FOREWORD

It is now a long time since the Dismissal on 11 November 1975. In brief, there had been a unique stand-off between the Senate and the House of Representatives over the Budget and Supply and the matter was resolved at the eleventh hour by the Governor-General Sir John Kerr, who dismissed Gough Whitlam summarily as prime minister and appointed Malcolm Fraser in his place. Before 1975, no prime minister had been dismissed against his will by a governor-general, although Sir Philip Game, the then Governor of New South Wales, had dismissed the state Premier Jack Lang in 1932.[1]

Elsewhere the events of 11 November might have led to revolution or been resolved by military intervention. In Fiji, a military takeover followed an election result unacceptable to a powerful minority;[2] in India, the Constitution was suspended by a president who determined that emergency powers were required.[3] In Australia, there was no such extra-constitutional intervention, disorder being confined to demonstrations in Australian capital cities on 11 November and a crowd of 1,000 angry people who demonstrated outside the Parliament that evening.[4] Letter bombs were sent to the Governor-General and to the Queensland Premier, injuring two public servants. Nevertheless, the deadlock between the Senate and the House of Representatives was resolved,

1 Sir Philip Game was Governor of New South Wales when he withdrew the commission of John Thomas Lang as Premier of New South Wales on 13 May 1932.

2 A government led by Timoci Bavadra won the Fijian general election held in April 1987, defeating the predominantly indigenous Fijian administration of Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara. The Bavadra Government was supported, especially by Fijians of Indian background. It was overthrown in a military coup led by Lieutenant-Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka on 14 May 1987, in which non-Indian Fijians regained control of that country.

3 Indian president Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed declared a state of emergency on 26 June 1975 based on an alleged threat to internal security. Opposition MPs and 676 opponents of Indira Gandhi were arrested and press censorship was imposed. The Parliament, without the Opposition, later ratified the declaration. These events followed the finding by the Allahabad High Court that Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's election in 1971 was invalid, and its disqualification of her from membership of any parliament for six years.

4 *The Australian*, 12 November 1975: 1.

in the first instance by extraordinary vice-regal action, and validated later by Australians voting at an election. There was no sustained violence and the transfer of power was peaceful.

I was present throughout that Parliament as a freshman senator, having won the tenth Senate seat in New South Wales, in 1974. The Coalition then had an equality of Senate votes—enough to block any proposal and deny Labor a Senate majority. Labor thought it would get a Senate majority on election night in 1974, but quickly realised, as did my people, that I would win and Labor's Peter Westerway would lose narrowly.

I was new to politics and to public life—having come from the relative security, order and comfort of the practice of medicine—very green and very much needing to learn my new craft. But the Twenty-Ninth Parliament I entered was the focus of crisis from the start and later the eye of the constitutional storm. There was little time to learn, especially in 1975. For all this turbulent and difficult Parliament, I was there in Canberra—inexperienced, undoubtedly ignorant, certainly shaken, and yet exhilarated and involved, and determined to observe and record some of what was going on about me.

There have already been a number of books about the events of 1975. Most have been written by journalists who observed the events,[5] by academics,[6] by interest groups,[7] and by principal actors in justification of the roles they played.[8]

No longer do I have any such agenda. No longer do I have any need to justify publicly what we did, or to assert a Panglossian view of events past.

I was unknown in 1975, the most junior member of an activist Senate. Apart from casting my vote in Senate divisions, I played no significant role in determining events or their outcomes, had no advisory function to the decision-makers, no frontbench position or parliamentary office, no pivotal role or leverage. All that I did (and it has been recorded in several places in print)[9] was to question, for a month, the course of events that led to the deferral of Supply in late 1975, although I had changed that view after 14 October when Rex Connor was the fifth Labor minister to resign or be dismissed.[10] The demotions and dismissals of ministers in the Whitlam Government were as follows: Gordon Bryant was demoted from Aboriginal Affairs to Capital Territory on 9 October 1973; Frank Crean was demoted from Treasurer to Minister for Overseas Trade

5 See, for example: Kelly (1976, 1984); Hall and Iremonger (1976); Solomon (1976); Tennison (1976); Reid (1976); Oakes (1976).

6 See, for example: Horne (1976); Penniman (1977); Encel et al. (1977); Sexton (1979); Ayres (1987).

7 See, for example: (IPA 1976).

8 See, for example: Freudenberg (2009); Kerr (1978); Whitlam (1979); Barwick (1983).

9 See *National Times*, 20 October 1975: 6; Kelly (1976: 255); Oakes (1976: 155); Whitlam (1979: 72).

10 Senate Hansard, vol. S66, 1975: 1,065.

on 21 November 1974; Lionel Murphy resigned on 9 February 1975 to go to the High Court; Speaker Jim Cope was forced to resign on 27 February 1975; Jim Cairns was demoted from Treasury to Environment on 5 June 1975, and then dismissed from the ministry on 2 July 1975; Moss Cass was demoted from Environment to Media on 5 June 1975; Clyde Cameron was dismissed from Labour and Immigration on 5 June 1975 and appointed to Science and Consumer Affairs on 6 June 1975; Lance Barnard resigned to become Australian Ambassador to Sweden in June 1975; and Rex Connor was dismissed from Minerals and Energy on 14 October 1975.

Throughout the period of deferral of Supply—the actual constitutional confrontation—I was there in the Senate every sitting day and voted in every division with my colleagues.

Now we are almost 40 years on. Passions have cooled and it is possible at last to record, examine and discuss calmly, with the benefit of inside knowledge, some of those events and those times.

In 1990, when I first edited these reflections into a manuscript, almost all the main protagonists of those events had retired from public life or had died. Sir John Kerr retired as Governor-General on 8 December 1977. He lived for some time outside Australia and has generally been treated rather poorly, especially by some of those most affected by what he did. Gough Whitlam led the Labor Party to the election in 1977 but retired from Parliament on 31 July 1978. Bill Hayden, who later became Governor-General, had been a minister in the Whitlam Government of 1975, was subsequently Leader of the Opposition and then foreign minister under Bob Hawke. Malcolm Fraser retired from Parliament after he lost the election of 1983. Phillip Lynch, Rex Connor, Bill Snedden, Lionel Murphy, Ivor Greenwood, Jim Keeffe, Ron McAuliffe, Reg Wright, Frank Stewart, Eric Robinson, Bob Katter Snr, Kevin Cairns, Eric Bessell and Alan Missen were all dead. Retired from the Parliament were Speaker Cope, Presidents Cormack and O'Byrne, all surviving ministers of the Crown from 1975 except for Paul Keating, 20 members of the then shadow ministry, and 53 of the 60 senators of that Parliament. The celebrated retirements of Lance Barnard and Lionel Murphy and the death of Bert Milliner all preceded the Dismissal. Many of the main players who had gone were destroyed, completely or in part, immediately or later, by the Dismissal and by their roles in it.

The only then Labor minister still in Canberra in 1990 was Paul Keating and the surviving Liberal shadow ministers from 1975 (in the order of their seniority at that time) were Andrew Peacock, Harry Edwards, Michael MacKellar, Peter Durack, John Howard, Ian Wilson, Ian Sinclair and Bruce Lloyd, not all of whom became ministers in the Fraser ministries between 1975 and 1983. Steele Hall sat in the Senate in 1975 as the only representative of the Liberal

Movement, but in 1990 was a Liberal member of the House of Representatives, as were former senators Fred Chaney and Kathy (Martin) Sullivan. The only Labor senators from that time remaining in the Senate in 1990 were John Button and Peter Walsh; the only remaining Liberal senators were Peter Durack and me.

During all the period of the Budget sittings in 1975, I maintained a diary daily, writing a few lines each night or early in the morning. For the time before that I maintained a collection of notes and personal papers. Another diarist of those times was my colleague Chris Puplick. His diaries cover a longer period and include his comments when he worked, during the relevant period, as a member of my staff. He made his diaries available to me for use in the present enterprise.

Because there is no other manuscript by a parliamentarian with a diary of that time (and certainly no book by a bit player with no continuing personal axe to grind), I believe it is proper for me, from notes written at the time, to record what it was like from the inside—what it was like to be there to face the events as they occurred, with the picture as it unfolded; what it was like to have faced the pressure of being part of a decision to defer Supply, and then to have maintained that position and, finally, to have been part of the landslide election victory at the end.

From this distance of time, my perceptions have altered and softened. They are also clearer. I am less passionate in my judgement of our opponents, less vehement in my opinion of their actions, less passionate in my defence of our strategy, less absolute and arbitrary in my assessments, and in particular I am less certain of the wisdom of the course we took.

All this I will discuss in the succeeding chapters, drawing where necessary on contemporary notes and material, on the Hansards, on the Journals (the official records) of the Senate, on the newspapers and, above all, on my own contemporary notes.

In this manuscript, I emphasise my minor part and my own insignificance in the events. This is at once a strength and a weakness: while my access to 'inside' information was less than for frontbench colleagues, my capacity to avoid some of their tunnel vision and particular judgments was rather greater. But I was a member of the parliamentary Liberal Party. I did sit in every meeting of the joint parties. I did talk daily with major figures. I did report to public meetings about the situation and about our options. I did reassure them about our determination. I did discuss daily with colleagues where we were and where we thought we might be going. I did talk daily to members of the Canberra Press Gallery. I was subject to great pressure. I did breathe in daily the atmosphere and the sense of the drama as it unfolded.

In addition, I was a senator and not a member of the House of Representatives. Although the confrontation was between the two chambers, it was in the Senate that the main action occurred, and it was in the Senate that events were determined and in which I voted on every vital division. Those with a continuing sense of hurt and injustice will blame me for those votes, while those without deeply entrenched attitudes or bitter memories may feel curiosity about the whole affair. This series of insights will complement some other published material and because of that this manuscript should be of value to those who, while never having served in a parliament, wish to understand the events of that time as seen by a parliamentarian.

Peter Baume
Sydney, May 2014

This text is taken from *A Dissident Liberal: The Political Writings of Peter Baume*, by Peter Baume, edited by John Wanna and Marija Taflaga, published 2015 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.