



PRIME MINISTER

Press Statement No. 457
22 February 1975

SENATE VACANCY

Mr Lewis will be flouting the unanimous wishes of the Senate, the Parliamentary Liberal Party in Canberra and now the Liberal Party Federal Executive if he goes ahead with his defiance of convention in filling the Senate vacancy.

It is apparent to everyone except Mr Lewis and the more backward elements of the Country Party that conventions of this kind must be preserved if our democratic parliamentary system is to survive.

The fact that the Liberal Party Federal Executive has had to hedge its support for the convention is clearly the result of the difficulties in which Mr Snedden has placed it by his inability to do anything but lead his party from behind.

The appointment of a Senator by a State is not an "internal affair" of the State. It is something which, unless carried out in accordance with Australia-wide custom, can disrupt the whole Parliamentary system.

Events of the last week have demonstrated just how ineffective the Liberals would be if they were in government in Canberra.

On two major issues affecting the Australian constitution, they have been unable to get the co-operation of the Country Party and the two Liberal-Country Party Premiers.

Mr Lewis has disregarded Mr Snedden over the Senate replacement; Mr Bjelke-Petersen has disregarded Mr Snedden over the way in which Australia's overseas trade should be conducted.

It is clear that the Liberal and Country Party are at odds with the Australian Parliament and the Leader of the Liberal Party is unable to secure co-operation of the Premiers of New South Wales and Queensland.

If Mr Snedden can't get the Premiers to agree with him on matters involving the propriety of appointments to the Australian Parliament and the conduct of foreign trade, how hopeless would he be facing the more difficult tasks of government.

CANBERRA. A.C.T..