



PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

16 SEPTEMBER 1979

The Prime Minister answered the following question from the floor of the Wannon Corangamite Liberal Party conference today:
Question:

Could the Prime Minister please comment on the considerations the Victorian Liberals are giving to standing Liberals against sitting Country Party Members? I refer particularly to Mr Nixon.

Prime Minister:

Within the constitution of the Liberal Party of course, in each State, where the candidates are stood is a matter for the organisation of the State executive and the councils of the Party. But when there is a coalition involved and a coalition arrangement which has served Australia very well over a long period, there are a number of considerations that need to be taken into account.

It is worth noting, I think, that the coalition arrangements has given good government to Australia over the very large part of the past 30 years. 1979 will be the 30th anniversary of the 1949 victory and so its not an insignificant year.

But let us be positive, because there are very close relationships between the Federal leaders, and a very close relationship between the Parties at Federal level. I don't know whether people get bemused by the two largest majorities we have ever had in our history, the majority up around 50 in a Parliament of 120, but they are larger majorities in any we have had in the intervening period. There have been many occasions of course, and as it still is in the Senate - the support of our partners is absolutely critical. It would be taking grave and serious risks with the good government of Australia if anything were to be done to jeopardise the harmony of the coalition arrangement in Canberra. We are all dedicated anti-Socialists, we are all dedicated people who want to positively advance our Liberal philosophies. We need to be able to do that because of our belief in Australia.

We can only do that if we are in government. That is by and large control of the House of Representatives and of the Senate. Therefore we need the kind of partnership that there has been between Doug Anthony and myself, and between Tony Street and all the rest. I don't think as far as Canberra is concerned, the coalition arrangement has ever worked better.

Now, take Peter Nixon's circumstance. A senior Minister in the Government, a very good Minister in the Government, and a very good Minister for the Government, not for one Party or the another - for the Government. He argues the cause very well.

If our Party, my Party, is going to stand against Peter Nixon, quite plainly the National Party will want to stand against Malcolm Fraser, against Tony Street, and against Philip Lynch. And why wouldn't they?

Then you start to get a diversion of resources. You start to make it easy for some of those great national dailies who aren't always our most devoted friends - to suggest there are differences, to suggest there are problems, when in fact there are none. But there would certainly be a diversion of resources. Instead of concentrating wholly on the real political enemy - the A.L.P., Socialists and worse - Peter would clearly have to safeguard himself and spend more time in Gippsland. Tony's got such a tremendous majority he probably wouldn't have to spend more time in Corangamite. I never forget that I won Wannon from the Labor Party - I'd probably have to spend more time in Wannon. That just doesn't make really seem to me to make sense in those circumstances. But that is a practical matter. If you've got a senior member in the coalition Parties who broadly supports all the policies - as Peter Nixon certainly does - and then the other partner in the coalition says we are going to put up somebody to stand against you, is that really a good thing? Does it make sense? Doesn't it make it very difficult for Peter Nixon himself? Doesn't it provide an incentive to the other partner - the National Party - to stand people in a wider field. And so it spreads.

I think clearly what we need to do is to realize who the enemy is - and that is the A.L.P. There hasn't been a policy issue in Canberra - I've said this for years, and it's always been true - not a policy issue that cabinet has been divided on Party lines - National Party or Liberal Party.

People just say what they think about the issues and come to their conclusions. In Victoria there has been a long period of State Government without National Party support in coalition. I'm well aware of the things that happened in the late 40's - very early 50's - before Henry Bolte's day. I'm well aware of what has happened in Victoria since.

In N.S.W. the Parties there are in harmonious coalition. In Queensland, the Parties are in coalition. They-sometimes say one or two things about each other. But you can't judge total Australian result from what has happened since Henry Bolte's day in Victoria. It's much easier to guarantee sensible anti-Socialist policies; it is much easier to guarantee that the constructive policies of the Liberal Party will be given effect if that coalition is maintained in a strong, healthy and vigorous way.

Now, that's why last week, when I had a meeting with some people in Canberra, and found printed in the Courier Mail a sentence which said that Malcolm Fraser accepted an organisational view which was accepting that this kind of contest - and dual Senate teams and all the rest - was something that was acceptable and alright to me. I don't know how it got in the paper. It wasn't the view I expressed. It wasn't the view I hold in terms of the interest of the coalition and the kind of Government we all believe in. So I had to say something about it. Therefore, as Federal Parliamentary leader, and as Prime Minister, I regard one of my first obligations to preserve the strength and integrity of the Federal coalition upon which the good government of Australia as a whole totally depends.