

~~XXXXXXXXXX~~
24

PRIME MINISTER'S WEEKLY BROADCAST

THE CONSTITUTIONAL CRISIS

SUNDAY 19 OCTOBER 1975

I've been astonished in recent days by the flood of messages and telegrams which have come to my office in support of our stand against the latest abuse of power by the Opposition. Rarely have I seen such a massive and spontaneous demonstration of feeling on any political issue. Australians have been roused to anger by the actions of the Opposition in the Senate in the past week. The Opposition has embarked on a course which imperils the foundations of our democratic system and threatens the whole nation with chaos. By refusing to pass the Supply Bills they are holding up the money for essential public services. It's not just my money or their money they're holding up - it's your money, the taxes paid by every Australian for the running of the country, for the defence forces, the A.B.C., for Medibank, for schools, universities, transport and a host of other things. What the Opposition is saying is this: "We don't like the Government. Unless it resigns, we'll stop the essential services of the Australian people. We'll bring the country to a standstill unless we get our way." In other words, the classic demand of the terrorist: "Surrender or we'll take your money."

It's as simple as that. The Opposition is threatening the country with chaos in a grab for political power. They are telling the Australian people that a democratically elected Government, a Government with a secure majority in the House of Representatives, a Government elected for a three-year term, should hand over power half way through its term simply because it suits the Opposition. Could any self-respecting Prime Minister yield to such tactics? What leader worth his salt would give in to this sort of blackmail? I certainly will not. The Government will not. The Opposition's methods are a violation of every constitutional and democratic principle. If these tactics became the rule in future, if an Opposition could force a Government to resign whenever it suited them, Parliamentary Government would become unworkable. It is simply not on - the Opposition knows it, and I believe the people know it.

Having created this constitutional crisis that threatens the whole nation with disruption, the Opposition has the gall to say that it's the Government's responsibility to get rid of the crisis by surrendering its mandate. I remind you that it's not the Government which is holding up the people's money. It's not the Government which is blocking the use of your taxes. It's not the Government which is threatening the life and stability of the nation. It's the Opposition in the Senate. The House of Representatives has passed the supply bills. Every Labor senator has voted for them. Every Labor member of Parliament and every Labor senator will go on voting for these money bills until they are passed. The Opposition senators alone are holding them up.

Let's look at the Senate which is causing this crisis and threatening chaos to the nation's life. Who are the men responsible? It's not the same Senate that was elected 18 months ago. It's a stacked Senate, a bogus Senate - or as Jim Killen, the Queensland Liberal M.P., has put it, a "tainted Senate". Remember this: at the elections in May last year Labor candidates polled 200,000 more votes than all other candidates and parties combined. We were returned with 29 senators - the same number as the Liberals and the Country Party. And there were two independents. Since then the Labor senators have been reduced to 27, because two State Premiers have flouted another great constitutional convention that senators should be replaced by a man or a woman of the same party as the one elected by the people. Last Wednesday's resolution to block supply would never have been carried but for the death of Senator Milliner of Queensland. As the Independent Senator Steele Hall put it so vividly and accurately this week: "Let it be remembered that the Opposition succeeded only because a Labor senator died. They did it over a dead man's corpse. "

A dead man's corpse! It's on that basis that the Opposition now claims the right to subvert the elected Government and bring the nation to its knees in order to achieve its political goals. They say they want an election. Certainly we shall have an election. If the Opposition carries out its threat and finally rejects the supply bills we shall have an election for the Senate - for the every House that has brought this crisis on the nation. We shall submit this tainted, stacked, vicious and irresponsible Senate to the people's judgment. It is the Senate which is blocking supply. It is the Senate which will answer to the people for its actions. And when the normal time comes for the Government to go to the people we shall do so - confident that the people will endorse our record over a normal three-year term.

What a sorry spectacle the Australian Liberal Country Parties present to the world. How wantonly they have degraded our country's reputation in the eyes of other nations, of the nations of our region, of new nations like Papua New Guinea who should be looking to us now as an example of mature and stable democracy. How recklessly they've weakened the democratic cause in every nation where democracy is under challenge. Mr Fraser, by this action, has destroyed whatever pretensions he had as a man of honour and principle. He knows it in his heart. He has succumbed to the same pressures and embarked on the same suicidal course as Mr Snedden, the Liberal leader he stabbed in the back only seven months ago. The Opposition failed in these tactics when Mr Snedden tried them last year. They were taught a lesson by the Australian people. They must be taught that lesson again in a manner they will never forget. We shall win this battle. It won't be won by me, but by the united resistance, the angry defiance of the whole Labor movement, the trade unions, decent parliamentarians, and above all by the great mass of ordinary Australians who cherish our democratic institutions and will not have them trampled by a power-hungry Opposition and the vested interests who support them.
