



PRIME MINISTER

STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P.J. KEATING, MP

Not for the first time, John Howard has hijacked the Opposition's immigration policy and called for an intake "dramatically lower" than both the Government's target and the Coalition's.

The Coalition wants 50,000 - 70,000 nett. Mr Howard wants next to none - if that is what "a virtual moratorium" can be taken to mean.

The Opposition has a spokesman on immigration and ethnic affairs, but it is John Howard who does the talking.

And there are signs that neither his tone nor his obsessions have changed much since his notorious outbursts as Liberal Party leader in the eighties.

While Mr Howard and Dr Hewson cannot agree over the migrant intake figure each believes to be appropriate, they seem to be more united in their aversion to multiculturalism.

John Howard made his position clear a few years ago.

Dr Hewson is firmly on the record since his extraordinary outburst at the State Conference of the Liberal Party of Western Australia on July 25 this year.

He said then that multiculturalism was "absolutely a fundamental mistake in this country."

He said: "We are a multicultural society - yes. But we should never have multiculturalism." In his view multiculturalism amounts to nothing more than the "elevation" of people he describes as "a few professional ethnics..."

This is Dr Hewson's view of one of Australia's great social achievements - a peaceful and cohesive multicultural society.

It reflects his loathing not only of the goals of fairness and equity at the centre of multicultural policy, but his deep disdain for ethnic community leaders.

In a world torn apart by ethnic divisions it seems extraordinary to mount such an attack on what is surely an enviable Australian success.

I note that the Opposition's official spokesman on immigration matters, Mr Ruddock, is trying now to reconstruct Dr Hewson's remarks to make them more socially palatable.

The fact is that with Dr Hewson devaluing multiculturalism, despite its manifest social and economic advantages, and Mr Howard weighing in with his own obsessive and regressive views on immigration, Mr Ruddock has nowhere to turn.

Australians should be aware of the threat to the harmony and cohesion of their society in the attitudes of Dr Hewson and Mr Howard.

SYDNEY
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