

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB OPENING - 27 MAY 1976

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Jim
Thanks

IT GIVES ME PARTICULAR PLEASURE TO BE STANDING
HERE THIS EVENING AND TO GAZE OVER A SEA
OF FRIENDLY FACES.

ON OCCASIONS LIKE THIS, IT IS COMFORTING FOR
THE SPEAKER TO KNOW THAT HE IS AMONGST FRIENDS.

I HAVE ALWAYS ENJOYED VERY GOOD RELATIONS WITH THE
PRESS... SOMETIMES THEIR RELATIONS WITH ME HAVE
BEEN A BIT STRAINED. IT HAS NEVER BEEN MY FAULT.

THIS OCCASION IS OF COURSE, OF SPECIAL IMPORTANCE
TO THE PRESS IN CANBERRA. IT IS ALSO SIGNIFICANT
TO ME AS THE LIBERAL PRIME MINISTER.

YOU'VE HEARD FROM THE PRESIDENT THAT THE LAST
LIBERAL PRIME MINISTER, BILLY McMAHON, TURNED THE
FIRST SOD IN THIS SITE IN 1972.

HOWEVER, HE DIDN'T REFER TO THE CAPTION UNDER THE
PHOTO IN THE BAR OF MR McMAHON PERFORMING THAT
TASK, IT READS: "BILLY McMAHON TURNS SOD."

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I AM INDEBTED TO THE MANAGEMENT OF THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB FOR SCHEDULING THE BUILDING AND CONSTRUCTION WORK SO THAT A LIBERAL PRIME MINISTER IS STILL ABLE TO COMPLETE THE COMMEMORATION.

THE PLAQUES WILL READ ... "THE FIRST SOD WAS TURNED BY BILLY McMAHON ETC, ETC," AND "THIS BUILDING WAS OFFICIALLY OPENED BY MALCOLM FRASER."

SO TO THE CASUAL OBSERVER, IT'S AS THOUGH THE THREE LABOR YEARS NEVER HAPPENED.

INCIDENTALLY, LOOKING ROUND THIS BUILDING AND ITS FURNISHINGS, I CANNOT HELP BUT MARVEL AT THE TRUE PATRIOTISM OF THE NATIONAL PRESS CORPS.

IT WAS ONLY A MATTER OF WEEKS AGO THAT THE NEWSPAPER HEADLINES ERRONEOUSLY SPLASHED OUT WITH ... "FRASER SAYS BUY, BUY, BUY. AND "FRASER SAYS GO OUT AND SPEND."

MR PRESIDENT, YOU SEEM TO HAVE DONE THAT WITH A VENGEANCE HERE. UNTIL NOW, I HADN'T REALISED THAT THE PRESS BELIEVED EVERYTHING I SAY.

SOME JOURNALISTS AMONG YOU MAY FIND IT IRONIC THAT MALCOLM FRASER - OF ALL PEOPLE - IS STANDING UP HERE READY TO OPEN THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB.

I'VE BEEN CALLED MANY THINGS AND DESCRIBED IN MANY WAYS BY JOURNALISTS. AND I MUST ADMIT THAT I'M NOT OPENLY REFERRED TO BY MY COLLEAGUES AS THE "JOURNOS FRIEND."

BUT PERHAPS FOR MALCOLM FRASER THE TIMES ARE CHANGING. WITNESS A BRIEF EXTRACT FROM LAST WEDNESDAY'S SUNDAY PRESS NEWSPAPER IN MELBOURNE WRITTEN BY A MELBOURNE AGE JOURNALIST:

THIS MAN, THE PRIME MINISTER, HAS DONE MORE FOR THE ORDINARY AUSTRALIAN WOMAN, THE AVERAGE STAY-AT-HOME CHILD BEARING HOUSEWIFE THAN ANY OTHER PERSON IN THE COUNTRY'S HISTORY.

MORE THAN ALL THE GERMAINE GREERS, THE PROTESTERS, THE BRA-BURNING, THE WRITING AND BALLYHOO PUT TOGETHER.

SIMPLY, HE GAVE HER WHAT NO ONE ELSE HAS BEEN ABLE OR WILLING TO ...

HE GAVE HER A BILLION DOLLARS. OR \$1125M TO BE PRECISE. WHAT'S MORE, HE TOOK IT FROM HER HUSBAND."

I'M SURE YOU WILL ALL AGREE THAT THE TONE WAS DISTINCTLY FAVOURABLE.

PLAINLY, THIS IS THE START OF A NEW ERA FOR ME - THE CHAMPION OF WOMEN JOURNALISTS, AT LEAST.

5.

PERHAPS, THAT ARTICLE HAS NOT CONVINCED YOU
OF HOW THE PRESS REALLY SEE MALCOLM FRASER.
PERHPAS MY REPUTATION WITH THE PRESS IS
WELL FOUNDED.

BUT I CAN CLAIM A GOOD EXCUSE - ITS HERIDITARY.

~~THE~~ THE PATRIARCH OF THE FRASER
FAMILY, SIMON FRASER, OCCASIONALLY CROSSED
SWORDS WITH THE AUSTRALIAN PRESS.

IN 1889, THE WEEKLY MAGAZINE "TABLE TALK" SAID
THIS OF SIMON FRASER, THE POLITICIAN:

"HE CONTROLS THE POLICY OF THE EVENING STANDARD,
OF WHICH HE IS A LARGE SHAREHOLDER, AND IS A
FRIEND OF THE PROPRIETOR OF THE AGE."

AT THAT TIME SIMON FRASER SHARED A VIGOROUS
BELIEF IN FREE TRADE WITH THE AGE'S PROPRIETOR
DAVID SYME. HOWEVER - AS OFTEN HAPPENS WITH
NEWSPAPER PROPRIETORS AND POLITICIANS - THEY
FELL OUT, WHEN SYME BECAME AN ARDENT PROTECTIONIST.

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6.

SYME BANNED FRASER FROM THE EDITORIAL COLUMNS OF THE PAPER. BUT SIMON FRASER WAS NOT EASILY DETERRED. HE IMMEDIATELY RETORTED BY PUBLISHING HIS OWN SPEECHES AS PAID ADVERTISEMENTS.

I GUESS TIMES HAVEN'T CHANGED THAT MUCH. THE PROPRIETOR OF THE AGE AND THE CURRENT FRASER ARE STILL CONCERNING THEMSELVES ABOUT PAID ADVERTISEMENTS THAT RECENTLY APPEARED IN THAT NEWSPAPER.

OF COURSE THE WARMTH OF THE BOND BETWEEN JOURNALISTS UPSTAIRS IN THE GALLERY AND US POLITICIANS DOWN IN THE GOLD FISH BOWL OF THE CHAMBER VARIES.

SOMETIMES IT IS MORE CHEERY THAN AT OTHER TIMES. SOMETIMES IT IS FIERY.

HOWEVER I LIKE TO THINK THAT OVER THE YEARS WE ARE COMING TO KNOW EACH OTHER, ALTHOUGH FROM TIME TO TIME I FIND MY BREATH CAN STILL BE TAKEN AWAY.

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7.

I WOULD LIKE TO RECALL A TIME DURING THE POLITICAL CRISIS LAST YEAR, WHEN THE PRESS WAS SPECULATING INTENSIVELY ABOUT WHETHER THE BUDGET WOULD BE PASSED BY THE SENATE.

SEVERAL MEMBERS OF THE GALLERY BECAME SO IMPATIENT THEY DECIDED BOTH TO ANTICIPATE THE EVENT AND TO ENCOURAGE A COURSE OF ACTION.

LET ME SUM IT UP FOR YOU, IN JUST ABOUT THE EXACT WORDS THAT WERE USED:

"I THINK MALCOLM WILL REJECT THE BUDGET. HE'S MAD IF HE DOESN'T," THEY TOLD MY STAFF.

"MIND YOU, WHEN IT HAPPENS, WE WILL KICK THE TRIPES OUT OF HIM IN PRINT."

WELL THE SENATE DID REJECT THE BUDGET, AND I WOULD LIKE TO COMMEND YOUR ABILITIES AS FORECASTERS - YOU DID KICK THE TRIPES OUT OF US IN PRINT.

I THINK EVENTS LIKE THESE HELP PEOPLE TO UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER BETTER.

ON A MORE SERIOUS NOTE, HOWEVER, - AND SO I MAINTAIN MY REPUTATION WITH THE PRESS - CAN I BRIEFLY TALK TO YOU ABOUT GOVERNMENTS KEEPING SECRETS.

FIRST - AND I WANT TO MAKE THIS POINT CLEAR - I STRONGLY BELIEVE THAT AS MUCH INFORMATION AS POSSIBLE SHOULD BE MADE AVAILABLE TO THE PUBLIC.

MINISTERS SHOULD BE APPROACHABLE, AVAILABLE AND ACCESSIBLE.

THEY HAVE BEEN REQUESTED TO MAKE THEMSELVES AVAILABLE WHEREVER POSSIBLE TO THE MEDIA, AND ENSURE THAT THEIR DEPARTMENTS MAKE THE GREATEST EFFORTS TO SUPPLY THE PUBLIC WITH INFORMATION.

HOWEVER, IN THE MINDS OF MANY, CONFIDENTIALITY WHEN IT APPLIES TO GOVERNMENT - HAS COME TO HAVE A BAD OR EVIL CONNOTATION. THAT IS A MISCONCEPTION.

AT THE RISK OF OVERSTATING THE ARGUMENT, CAN I
MAKE A COUPLE OF POINTS.

CONFIDENTIALITY IN ONE FORM OR ANOTHER, IS PART
OF OUR LIVES - PRIVATE LIVES, BUSINESS LIVES
OR FOR THOSE IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS, PUBLIC LIVES.

IN A RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DOCTOR AND PATIENT,
LAWYER AND CLIENT, ~~PRIEST AND PARISHIONER,~~ THERE
ARE MATTERS OF CONFIDENTIALITY - OFTEN PROTECTED
BY LAW.

WITHOUT CONFIDENTIALITY IN THESE AREAS, MUCH OF
THE FABRIC OF OUR SOCIETY WOULD DISSOLVE.

OF COURSE, THERE ARE MANY PROTECTIONS AGAINST
EXCESSIVE CONFIDENTIALITY.

THE NATURE OF OUR PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEM PROVIDES
FOR THIS, ESPECIALLY IF THERE IS AN EFFECTIVE OPPOSITION.

ALSO A VIGILANT AND RESPONSIBLE PRESS CAN PROTECT
AGAINST EXCESSIVE CONFIDENTIALITY. WE'VE SEEN THAT
AMPLY DEMONSTRATED IN THE WESTERN WORLD.

OVER THE PAST FEW YEARS.

SOMETIMES THERE ARE SUGGESTIONS THAT THE GOVERNMENT WANTS CONFIDENTIALITY FOR ITS OWN SAKE.

I WOULD PREFER TO ARGUE THAT THE GOVERNMENT SOMETIMES SEES THE NEED FOR CONFIDENTIALITY - AND WHEN IT DOES IT MUST DEFEND IT AND TAKE WHATEVER CRITICISM COMES.

IN RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN GOVERNMENTS, CONFIDENTIALITY IS OFTEN QUITE ESSENTIAL - IN THE INTEREST OF FRANK AND TRUTHFUL COMMUNICATION.

IN OUR FEDERAL SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT, RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE STATES REQUIRE A DEGREE OF CONFIDENCE THAT WOULD NOT APPLY IF EVERY LETTER BETWEEN A PREMIER AND PRIME MINISTER WERE TO BECOME PUBLIC IN THE PROCESS OF JOINT DECISION MAKING.

HAVING SAID ALL THAT, CAN I RE-ITERATE MY FIRST STATEMENT ON THIS SUBJECT.

✓
F.S.A.

11.

I WANT AN UNHINDERED FLOW OF INFORMATION TO THE MEDIA. I WANT MINISTERS TO BE AVAILABLE TO COMMENT. I WANT FACTUAL INFORMATION PROVIDED.

✓ HOW CAN ANY COMMUNITY PROGRESS WITHOUT CONTINUING INFORMED AND INTELLIGENT DEBATE. AND HOW CAN THERE BE DEBATE WITHOUT INFORMATION.

FINALLY, WITH DUE DEFERENCE TO THE A.B.C. CAN I SYMPATHISE WITH ALL BROADCASTERS. I AM ONLY TOO WELL AWARE OF THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF BROADCASTING ... AND THE HAZARDS.

A FEW WEEKS AGO, LATE ONE EVENING, I SAT DOWN IN MY OFFICE TO RECORD MY WEEKLY BROADCAST TO THE GOOD PEOPLE OF MY HOME ELECTORATE, WANNON.

I THINK IT WAS ABOUT THE 1000TH SUCH TIME I HAD SAT DOWN TO IT. I'VE BEEN RECORDING IT WEEKLY FOR JUST ON 21 YEARS.

I READ THE FIRST COUPLE OF PARAGRAPHS, AND AS I WAS A LITTLE TIRED I MADE AN ERROR.

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12.

UNCHARACTERISTICALLY, I GAVE AN INVOLUNTARY EXLAMATION - WORDS NOT FIT TO BE REPEATED HERE - STOPPED THE TAPE AND STARTED AGAIN.

THE TAPE WAS DULY LANDLINED TO RADIO 3HA HAMILTON, WITH A WARNING OF THE FALSE START.

HOWEVER, SOMEWHERE ALONG THE LINE, THAT MESSAGE DID NOT GET THROUGH - THE TAPE WENT TO AIR (ON A SUNDAY EVENING TOO) FALSE START AND ALL.

THE MOST DISTURBING ASPECT OF THE INDICENT HOWEVER, WAS THAT THE STATION DID NOT RECEIVE ONE SINGLE COMPLAINT.

THAT COULD ONLY MEAN TWO THINGS - NO ONE WAS ACTUALLY TUNED IN, OR THOSE THAT WERE THOUGHT THE LANGUAGE WAS THE NORMAL PRIME MINISTERIAL MANNER OF SPEECH.

MR PRESIDENT, I KNOW THIS DAY IS THE CULMINATION OF AN EXTRAORDINARY AMOUNT OF TIME AND ENERGY BY A GREAT NUMBER OF JOURNALISTS OVER MANY YEARS.

THERE IS NO DOUBT ALL THE EFFORT HAS BEEN WORTHWHILE.

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I CONGRATULATE THE MANAGEMENT, PAST AND PRESENT,

THIS FACILITY WILL PLAY A REAL PART IN ENHANCING
THE STANDING OF JOURNALISTS IN AUSTRALIA.

ON THAT NOTE, AND IN ACCEPTED PRIME MINISTERIAL
TONES, IT NOW DOES GIVE ME CONSIDERABLE PLEASURE
TO OFFICIALLY DECLARE THIS MAGNIFICENT
NATIONAL PRESS CLUB BUILDING OPENED.
