



# PRIME MINISTER

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

## **NOT A HEADLAND, NOT A POLICY**

Mr Howard has answered the call from ACROSS for him to announce his policies with a list of things that the Opposition will not do.

John Howard claims he will not slash Medicare. He will not kick people off unemployment benefits. He will not take away the sole parent pension. He will not force people with disabilities onto unemployment benefits.

Mr Howard has been forced into the embarrassing position of promising not to deliberately disadvantage the most vulnerable people in the nation.

Why?

Because he has a past dominated by a determination to strip away benefits from society's most disadvantaged.

The remarkable fact is that John Howard went to the last election promising to do just that - promising to abolish Medicare; promising to kick people off the unemployment benefit; promising to take away the sole parent pension; promising to force people with disabilities onto unemployment benefits.

These were the proud boasts of the Liberals at the last election. And 16 out of the 19 members of the current shadow cabinet put their hands up for these regressive policies and stomped around Australia selling them.

Because he can't hide from his past, he is now in denial.

However, on the issue dearest to John Howard's heart - industrial relations - he is less categorical.

In his speech, John Howard admits to the inevitability of pay losses where he refers to countries with greater flexibility having lower unemployment. Flexibility is code for pay cuts.

He says he will not force workers off awards. But he says nothing about what will happen to the 1.73 million workers who face a new employer each year. How can someone choose to stay on an award that is not offered to them?

The amount of turnover in the labour market will ensure that workers are forced off awards very quickly. Workers will lose pay and conditions. Overtime, penalty rates and holiday leave loadings will be optional, and not compensated if lost.

As ever, John Howard says he's pro-family; but he's not pro the wages families need and he's not pro-family support.

John Howard also denies that he has any plans to slash \$10 billion from social welfare. Yet, the shadow treasurer, Peter Costello, is on record as saying that the Government should cut at least \$11.7 billion from the Budget. You don't cut \$11.7 billion without slashing social welfare.

I said yesterday that, when John Howard addressed the ACOSS Congress, he would talk in platitudes at best or untruths at worse. Today he did both.

**CANBERRA**  
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