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MY DILEMMA: FROM MEDICINE TO THE SENATE

Gough Whitlam became prime minister of the first Labor government to take office in Australia for 23 years after Robert Menzies led the Liberal Party to victory in 1949. Whitlam's Labor Party triumphed at the general election of 2 December 1972 by winning eight seats and sweeping out the Administration of William 'Billy' McMahon.[1] At that election, the Labor Party won 67 seats, the Liberal Party won 38 seats, and the Country Party won 20 seats.

I have always felt somewhat sorry for Bill McMahon. He was never a likeable person, and I did not ever like him. His voice was as unpleasant as Gough Whitlam's voice was impressive, his looks were against him, and he was a self-centred and untrustworthy colleague. Yet I felt sorry for him. He had been blackballed as Liberal leader by the leader of the Country Party John 'Black Jack' McEwen, following the death of Harold Holt, after which John Gorton had come from the Senate to snatch the premiership. Then he had taken over the prime ministership in a nasty palace coup against the liberal Gorton just in time to face the irresistible tide of Whitlam and the Labor revival. McMahon has been described by Laurie Oakes as being 'indecisive as a leader, confused in debate, unappealing on television, and unconvincing on the hustings'.[2]

1 Mayer (1973).
2 Oakes (1976: 228).

But even had he been more attractive, more likeable and more in tune with the aspirations and sentiments of the community and the times, it is doubtful that he could have withstood that tide.

In any event, once the Labor Party took office, McMahon was replaced quickly by the liberals. Bill Snedden became leader in 1972 and remained leader until the Fraser coup of 1974. A man of liberal views, Snedden never really stamped his authority on the Liberal Party or the Parliament. His leadership was always insecure—and was seen to be insecure by the press and by his enemies. It is one measure of the limitations of Gough Whitlam's political judgment that he chose to destroy Snedden in Parliament so completely, thus making more certain the advent of Malcolm Fraser and the eventual destruction of Whitlam's own government.

In the early 1970s, soon after joining the Liberal Party, I had been approached by Don Dobie, Member for Cook in southern Sydney and an assistant minister, to consider running for Parliament. An initial try for the seat of Berowra had been unsuccessful (as it had been for John Howard, Bob Ellicott, Jim Cameron, David Arblaster and Vi Lloyd—all of whom, like me, later ended up in Parliament), but I had been noticed by Nigel Bowen and John Carrick, and was able on 29 June 1973 to win preselection for a place on the next NSW Liberal Senate ticket. That preselection took place at the Boulevarde Hotel on William Street in Sydney. Bob Cotton won the first position and there were 20 of us seeking the other Liberal position in the team. We were all shut together in one large room, and there we stayed together for the whole day.

What an extraordinary scene it was in that room. There were party faithfuls who sat together and chatted, party eccentrics who carried on their own eccentricities, and newcomers (many of them to shine later in party affairs) nervously sitting around. The experienced had novels to read or packs of cards with them; the rest of us just endured the time. And, most extraordinary of all, there was Julia Freebury, the abortion law reform campaigner who had joined the Liberal Party so that she could nominate and address a college of 75 leading Liberals for only the cost of her nomination. She moved professionally during the day to speak with each of the candidates about abortion law reform. During her speech to the preselection college, she spoke on the same subject.

As the only 'outsider' in the whole preselection, she was rather more dispassionate than the rest. She later told friends that she had come expecting the preselection to have been determined in advance. It was only when she felt the tension rising and saw the nervousness of candidates that she realised that there was no designated candidate and that she was witnessing a true trial of strength. Perhaps she was only partly correct. Chris Puplick, who later became a close friend and associate of mine, was a preselector that day. He tells me that he

was 'under instructions' to vote for me. Incidentally, it was Puplick's aphorism that most people in political parties are 'lonely, mad or ambitious' to a greater or lesser extent that was well illustrated that day.

Towards the end, John Jobling, an unsuccessful candidate that day but later whip in the Legislative Council, returned from the lavatory to tell us that only Milovoj (Misha) Lajovic and I remained in the ballot. Ten hours after it had all begun, the 20 candidates were called back to the electoral college. All eyes were on me and I knew then that I had succeeded. The announcements followed, some speeches were made, whisky was drunk, I phoned home with the news, and we were off and running.

After the preselection, I was summoned to meet the most senior NSW Liberal Party senator, the Honourable Sir Kenneth Anderson. He greeted me with something like the following: 'Your job is to sit on stages, introduce people if asked to, give votes of thanks if asked to, and otherwise to keep very quiet. Do you understand? Would you join me now for a cup of tea? Milk? Sugar?' This was rather an abrupt and disquieting introduction to the glory of being a preselected candidate and Ken Anderson was fierce in delivering the message. But he was in fact a gentle, friendly, wise man and became a supportive friend. He had been a prisoner of the Japanese at Changi and on the Burma railway, as had John Carrick and Tom Uren. These doughty politicians from two opposing parties showed consistent support and courtesy to each other and there was something in this Changi association that transcended the daily conflicts of federal politics.

The election of 18 May 1974 was precipitated when, on 10 April, Senate Opposition leader Reg Withers moved an amendment to the first of three Appropriation Bills, which, when carried, was treated by the Government as a denial of Supply.[3] The amendment was to demand that there be a general election held in association with the expected half-Senate election.

My contemporary notes give some flavour of the campaigning. I have written:

> One night a parking station took 20 minutes to find my car and I missed a flight to Armidale as a result. I was due to join Ian Sinclair for his campaign opening but had to watch helplessly as the aeroplane taxied out without me. A charter plane got me to Armidale by 10 pm to reach the meeting just as it closed. My arrival caused great excitement and no little comment in the local paper that the Liberals had been so keen to keep their commitment that a charter aircraft had been used. After the meeting I went to the home of David Leitch, the local state member and a medical colleague.

3 Fraser (1983: 355); Reid (1976: 205).

> Next day I drove 400 km to Newcastle and joined Bill Snedden. During the afternoon Snedden's press secretary came to me and said: 'Bill is losing his voice. What are you going to do about it?'
>
> What could I do about it? I knew nothing about ENT [ear, nose and throat] work and I had no hand in setting up Snedden's speaking arrangements. A friendly ENT surgeon in Sydney listened to my plea for help for an unnamed political friend and then replied: 'Well, the first thing I can tell you is that your political friend is not a trained public speaker.' Much hilarity and mirth ensued from the Snedden team when this was relayed on. My Sydney medical friend did however give us some good advice which included almost total rest to Bill's voice except when he was actually speaking on a platform.
>
> With great gallantry Snedden proceeded on to Maitland to address a noisy street meeting from a truck. Later that night he spoke at the Newcastle Town Hall where no Liberal leader had spoken for 20 years. It was an unforgettable evening. Liberal and Labor supporters came to blows, blood was spilt, more than 50 police were needed, and one agitator actually tried to climb down drapes from the dress circle to attack speakers on the stage below.
>
> We received enormous and beneficial press coverage and earned some well deserved credit for his courage and determination.
>
> Later in the campaign I drove to Wollongong, then flew immediately to Albury, arriving too late to eat. I was taken straight off to a campaign meeting with David and Ruth Fairbairn who then put me, together with some soup and a pizza, on to the train. That train deposited me at Goulburn at about 5 am and I was met by our regional president Pat Osborne. Pat took me to his magnificent Lake George property *Currandooley* for a quick breakfast. Then we drove 200 km to Cooma for street meetings, then to Nimmatabel [sic] for a camp draft, then back to Cooma airport for a flight back to Sydney where I drove out to Luddenham for another function until midnight.

The 1974 election was unusual in that it became only the third double dissolution of the Parliament since Federation. A double dissolution is an election in which all senators and all members have to face the electorate on the same day, instead of having half the senators continue on, as happens with most Australian elections. It was probably only because it was a double dissolution that I was elected. Since the introduction of proportional voting for the Senate at the 1949 election, Labor had more often than not won three of the five seats contested in New South Wales. So although originally selected for the generally unwinnable third position (out of five to be elected) on the Liberal/Country Coalition Senate team in New South Wales, I suddenly found myself number five on our ticket for the larger election with a likely chance of our winning five places. As it turned out, it was still a close-run thing: we won the fifth position in New South Wales only after 35 days of counting votes and then only by 31,736 votes out of the 2,702,903 votes cast. I defeated Labor's Peter Westerway, who then went to

the Commonwealth Public Service and rose to a senior level in the Department of Communications. Except for some university positions, it was my first time in any elected public position. I was then 39 years old.

My wife, Jenny, and I were actually at a dinner party at the home of Senator Bob Cotton's daughter Annie and her husband, David Ferguson, on 22 June when my mother-in-law phoned to let me know she had heard on the radio that I had been elected. The Liberal Party either did not know or had not bothered to let me in on the secret. On my return to the table, I was asked the usual question of a doctor: 'Do you have to go?' I was able to answer with 'no'. Conversation at that dinner party was vigorous, interesting, civilised and non-political, so I did not burden the group at table with my news.

Because the voting systems are different for the House of Representatives and the Senate, and because the quotas for senators vary between states, it is possible to achieve different electoral outcomes in the two parliamentary chambers even at the simultaneous election for both chambers as a result of a double dissolution. This is what happened in 1974. After some uncertainty early in the counting, the Whitlam Government secured a second term in office by winning 66 of the 127 seats in the House of Representatives. But at the same election it won only 29 of the Senate places in a chamber of (then) 60 senators.[4] The Liberal and Country parties won five places in Victoria and Western Australia, six places in Queensland, four places in South Australia and Tasmania (Michael Townley was at that stage an independent senator),[5] and five places in New South Wales. My victory—the last place to be determined—ensured that the Government would not enjoy a Senate majority and that Steele Hall would exercise great influence. The election also saw the total disappearance of the Democratic Labor Party (DLP) from the Senate after 19 years. In fact, it was to the former office of defeated DLP senator Jack Kane that I was directed when I sought my office accommodation in Sydney.

I had only three or four weeks to prepare for my transfer to a new life. This involved phasing down a busy consulting medical practice, reorganising my links with the Royal North Shore Hospital (RNSH), paying off some of my dedicated personal medical staff (my personal secretary, Naomi Kirkpatrick, came with me and stayed, with one break, until 1989), finding the new office and mastering some of the logistics associated with its functioning, learning

4 The Senate was increased from 64 to 76 people in 1983 by an amendment to the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918*.

5 Senator Michael Townley sat as an independent from 1971 to February 1975, and again from 5 June 1987. He was a Liberal Party senator from February 1975 to 5 June 1987.

a little of my duties, responding to the many letters and invitations, getting an office in the provisional Parliament House, finding some accommodation in Canberra, and preparing my family for new challenges.

Renegotiating my relationship with the RNSH proved to be somewhat prolonged, difficult and disappointing. Unsure of my future in politics, I requested a long leave of absence from the hospital, as had been granted to some other medical colleagues from time to time. My appointment at RNSH involved both patient care and teaching. A request was made in a letter of 18 March 1974 to the general medical superintendent in the following terms:

> Dear Doctor Vanderfield,
>
> I write concerning the possible outcome of the forthcoming Senate Election. If I am unsuccessful in that Election then no adjustment of my present practice with relation to the Hospital will be required. If I am elected a Senator for New South Wales then an adjustment will be necessary and I write to enquire about possible ways in which this might be achieved.
>
> If elected it would be necessary for me to cease my regular duties at the Hospital and my regular practice of internal medicine. I believe that the Hospital requires 3 months notice of any such move and I hereby foreshadow such notice should it be required.
>
> It is not my desire to sever my relationships with the Royal North Shore Hospital. I would remind you that I came to the Hospital as a medical student at the beginning of 1956 and have been continuously associated with the Hospital in my professional career since that time. If elected I would have a six year tenure in the Senate provided there was not a Double Dissolution of Parliament. At the end of that time I might be defeated and wish to return to medical life.
>
> I write to ask the Board of Directors through you to give consideration to offering me some continuing form of association with the Hospital in the event that I am successful at the Senate Elections. Such an association might allow me to continue to make a contribution to the life of the Hospital on a less regular basis and could be to our mutual advantage.
>
> I remain
> Yours sincerely,
> Peter Baume

Not only was my request for special leave refused but also my hospital appointment was determined within six months. This occurred because, coincidentally, the normal quadrennial reappointments fell due at this time. I did apply for reappointment and for long leave of absence but was refused both. The leave of absence was refused first in the following letter sent to me on 15 July 1974:

Dear Doctor Baume,

I refer to earlier correspondence and our discussions of 3rd July regarding your future position at the Hospital. Your letter and your request for leave were considered by the Board at its meeting this week. I informed the Board of your future plans, as you outlined them to me, now that the outcome of the Senate elections was known.

The Board recognises the unique situation which has occurred and offers its congratulations on your election to the Senate. However the Board feels that it cannot depart from the policies it has always followed with regard to extended leave and feels unable to meet your request in this regard.

The Board asked that I convey its appreciation for your services to the Hospital, both as Resident Medical Officer in earlier years and as an Honorary Assistant Physician during the last eight years.

Yours sincerely
I.R. Vanderfield
General Medical Superintendent

The medical board of the hospital, the body representing the medical staff, was unhappy about this decision and made separate representations to the hospital board on the matter. At a meeting of the section of physicians on 23 July 1974, a move was initiated by Professor Douglas Piper to have the matter appealed through the medical board to the hospital board of directors. That motion from the section of physicians was moved at the meeting of the medical board on Tuesday, 13 August 1974 by Dr Murray Lloyd and seconded by Dr Ian Thomas. The minutes of that meeting of the medical board record that 'successive speakers stressed the high quality of Dr Baume's services to the Hospital and the community … The motions were carried without dissent and with acclamation'.

Accordingly, a letter was written by Dr Ian Hales, honorary secretary of the medical board, to Dr Vanderfield on 4 September as follows:

Dear Dr Vanderfield,

At the meeting of the Medical Board on Tuesday 13th August, the Medical Board follow [sic] due notice of motion from the Section of Physicians unanimously passed the following motions:

1. That the Medical Board notes with pride the election of one of its members, Dr Peter Baume, to the Senate and commend [sic] the spirit of public service which it believes motivated him.

2. That the Medical Board accepts that he will be unable to fulfil his various hospital commitments during his tenure of office.

3. That, being conscious of Dr Baume's contribution to the hospital in undergraduate and post graduate teaching, research, and patient care, the Medical Board believes that it is in the interests of the hospital to retain him in some appointment.

4. That the Medical Board recommends to the Hospital Board that Dr Baume be appointed to a position that will permit him to retain his clinical seniority for a period of three years, after which time there should be a review. This position should not require him to give clinical service to the hospital. It is suggested that this could be done by appointing him as an Honorary Physician with special leave of absence for three years.

It would be appreciated if you could bring these resolutions to the Board of Directors of the Hospital.

Yours sincerely,
Ian Hales
Honorary Secretary, Medical Board

But the board was unmoved. On 8 October 1974, Dr Vanderfield advised me of the termination of my hospital appointment in the following terms:

Dear Dr Baume,

The Board at its last meeting dealt with the statutory four yearly appointments to the Honorary Medical Staff, which included your application of the 20th June. I wish to advise that the Board decided it was unable to approve your reappointment in view of your present circumstances as indicated in your previously submitted letter of 18th March.

The Board also gave further consideration to your position generally, in the light of representations made by the Medical Board. However, the Board felt it was unable to alter its previous decision, conveyed to you in my letter of 15th July. The chairman, Sir Lincoln Hynes, would like to talk to you about this when a suitable occasion presents.

Yours sincerely,
I.R. Vanderfield
General Medical Superintendent

I responded on 29 October 1974 as follows:

Dear Dr Vanderfield,

Thank you for your letter of the 8th October 1974 informing me that the Board had found itself unable to approve my re-appointment or to make any concessions towards me in terms of leave or special appointment.

I am grateful for the consideration that the Board has given to my application and I am grateful for the opportunity I have had to work at Royal North Shore

> Hospital. I would be pleased if you would thank those of your colleagues who have helped over the years and pass my thanks on to those of your Senior Department Heads who have given me so much assistance and support.
>
> I am grateful for support which you personally have given me over a period of fifteen years in a variety of situations. I hope that my long term association with the Royal North Shore Hospital is not completely broken.
>
> I remain
> Yours sincerely,
> Peter Baume

It was disappointing to read in a subsequent annual report of the hospital that it had been necessary for me to resign my appointment. I had not resigned; I had been sacked and it was wrong of the hospital to say otherwise.

As a Jew, I decided to wear a yarmulke for my swearing in and to ask for a Hebrew Bible, which was provided immediately. For all my time in Parliament, I have always worn a yarmulke for daily prayers and have absented myself for the High Holydays and for the Passover whenever these clashed with sittings of the Parliament. In 1990, it happened that I was the only Jew in the Australian Parliament. Although other Jews have served during my time, none has been, like me, in the Liberal Party. Some of the other identifying Jews were Joe Berinson, Moss Cass and Barry Cohen. Dick Klugman was a cheerful agnostic. Lewis Kent and John Coulter, both born of Jewish mothers, identified themselves otherwise. Cohen tells the story of a day when he had forgotten to bring a yarmulke for his swearing in and explained his problem to Whitlam. Gough, the veteran of many Jewish communal functions, took Cohen to his desk, opened a drawer and asked him, 'Which colour would you like?'

A surprising telegram of congratulations had arrived from Senator the Honourable Sir Magnus Cormack, President of the Senate, whom I had never met. Although I was a little surprised, I came to learn in time of the unfailing courtesy and generosity of this colleague. By all accounts, he had been a good president during the first Whitlam Parliament.

Jenny accompanied me to Canberra for the first meeting of the Twenty-Ninth Parliament on 9 July 1974. More or less at random, I had booked us in to a motel in Manuka for those first few days. When the great day of the opening of the Parliament arrived, there was a heavy, pervasive Canberra fog and the Commonwealth car seemed to appear from out of nowhere and to take us back into a white blanket of nothingness. It was all unreal, exciting and symbolic of the great adventure we were undertaking into the unknown.

After we new senators had been sworn in, it was time to elect a new president. We had 29 Coalition senators with a Liberal independent, Michael Townley; Labor had 29; and then there was Steele Hall. So the possibility existed for a 30–30 tie and a draw from the hat, for which Senate Standing Orders provide that the name of the unsuccessful candidate shall be the one drawn.[6] Sitting there, new and polished, proud and inquisitive, with my wife sitting with Lady Cormack and others in the President's Gallery, I waited to take part in my first election for the President of the Senate. The Clerk Jim Odgers called for nominations; there were two. Labor nominated Senator Justin O'Byrne from Tasmania; the Opposition proposed the retiring president, Magnus Cormack. Each then 'addressed' the Senate with the identical formulaic words: 'I submit myself to the will of the Senate.' Each of us was given a ballot paper on which to write one name, and then the leaders, Lionel Murphy and Reg Withers, were invited to act as scrutineers while the votes were counted at the table by the clerks.

The result was 31–29 to O'Byrne, which was a great surprise to everyone—including Justin O'Byrne. But there it was: Steele Hall had almost certainly voted for the Government, as expected, but so had one of our senators! Who it was has never been revealed and the late Reg Wright actually collected damages after one commentator suggested it might have been him. My wife, Jenny, reported later that Lady Cormack nearly fainted when the result was announced, although she assured everyone present that her disappointment was for Magnus, not for herself.

Justin O'Byrne was the Father of the Senate—that is, he was the longest-serving senator, and he was an adequate president. I well remember that he became ill about a year later and I was asked to see him by a Labor senator and former student, Don Grimes. Grimes could have attended to the medical problem himself but was concerned that his colleague might mistrust his opinion because of local Tasmanian political considerations. For this reason, he sought a 'neutral' (that is, non-Tasmanian) doctor. Our teaching relationship dated from the time, many years earlier, when as a medical registrar, I gave tutorials to the student group of which he was a member. But at the time I saw Mr President, the Senate was in a frenzy of activity passing Bills—an event that occurred twice yearly at the end of each sitting period when accumulated legislation was cleared in double quick time to allow senators to get out of Canberra. So the president was in and out of the chair briefly as the various stages of different pieces of legislation followed each other with great rapidity. I was trying to consult medically in the passage behind the chair and it took some time to catch him long enough to determine that he needed to go to hospital—which he did.

6 Standing Order 7(4), formerly Standing Order 22.

From the moment that Parliament assembled in July 1974, even with a Labor president, the possibilities of disagreement between the houses, of deadlock and of constitutional crisis, were real. The temptation was there for the Liberal and Country Opposition to obstruct the Government in the Senate and so make it unworkable. As the Government reeled from crisis to crisis without any help from us, losing electoral support and the confidence of the people, the temptation to use Senate power became irresistible, as has been described in detail by many writers.[7]

After we got to work, I made an unmemorable maiden speech on the second day as my side wanted me, as the only Liberal doctor, to be ready for some health legislation soon to be debated. The convention was that one could not participate in debate vigorously, or accept interjections, until one's first speech was out of the way. I remember that second day when so many of us participated in what our seniors called 'the Maiden Stakes'. No one had warned me in advance to be ready. On the contrary, I had been advised to take it quietly and settle in before even thinking of speaking. As it was I had only one day or so to prepare what should have been (and was not) a significant and thoughtful first contribution.

Senator Bob Cotton used to tell the story of a maiden speech (perhaps his own) in which the chamber was full of colleagues sitting solemnly and listening in silence with eyes ahead and arms folded. When the speech finished, he alleges that a note was passed up with the words, 'I have a vacancy for a rabbit trapper—do you want a job?'

Soon after this, we had some health legislation and I spoke from a position of some knowledge. At the end of the speech, Steele Hall passed down a note complimenting me on 'a real parliamentary speech'. It meant a lot coming from a former premier of South Australia. Senator Don Grimes from Tasmania, who followed me, stated:

> It is rather strange for me to be speaking after Senator Baume in these circumstances. Many years ago Senator Baume taught me medicine.[8] Honourable Senators may be surprised to know that he did not teach me philosophy, politics, economics or anything else.
>
> Senator Jessop: It is a pity he did not.

7 See, for example: Reid (1976); Whitlam (1979); Schneider (1980). In each of these, large sections are devoted to the processes leading up to the deferral of Supply on 16 October 1975.

8 At the time Don Grimes was a final-year medical student at the Royal North Shore Hospital, I was a medical registrar who took his group for some tutorials. Incidentally, of the parliamentarians or significant political figures with an association with that hospital, only Bob Woods and I served the Liberal Party. Grimes, Moss Cass, Dick Klugman, Peter Wilenski and Doug Everingham all joined and supported Labor.

> Senator Grimes: It may be a pity but, unfortunately for Senator Jessop, I went on reading after I read Adam Smith's book which was written 200 years ago.[9]

I always did like Grimes!

Early in the Parliament we had the only Joint Sitting of the Houses to be called pursuant to the constitutional provisions relating to double dissolutions. On 6 and 7 August 1974, we all crowded into the House of Representatives chamber (and so I have sat officially in both chambers) for set-piece debates and votes along party lines to allow the Labor Government to obtain passage of six double-dissolution Bills. We new parliamentarians had the very back rows as befitted our lowly status. After dinner, Bill Snedden took several of us down to sit with him on the front bench for half an hour. It was a thoughtful gesture. It was during this sitting that I first saw the crossing of the floor by a parliamentarian: Country Party MP for the Northern Territory Sam Calder, who crossed the floor to vote with Labor on a Bill to provide Senate representation for the territories. He had told us in a party meeting of his intention and need to do so—and had received the 'blessing' of his colleagues, not that he required that to take the course he did.

During that same joint sitting, Steele Hall made a blistering attack on the resistance of the Coalition parties to electoral reform. Hall had, as premier of South Australia, pushed through an electoral reform Bill to remove a long-standing rural gerrymander. As a result of this courageous and correct action, his party had lost government. About a year after my election, I visited South Australia and was driven from Narracorte to Adelaide by a conservative group of South Australian legislative councillors who spent the entire four-hour trip telling me why I should not continue to feel respect and sympathy for Hall. They did not convince me then and have not convinced me since. He is a fine Australian, a fine liberal and a good friend.

As a senator, I became entitled to employ two staff. One was Naomi Kirkpatrick, who became my personal secretary. She had been with me in medical practice and understood my ways of working. She was married to an Irishman, Rea Kirkpatrick, who was badly afflicted with rheumatoid arthritis. In 1989, she finally had to call it a day as her husband's disability had by then become so severe as to require her to become his full-time carer.

My other staff member was Christopher Puplick. He accepted a job offer made by me on Friday, 14 March 1975 and remained with me until he entered the Senate himself. This outstanding Australian was even then a major figure within the Liberal Party. He is co-author of one of the few coherent books on Liberal

9 Senate Hansard, vol. S60, 1974: 296.

Party philosophy,[10] has been national president of the Young Liberal Movement of Australia, was on the Federal Executive of the Liberal Party during 1974 and 1975, has been a long-time diarist of events around him, and was a senator for New South Wales from 1978 to 1981 and 1985 to 1990. His defeat in 1990 was a victory for conservative elements who have never been able to accept his more liberal views. Puplick was a founder of the Liberal Forum and a powerful and feared contributor to Senate debate. He has been my friend for many years.

Soon after Chris joined my staff, I received a furious letter from the late Lady Violet Braddon, then a force in the Liberal Party, demanding that I sack Puplick. I have kept that rather unpleasant letter, which, if it did nothing else, put me on notice as to some of the more unreconstructed and vicious attitudes in the party that I had been elected to represent.

Our numbers in the Senate provided us with a powerful weapon. The question was then (and remains in retrospect) how we should use that power. Since all government measures passed in the House of Representatives while the Government held its numbers, the Senate votes were the only indication of the real tactics of the opposition parties or of the willingness of the Government to compromise if pressed hard enough. Assuming that Townley would vote with us, we always had sufficient numbers to block any proposal and, when Steele Hall was with us, we had numbers sufficient for the passage of an affirmative resolution. This was because tied votes in the Senate are determined in the negative, the president having a deliberative but not a casting vote. It is the failure to appreciate the full implications of this that led many people to assert that the constitutional crisis of 1975 could not have arisen had Labor had its proper complement of senators.[11] Such a proposition is incorrect. It would have been more correct for people to assert that the events could not have occurred in the manner they did. The events could still have occurred, using different procedural means to take advantage of tied votes (and therefore, of negative outcomes to any vote). The matter is discussed in more detail later in this manuscript.

The summary for the Budget sittings of the Senate for 1974 shows that six Bills were affirmed at the joint sitting, 141 Bills passed both Houses, two Bills with Senate amendments awaited further consideration by the House, two Bills had been returned from the House with Senate amendments disagreed to, two Bills originating in the Senate were awaiting consideration by the House, two Bills had

10 Puplick and Southey (1980).
11 See, for example, Whitlam (1979: 60).

been deferred, 25 had been negatived at the second reading, and 10 remained on the notice paper. There had been 12 successful amendments to the second reading of Bills and 184 amendments to the clauses of Bills.[12]

By the end of that period, I had made some speeches and felt comfortable in the chamber. I had already decided to limit my interventions to those matters on which I knew something (rather than responding automatically to requests from my seniors to speak whenever they needed another speaker) and had decided also, following some fatherly comments by South Australian Senator Condor Laucke, to 'play the ball and not the man'. That is a decision that each parliamentarian has to take individually. Some elect to 'play the man' and these become the 'bucket droppers' of Parliament. They play it tough and are treated accordingly within Parliament. They can expect to receive no mercy if ever they seek the indulgence of their chamber in a moment of need. Those who decide to play the ball (that is, concentrate on the issues and not the personalities) are likely to find, later in their careers, that people remember and appreciate this and are willing to help in difficult moments. Such an occasion occurred for me in 1979 when I breached the privilege of Parliament. I had briefed a journalist about the contents of a forthcoming senate committee report and that journalist then wrote a story before the report was tabled. I went straight into the Senate, explained what I had done and left it to the chamber. Although I had laid myself open to severe disciplinary action, the senators, including tough Labor senators, all just looked the other way.

During that first period, the leadership of Bill Snedden was challenged—an event that has been described extensively in books dealing with that Parliament. I had noticed that Malcolm Fraser wandered into my office a couple of times and had seemed unusually interested in the views of a new and inexperienced backbench senator. Still, flattery has always been a potent weapon in politics and I was flattered. The actual question at that 1974 challenge was the 'spill' motion—'that the leadership be declared vacant'. That motion was defeated. At that party room meeting, the NSW contingent voted generally for stability by supporting Snedden, although we were, as described later, to change our vote in March 1975.

After that first unsuccessful challenge, the party room emptied quickly and John Carrick and I noticed that Fraser was standing alone looking a bit forlorn. We asked whether he would join us for a cup of tea and he agreed readily. Our motive was simple: we wished to start the healing and binding of wounds and this was a good way to begin. We wandered from the party room to the tea room to find a large table almost full with people from the parliamentary Liberal

12 *Business of the Senate July–December 1974*, The Senate, Canberra.

Party. We would have sat down but Malcolm asked first of a very senior person at the table whether he or the others would mind our joining them. 'Yes', came the answer, 'we would mind'. So much for the quick healing and binding of wounds! Fraser, Carrick and I sat at another table, drank our tea and, in time, were joined by others.

By the end of my first Budget sitting, it was clear that the year ahead would be one of crisis and difficulty. The Government was determined to effect change quickly and, partly as a result of the speed with which it moved, many of its actions were untidy or unconventional and laid ministers open to criticism. It was clear, too, that our people were considering all the options available to them in the year ahead, and the press was already canvassing another deferral of Supply as one of these.

I returned to Sydney at the end of that year for Christmas and New Year with my wife and two children. We decided to have a decent break and took ourselves to Lord Howe Island for a marvellous holiday. Although I returned from that holiday refreshed and ready for the year ahead, I did not know it would involve me in some of the most dramatic events in Australian political history. The story of those events is contained in the following chapters of this 1975 manuscript.

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