This chapter covers the month before the deferrals of Loan and Appropriation Bills on 15 October. During this time I faced and resolved my own doubts about deferral, discussed the matter with Malcolm Fraser and with Carrick and Cotton, and became outraged at the serial revelations wrung out of the desperate Government until, finally, I was ready for what we did.

We had an ‘up’ fortnight in our electorates in mid-September. It began with a trip to Newcastle, which was noteworthy because it was Misha Lajovic’s first trip in a small plane. Our contacts in Newcastle were very old and very dangerous drivers, so we endured a certain amount of terror while they drove us unsteadily from place to place. But generally this was a time to do a mass of those electorate things I have described elsewhere.

One trip worth recording was the annual general meeting of the ACT Council of Social Service (ACT COSS), at which I was appointed returning officer by the meeting. I became aware that multiple voting was occurring and asked to see the ballot papers, discovering eventually that one person’s handwriting appeared on eight ballot papers. It sure is rough at some of those meetings!

On another evening, we had a dinner at the Carricks’ for NSW senators and for the Lajovics. Everyone opened up; it was so animated that Tatjana wondered what had hit her. One other matter was a field trip to Eden with the senate standing committee investigating the effects of clear felling and woodchipping. We found more damage than the woodchip company Harris Daishowa had admitted to and less than the conservationists claimed.
It was during this time that I flew to Canberra for my first meeting of the Institute of Aboriginal Studies, at which I represented the Senate. This is a body with a record of solid achievement. Many years later, I was able to obtain amendments in the Senate to save it from amalgamation with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC). But my impression at that first visit was not promising. I wrote: ‘Found committees were hard at work trying to exclude Aboriginals. Confirmed my worst fears.’

Today I can no longer recall the reason for that harsh judgment; neither can I reconcile it with the very good impression I gained of the institute later on. But there it is: I was not impressed that first day.

On Friday, 26 September, I came face to face with some of the pressures for deferral of the Appropriation Bills. There was a campaign committee meeting of which I recorded: ‘I argued with Jim Carlton against rejecting the Budget. Carrick and Atwill were strongly for. I felt then the pressure was mounting.’

The pressure was certainly mounting for us to deny Supply to the Government and that is why I was so vehement with my state general-secretary and with my senior Senate colleagues. I was determined to let them know that I did oppose the course being bruited so widely in the press. This exchange was the cause of their suggesting I should see Fraser just a few days later.

October was the crisis month in Australian politics. For me, it began on 30 September, when I waited on Malcolm Fraser. I had acceded to the suggestions of my senior colleagues John Carrick and Bob Cotton that I should do this, once they had learned that I was reluctant to consider the refusal of Supply.

I had some difficulty getting an appointment but was taken eventually to Malcolm’s office by Tony Staley so that I could have a drink with the Leader of the Opposition. There was a large group of people in his office drinking and talking when I arrived but he separated from them, guided me over to a bench near one wall and then spent between 10 or 15 minutes with me. We discussed in detail my objections to any radical course, including my concern that our policies were not ready, that an election in May would be better timed, and that Malcolm’s popularity and acceptance were on the basis that he would not force an election as the press was discussing so widely and so freely. I recorded in my diary: ‘I see no real impropriety tho’ I recognise wisdom will depend on circumstances.’

Malcolm outlined to me his view on the two competing principles involved. I recorded: ‘A useful discussion over one whisky.’

On 1 October, both Carrick and Cotton told me that Malcolm Fraser was pleased I had talked to him. I recorded: ‘One more head counted off.’
Later that day I had lunch at the Department of Health—a private lunch hosted by Gwyn Howell, the Director-General. Many years later, when I was acting minister, Gwyn was still Director-General. He and I disagreed about the number of ministerial letters for signature, about the content and length of those letters, and about many other matters. Gwyn used a medical metaphor again and again, pointing out each time I complained that my relationship with the department was like that between a locum doctor and a principal—that is, my job was to maintain what I found in good working order ready for the return of the substantive minister. Then that minister was forced to resign and Malcolm Fraser decided that I should be sworn in as minister in his place. When Gwyn came that day and I renewed my complaints, he started once more on his tale of how I was like a locum, and so on and on. I was able then to point to my desk and ask what he could see there. ‘A Bible,’ he replied, and then quickly, ‘My God, you are no longer a locum!’ He was right; the Bible had been given to me that morning at Government House when I had been sworn in. We had quick attention to the problems I had raised after that—after all, I was now the principal and no longer the locum.

At lunch on 1 October the officers were trying to sell me the departmental line on a current controversial issue while we ate a pleasant meal. I tried to get some answers on one matter of policy still before the Government. It concerned possible compulsory acquisition by Fawnmac and CSL of licences to manufacture drugs held by other companies. Very properly, they would not be drawn.

Back at Parliament House, I chaired a meeting of our unique parliamentary group of Amnesty International and got the work completed quickly.

On the Friday morning we had a meeting of my senate standing committee in Sydney where we held a public hearing on our current reference on woodchips. That evening I went to Sydney Hospital to a mess dinner, held by the medical staff, particularly by the resident staff but including some older and more senior doctors. My diary records:

Made the best speech I have made for ages—jokes very well received and also some serious talk. Lots of questions. Very pleased. It is as Royal North Shore Hospital used to be ten years ago with a fine corporate spirit.

The next day, Saturday, 4 October, I took the family with me when I went to Broadway to visit Theo Skalkos. He gave me a translation of some allegedly defamatory material that he wanted me to see. He was very aggressive about a Greek communal argument related to radio 2EA. Later that day I put on a medical hat again when Jenny and I visited Bernie and Helen Amos to meet Eric Andrup, the guest professor at RNSH for 1975. This all seemed like an idyllic interregnum before the crisis that was to come in a fortnight. The mood
continued on 5 October when I attended a seminar on Israel at Shalom College at the University of New South Wales. Monday, 6 October was a public holiday in Sydney and the next day I returned to Canberra by plane.

On Friday, 10 October, we finished the examination of the estimates of expenditure for social security, repatriation and health. I was then able to fly back to Sydney and went to RNSH for the traditional mess dinner that preceded North Shore Reunion Week. The jokes were very poor. The general medical superintendent Roger Vanderfield took me aside and advised me that RNSH would invite me to join the council of its Medical Research Institute. I told him I would be delighted (but it never happened). I was delighted partly because they were now coming to me in a spirit of friendship and support.

I sat at a bottom table with Martyn Sulway, who has always been my friend but who, like me, has made some of the ‘heavies’ uncomfortable because he is slightly unconventional. Martyn and his wife, Rosie, have always been close friends of ours. We have had some wonderful boozy evenings at their home with former quiz kid Chris Ringstad. On one of these occasions, in between food, poetry recitations and Gilbert and Sullivan, they advised us that their bitch had been spayed a week earlier and that the vet had advised them ‘to keep her quiet’ for a couple of days on return from the dog hospital. They alleged that they complied with this instruction by telling the dog solemnly ‘not to climb trees’. She climbed no trees and prospered.

On 11 and 12 October, a weekend, we embarked \textit{en famille} on one of the most ill-fated family outings ever. We had with us in our old Mercedes our dachshunds, Barnaby and Rusty, and a friend of Sarah’s named Nicky Israel, as well as Sarah, Ian, Jenny and me. The plan was to travel to a state forest beyond Central Mangrove and camp there overnight. This plan had been inspired by the beauty of the forests as I had seen them with our senate committee and the particular forest had been made known to me by John Yarwood, a Forestry Commission officer who gave evidence to us.

We got to Olney State Forest by late morning and to the spot marked on the map by John Yarwood. Ian was delighted and was quite prepared to pitch camp there and then, but Sarah in particular was not impressed as she wanted us to find a spot closer to a creek so that she could swim. With some reluctance, we drove on from the marked spot. We passed a group picnicking on Wollombi Creek and then, two kilometres further on, we became hopelessly bogged when some apparent puddles turned out to be deep ruts into which the Mercedes sank. I spent almost two hours trying to get rocks under the car wheels to enable it to get moving but the differential was resting on the solid centre of the track.
and I failed totally. The dogs and the children were milling round and all were covered in leeches in no time (as was I). Eventually, I broke the car jack and so, drying off the sweat and pulling off the leeches, I walked back to the group at Wollombi Creek. A Dr Timms from Avondale College (who recognised me from my time at the Sydney Sanitarium and Hospital in 1967) pulled us out. Ian was so upset by it all he wanted to go home.

Instead we drove down to Kilcare Beach and found Bouddi State Park. Unfortunately, no dogs were allowed into the camping area proper so we parked in a depression out on a dune area, pitched our tent and let everyone relax. Even Ian was happy and the dogs were able to run around and establish territorial rights over the area.

It began to rain so Jenny cooked some food over a primus and by 7 pm we all retired to sleep. Jenny and Barnaby were sensible and slept in the car. That Barnaby always did know where to find comfort! Rusty, Sarah, Ian, Nicky and I slept in the tent. With the rain, some water began to run in the slight depression in which we had our tent. Somehow we remained dry enough to sleep the sleep of the dead and the virtuous. We woke next day to glorious weather at Kilcare Beach. Jenny and the girls went off to swim after we had cooked a legal breakfast on our primus (no open fires were allowed outside the designated camping area). Ian and I struck camp and packed up the car. We all left Kilcare after lunch and were home by late afternoon. We cleaned the car and unpacked, cleaned mud from ourselves and got Nicky home. I went back to work on papers.

I have recorded in my diary: ‘Weekend was really a great success in spite of dogs, mud and bog.’ Perhaps it was, but reading the account almost 40 years later, I wonder.

John Atwill had won the federal presidency of the Liberal Party: ‘So much for that vaunted numbers man Reg Withers. We did him in! 27 votes to 15 each for Sampson and Wing. Puplick as active as ever.’

On Monday, 13 October, I saw patients, all of whom wanted to talk politics: ‘Indeed everyone wanted to talk politics. Just the one question.’

I arrived in the city and met an office bearer from the Cook Federal Electorate Conference with whom I talked too frankly about Don Dobie and problems he had within the parliamentary party. It was probably dangerous to be so frank. Happily Don Dobie became a senior and very respected member of the parliamentary Liberal Party but at that time we had to exert real effort to stave off some marauders who wanted him out. At lunchtime I joined an impromptu syndicate at the American National Club and came away with some profit from the poker machines.
I then met Terry Hillsberg, who told me that social security people were saying that I was trying to knock off Don Chipp. I decided that I would have to clear this up with Chipp directly, as it was untrue. As part of my communal duties, I attended the Malcolm Gillies Lecture and annual cocktail party at RNSH and then a meeting at the North Shore Temple Emanuel.

On arriving home late and tired, I learned that Rex Connor had met Whitlam following the release of documents in Melbourne papers, provided by Khemlani. Connor seemed to be resisting. This was stunning news: it meant that Connor had been lying, too, that the assurances we had all been given were of no value, and that Labor was much more vulnerable than ever to the charge of ‘reprehensible behaviour’. My diary records: ‘Election now looks imminent. My own doubts recede as the government’s lies on Loans Affair catch it up.’
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