

PRIME MINISTER'S WEEKLY BROADCAST

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MR FRASER'S CLOWNS

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SUNDAY 2 NOVEMBER 1975

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I don't suppose there has ever been a time when the Opposition's behaviour has come closer to sheer knockabout farce than it did during the past week. At the centre of it all was the continuing drama of Mr Khemlani. For days we were led to believe by the Opposition and the press that Mr Khemlani had the answer to all Mr Fraser's prayers - evidence which would somehow incriminate the Government and justify the Opposition in blocking the national Budget. Mr Khemlani's documents, we were told, would prove that the Prime Minister had been associated in the loan raising activities of the Government,

Mind you, I have never been able to understand why a Prime Minister should not be associated with the loan raising activities of the Government - it would be extraordinary and reprehensible if he were not. But let that pass. Mr Khemlani duly arrived in Canberra. The world waited with bated breath while his luggage was examined by the Opposition.

Now my colleague, Fred Daly, has a well known talent for humour, so I thought I'd read from an account he gave to Parliament of what happened on Mr Khemlani's arrival. Fred Daly had been studying all the press reports of these incidents, so naturally his version is authentic. He pointed out that a Commonwealth car was booked by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition to meet Mr Khemlani on his arrival at Canberra Airport. He was greeted by members of Mr Lynch's staff. Fred Daly went on:

"Mr Khemlani was then pushed into the Commonwealth car along with 2 sinister bearded staff members and taken on a high speed car chase through the back streets of Fyshwick reaching speeds of 100 kilometres per hour, turning down side streets, and doing sudden U turns before coming to a sudden stop at his destination - a \$23 a night room at the Hotel Wellington. Mr Khemlani, still using the car, and the men then disappeared into room 49 - the room adjoining the motel shoe-shine box. Lemonade, potato chips and 2 Sydney afternoon papers were pushed through the breakfast hatch. He stayed locked in his room while the staff members stayed huddled in a corner sifting through his 8 suitcases of documents. Later in the afternoon Mr Khemlani was taken on another high speed car chase. This time, as a taxi pulled up at the front of the motel, Mr Khemlani disappeared out the back door and sped off in a late model gold Torana with the manager of the Wellington Hotel at the wheel. That is service. It raced through the peak hour traffic, went one and a half times round State Circle, and reached speeds of up to 120 kilometers along Commonwealth Avenue before swinging around and returning to the hotel. Then Mr Khemlani disappeared."

That was Fred Daly's account. Of course, the real embarrassment for the Opposition came later, when Mr Khemlani's "documents" were examined by Mr Ellicott, their appointed spokesman on Aboriginal Affairs of all things. Presumably it was felt that Mr Ellicott's legal training could quickly enable him to assess the documents as evidence. As it happened, Mr Ellicott promptly offered his considered, and no doubt honest opinion, that the documents proved nothing. They did not implicate the Prime Minister in any way. To use his own words: "There is no direct evidence in the documents I saw which involved the Prime Minister." But that wasn't good enough for the Opposition. Mr Ellicott was summoned to a meeting of the Shadow Cabinet and later issued another statement saying that while there were not documents passing between Mr Khemlani and the Prime Minister, he was sure the Prime Minister was involved. I was reminded of Mr Chipp's humiliation a few weeks ago when he stated publicly that the Liberals would scrap Medibank and was later persuaded to issue a statement saying the Liberals would do nothing of the kind. The trouble with Mr Fraser's shadow ministers is that they are often too candid for Mr Fraser's comfort and too outspoken for their own good.

While the so-called loans scandal was collapsing around the Opposition's heads, some pretty large cracks were appearing in the temple of Liberals unity which Mr Fraser has proclaimed. Mr Fraser keeps saying that he won't yield on this issue, but what about his senators, what about his friends and followers? His whole case depends on getting an election for the House of Representatives as soon as possible. That's the purpose of the whole discreditable exercise - a quick election. Yet Mr McMahon, a former Prime Minister, was on the radio this week telling us that he didn't know when the next election would be held. I quote him - "It might not be in the immediate future, it might be a little later on, next year or even the year after." Obviously the former Prime Minister isn't too confident that an election will be held before 1977: and we all know the views of Mr Gorton, the Liberal Prime Minister before that.

The truth is that behind these sideshow antics there remains a grave threat to the nation's economy, to social order and our democratic institutions. The farcical side of the Opposition's conduct is in marked contrast to the behaviour of the more responsible Opposition senators. Senator Bessell, for example, can see very clearly the perils involved. Senator Bessell is one of a small group of Liberals who have grave reservations about Mr Fraser's chosen course. Senator Bessell said firmly this week that he would never vote against the Budget, and he added - again I quote - "a good many others would feel the same way as I do." All that Senator Bessell and his group are prepared to do is defer the Budget. Only in this way, on this tenuous measure of support, can Mr Fraser sustain his threat to deprive the Government of the taxpayers' money and bring the nation to a standstill.

We had a very good illustration of the anxieties of these senators during an incident in the Senate on Wednesday. Senator Missen and Senator Baume - two of the waverers, the

"jellyfish" as Mr Fraser's people contemptuously call them - were presenting petitions from Australian citizens protesting at the Opposition's tactics. Senator Greenwood objected to the petitions being received. Senator Missen and Senator Baume, to their great credit, insisted on the right of the Australian people to protest. It was a revealing moment. It came 24 hours after another Liberal, Senator Wood, failed to turn up for a division on one of the crucial money bills.

The way things have been going for Mr Fraser, we can hardly be surprised by the results of the latest opinion polls. Normally it's my practice not to comment on opinion polls, but the recent surveys have been so unanimous, so clear-cut, so decisive and essentially so relevant to the nature and origins of the present crisis that no one can ignore them. Certainly Mr Fraser can't ignore them. The polls show that 70 percent of the people believe the Senate should pass the Budget; well over half the people believe the Government should remain in office. It is rare for any opinion poll on a matter of basic political allegiance to produce a result so unmistakable, so overwhelming; but in the present context the polls have a special significance. Mr Fraser has tried to justify his action in blocking supply by repeated claims that the people were demanding the Government's dismissal. He talked of a great upsurge of public opinion, a rising tide of anger, a veritable public clamour to see the Government removed. These lofty insights into the national mood, so mysteriously vouchsafed to Mr Fraser, are now revealed as illusions - if indeed Mr Fraser ever really believed them. If Mr Fraser wants to live by the polls, let him now accept the verdict of the polls. The people have given him their answer with dramatic clarity. They want an end to the farce; an end to the fruitless fishing expeditions of the past week, with their wild charges, their web of innuendo, the car chases and suitcases; and end to these threats of economic and social disruption; an end to this challenge to our democratic system. Mr Fraser has one course only left open to him. He must let the Budget pass. He must let the Government govern. He must let the economy and the nation go forward.

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