The 1975–76 Budget was brought down on the evening of 19 August 1975. It was Bill Hayden’s only Budget and was rather less irresponsible than those of his predecessors. I flew to Canberra that morning and had an argument with an unusually surly hire car driver. I am normally equable and to have an argument was unusual. I had lunch with various staff members and John Carrick. Then, as usual, we filed into the Senate in the evening to hear the Budget read by the representative of the Treasurer in that chamber.

The Budget is an enormous challenge to any parliamentarian. There are some 10 or more printed books crammed with a mass of financial statistics, projections, analyses and explanations. These books contain programs, details of government outlays by functional area, payments to the states, government borrowings, and so on. They are more than I have ever been able to digest quickly and probably more than any parliamentarian can master in a moment. The Budget speech is merely a summary designed for public consumption; to understand the Budget, one has to go to the mass of detail. When our experts came to do that detailed examination, they concluded that the Budget itself was still sufficiently flawed to make it unlikely to work. I recorded:

Poor Budget, I listened to [Senator the Honourable] Ken Wriedt deliver it in the Senate. I doubt it will work. I suspect that we will now have a double dissolution in April or May—there will be great pressures for an election. Labor men were despondent and the Senate rose early at 9pm.
These comments were indicative of the thinking even then prevalent in the world of politics. Not only did I raise the possibility of a forced double dissolution in that diary note, but also I acknowledged that there would be great pressure put on us to force an even earlier election. In the light of subsequent developments, these observations were prescient.

On Wednesday, 20 August, we had a party meeting at which we made our first collegial analysis of the Budget of the previous evening. Michael Baume (then a staffer with Fraser and my cousin) was brought in to give some detailed criticisms. I have recorded:

There was a brief and unsatisfactory Coalition meeting at lunchtime. Doug Anthony was quite unregenerate—objects to the idea of tax credits as against tax deductions—he was big on eloquence but not on facts. The Budget was criticised piecemeal—not coherently as a whole. Michael Baume spoke on the details—there was too much detail and proper criticisms of the whole Budget seem obscured.

But we were having our own fights, too, especially on a number of issues relating to social justice and associated values. I learned on the Thursday that our side was likely to abandon the Social Welfare Commission, and I was upset at this foolish decision.

Colin Benjamin of the Victorian Council of Social Service phoned, angry about the treatment of the councils in the Budget. It had all the marks of political retaliation against them, possibly because they had given advice on policy to the Liberal Party. I was to pursue the question of funding for the Councils of Social Service in the Senate and later in the estimates committees. I recall the then minister John Wheeldon saying eventually, in paraphrase of Napoleon's famous statement, words to the effect of ‘when they look at my heart they will find the word ACOSS [Australian Council of Social Service] written across it’.

On Friday, 22 August, we had a meeting of our ‘campaign committee’ in Sydney at which John Atwill and I had to await the arrival of Carrick and Cotton, who were late. It was of course a committee related to an election for half the Senate, but it did exist, it was working and it could be upgraded should circumstances change. Later we had a function for Dan Aarons, the long-time Liberal Party Treasurer who had turned 90, and then went on to the Liberal Party State Council.

I got home to find Jenny ill in bed with influenza. I did some tidying up to give her a hand and managed to get our daughter, Sarah, away from the television and to bed by 10 pm. The next day, I took Sarah with me to meet seven candidates
in western suburbs seats, where we all agreed on a program of joint work and cooperation. After that we came home and I built a billycart for the children. It was great fun but the damn thing was so heavy it scarcely moved.

In the evening, Jenny and I joined the Carricks and travelled to Punchbowl for a celebration of St Stephen’s Day. It was memorable in more ways than one. The microphones did not work, the girls forgot the bottle for the bottle dance and then a male choir member attacked a woman (possibly his wife).

The next day Jenny was still ill so I took Sarah riding. I met Charles Curran at the nursery, and I recorded that ‘[h]e says Michael Baume in real trouble. Feels Patricks are in a very bad way and the publicity is bad. I agree.’

I took the children with me in the afternoon to Ingleburn to a meeting of mushroom growers. We had a good barbecue and I drank a fair bit of slivovitz. Jenny remained ill on the Monday and eventually I got our family doctor, Bruce Glass, to see her. He said I looked awful, too! Sarah had been ‘a little mother’. She went off to dressmaking at Abbotsleigh and our son, Ian, went to craft. He had never used a return ticket before and threw away the return stub, but Sarah sorted it all out.

I went to the office and shifted a mountain of paper.

On Tuesday, 26 August, we were back in Canberra for more of the usual activities. Malcolm Fraser made an excellent reply to the Budget and Labor prepared to ‘bucket’ Michael Baume as we had expected. It came the next day from Fred Daly in the House and John Wheeldon in the Senate. I recorded it as follows: ‘Michael got a terrible bucket from Fred Daly. Savage and dirty. It seems to be getting worse.’

I then made an interesting diary record:

Magnus Cormack seems to be duchessing me—drinks last night. He still fights the fight of Charles I vs the Parliament. Pym, Hampden and Speaker Lenthall and all that stuff. He told us that he called on O’Byrne yesterday and told the president he would get support if he asserted control of the chair over people like Jim Webster. Webster had behaved disgracefully yesterday on a personal explanation. This is intolerable from a chairman of committees. Webster is unregenerate and extreme in views and behaviour. It will come to a crisis and if O’Byrne plays it well we will support him. O’Byrne told Cormack he had not known he would get support. It is important for the chair to have support.

This was most interesting. Cormack was really an ‘institutional’ person and his approach to O’Byrne (and the reassurance he offered) was an important one for a minority president to receive. Webster was a nice man who was always friendly
to me and good to my children, but he was always a party ‘warrior’ and the
behaviour described above is typical of the hardline approach of some of the
‘warriors’ of that time.

On Friday, 29 August, I became a medical examiner again and took part in
examinations into physical diagnosis at RNSH. It was good to be there again.
In addition, I addressed an ACOSS conference and hammered at the unfairness
of the cuts that had been imposed. Later I had dinner with Michael Baume:

Dinner with Michael Baume. First good talk about his troubles, and about
the attack yesterday in Parliament by Daly. Fraser’s office holds an undated
resignation. Clearly if … called in he will be in trouble in Macarthur. He was
open and cheerful. Agreed the business was hurting me too. Feel sorry and on
his side at last.

Cousin Michael was then the endorsed Liberal candidate for the seat of
Macarthur, which he won eventually from Labor’s John Kerin. Michael had
been briefly a partner in an ill-fated firm of stockbrokers and had never drawn
a cent from that partnership. On the contrary, he entered the partnership
almost at the time it went into liquidation and accrued only obligations and
trouble. An independent investigator subsequently absolved Michael of any
responsibility in the matter.

That week Don Chipp was ‘suckered’ into refusing to allow Senator Ruth Coleman
to take part in a Parliamentary cricket game on account (so it was alleged) of her
gender. ‘He should have asked her to open the batting and bowling and to field
at mid-off,’ I wrote.

Chipp also said that we would dismantle Medibank and was not supported
by Fraser in the furore that followed.

I returned to Canberra on Monday, 1 September for the next sitting week.
On 3 September, we learned that the Queensland Parliament had not replaced
Bert Milliner with a Labor senator, but had instead appointed (Albert) Pat Field.
This was one of the most significant (and disgraceful) acts of 1975. I recorded
in my diary:

Queensland senator selected. It is disgraceful that ALP’s Colston was by-
passed. Thank God Liberal Leader Chalk led many Liberals to support ALP.
The Queensland [Liberal Party] State Executive has given a firm indication of its
view. But Chalk could not take all his own men with him. Clearly a grave mistake
in Queensland. [Senator James] Keeffe [ALP] spoke about it on the adjournment
and Greenwood responded very well.
On 4 September, I learned a lesson about parliamentary tactics. A point of order was taken just as lunch came and the determination of the matter was stood over until after we resumed. Without any leadership guidance, I did a deal with Merv Everett that met both our needs, but was told later that I should have done nothing and forced the point. It would have helped if a senior colleague, any senior colleague, had given me some advice at the time.

On 5 and 6 September, we celebrated Rosh Hashanah. I had an Aliyah Torah at the main Rosh Hashanah service at the North Shore Temple Emanuel. That evening we went to Dapto with Misha and Michael Baume for a very successful meeting. I drove home again—no wonder the doctor said I looked tired—and had a ‘family day’ the next day, which happened to be Father’s Day. We did some garden work, repaired a fence, felled and burned an old tree, visited our neighbour and her new baby in hospital, took Ian to a birthday party, took Sarah to a football game, went to a Monty Python film, picked up Ian and, finally, called in on my brother-in-law and his family at Wahroonga. Ian turned eight a few days later and my present to him proved one of the best ever: an electronic kit. It was a good gift because it was something he really wanted, it accentuated one of his strengths, and it allowed him to construct things that people admired. I well remember going to the Sydney Cricket Ground with Ian a few months later. He produced a radio he had constructed from the electronic kit and incredulous cricket lovers around us all took turns at listening to the ABC commentary, while Ian sat there looking pleased and proud. He was not half as proud as I was.

The next day, 8 September, I received some good treatment for any inflated sense of self-importance. A branch that had attracted 400 people when Andrew Peacock came to speak provided just 10 people to hear me. It was good for me, I suspect.

Tuesday, 9 September was an infamous day in the Senate. It was the day on which Pat Field was sworn in as a senator for Queensland and on which a move to refer the matter to the Standing Committee on Disputed Returns was defeated. Senator Field was granted leave of absence from the Senate on 1 October and did not sit thereafter. My diary recalls the scene as follows:

New senator sworn in—[Albert] Pat Field from Queensland—sent by Queensland Premier Bjelke-Petersen when Dr Mal Colston should have come. Am horrified by it.

The poor man is not equipped for the job in any way—he is a fool who will be destroyed. Withers caught short at the start of Senate sitting when ALP moved that the new senator not be seated. Standing Order 1(g) which clearly covers the

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1 Senate Hansard, vol. S64, 1975: 2,801.
situation was brought to the attention of the president in time. Withers had not
examined the Standing Orders and did well from this weak basis. Eventually
Field sworn but only after a Division—question of a challenge to a court of
disputed returns remains to be settled. I shook hands with him on the basis
that he had been properly sworn, had come with a proper certificate from the
Governor of his State, and had entered the Senate. I fear that some people might
read into this some acquiescence in the event.

Alan Missen refused to speak to the man or otherwise deal with him—and I did
not blame him.

We started the estimates examination on Thursday, 11 September. ACOSS was
very professionally organised. Philippa Smith was up from Sydney and attended
to brief me with Julia Hayes from the Australian Capital Territory. I learned that
day to do what I have since refined to an art form—namely, to have questions
organised with care and precision to elicit matters of fact. The Department of
Social Security was horrified at my material and presentation and clearly saw
its role as protecting the good guy (Minister Wheeldon) from the bad guy (me).
I recorded: ‘c’est la vie!’ I did obtain a promise that the ACOSS decision would
be reviewed.

It was on this day that I was asked to join the backbench group drafting some of
Fraser’s replies to the masses of incoming mail. It was not unduly onerous and
I accepted it as an act of minor patronage, although I did demand equipment
with which to dictate draft replies; it was provided.

On Monday, 15 September, I went to the Yom Kippur service with about half the
world. Sarah tried to fast with me and almost succeeded; most other kids her
age did not even try.

It was now just one month before we moved to defer votes on the various Loan
and Appropriation Bills. From here on the issue of deferral became more pressing
and that period leading up to the crisis itself is the subject of the next chapter.