has?

P.M.: Oh, yes, that's another issue. You're whether there should be an election, and there was a considerable majority of people who didn't want an election at this stage. And it's true that the polls show that my Government is less popular than the Opposition, but when the Budget goes through there's no question that this will entail a big increase in support for my Government, that's what the Opposition fears. They know it's a good Budget.

Q: And the Budget will go through?

P.M.: That's my expectation, but I can't be certain of that. All I can be certain of is that I will not advise the Governor-General to issue writs for a House of Representatives election until towards the end of our term. Our term ends on the 8 July 1977. There will be no writs for a House of Representatives election for well over a year.

Q: Thank you very much.

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