



PRIME MINISTER

FOR PRESS

17. MAY 1977

The Queensland Premier, Mr. Bjelke-Petersen, and the Deputy Premier, Mr. Knox, are gravely misleading the people of Queensland.

In October last year at Hobart, Mr. Petersen, Mr. Frawley, Mr. Hewitt, Mr. Knox, Mr. Lickiss, Mr. Neal, Mr. Porter and Mr. Row, all from Queensland, all voted for the simultaneous election proposal.

They voted to make sure that it would be a State Governor and not the Governor General who would issue the writs for elections for the Senate.

Are we to assume that these Queensland Members were so bemused by the casino when they were in Hobart, that they forgot their great State of Queensland? What made them change their minds after that Constitutional Convention? The proposal is the same. The principle is the same. They supported it then, to a man, for the proposal was carried without dissent.

Queenslanders should demand of them an explanation of their change of heart. How do they say that the principles that they supported in Hobart are now wrong.

Let us look at the questions:

1. That elections for the House of Representatives and the Senate should take place at the same time.

This is a matter of simple common sense. Who wants as many as four elections over the next four years?

2. That if a vacancy occurs in the Senate through death or retirement, the nominated replacement should be of the same political party and should serve out the full term of the Senator who he is replacing.

This is plain Australian fairness. Replacing a National Party Senator by another National Party Member, a Liberal Senator by a Liberal and a Labor Senator by a Labor, preserves your decision at the Senate election.

3. That electors in the Northern Territory and the Capital Territory should be able to vote in referendums like other Australians.

It is fair and just that people in the Northern Territory and Australian Capital Territory no longer be second-class citizens.

A referendum is in two parts. To be carried it requires a majority of voters throughout Australia. It also will, still require a majority in at least four states. The votes of the Territory residents would not be counted in that second part and the rights of the States would still be protected.

- 4. That High Court Judges should retire at the age of 70, and that a retiring age also be set for other Federal Judges.

We think it only fair that after the age of 70 they should pass the job on to younger people. How could setting a retiring age for judges be a threat to Queensland? The State already has a retiring age for its own State Judges.

These proposals are fair, reasonable and just. I believe the electors of Queensland will see through the campaign of deception being mounted against the referendum proposals.

They are a common-sense approach to constitutional reform based on a broad consensus of agreement. Upholders of State rights should have no -complaint about the Constitutional Convention because the States had 72 votes, while there were only 16 for the Federal Parliament. Nobody could say that Federal Parliament stacked that meeting. The States had absolute control of that Convention.

Again, let me repeat, the Premier of this State supported the proposal for simultaneous elections. Ask him: why Mr. Petersen have you changed your mind?

The campaign in Queensland is a hangover from the past. All Queenslanders, and indeed all Australians, owe Mr. Bjelke-Petersen a great deal of thanks for the way he battled against a wretched socialist Government - the Whitlam Government. He was redoubtable in that. He mounted his charger to do battle with Canberra, and a great many Australians applauded him for it. But Canberra has changed. Doug Anthony and Malcolm Fraser are not the same as Mr. Whitlam. But we still have Mr. Petersen on his horse - still tilting at windmills. It is time he gave it up.

The referendums do not detract from the power and authority of the States House. The Senate's authority will be enhanced. The Prime Minister will no longer be able to manipulate political power by manipulating Members of the Senate. The choice of the people of Queensland will be protected, and nothing will be able to upset your vote - the people's vote - so far as the Senate is concerned.

The charge that the Senate could be made to disappear is hysterical. Without the Senate, there is no Government. Nothing can become law unless it passes the Representatives and the Senate. The proposed referendum says that the writs for the Senate election shall be issued. They have to be issued. The highest legal advisers in the land say so.

A Yes vote will increase the influence of the less populated States, because when the Senate and the Representatives elections are held at the same time, political leaders must canvas all States and have

policies appropriate to all States. Policies and issues at House of Representatives elections held alone could even be confined to Melbourne and Sydney alone.

Mr. Petersen has said the referendum is costing money, and should not be held. He never said that at the Hobart Constitutional Convention, where none of the delegates mentioned money. They knew a referendum would cost money, but the cost would be nothing like as much as having separate elections for the House of Representatives and the Senate year after year. Millions and millions of dollars will be saved in all future years once this vote is carried.

Mr. Bjelke-Petersen should aim at the proper target. He will be fighting the ALP and its State leader Mr. Burns in a few months.