



PRIME MINISTER

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

HOWARD - DODGING AND WEAVING

The Opposition Leader was at his most slippery on Meet the Press today - sending a clear signal that he intends to conceal his true policies from the public until after the election.

Mr Howard has very little to say on a range of important national issues, and what he *does* say simply cannot be believed. Whether it be pensions, Medicare, industrial relations, media ownership, or economic management, Mr Howard cannot be trusted.

He refused this morning to match the Government's undertaking to maintain pensions at 25 per cent of average weekly earnings. If the Labor Government had adopted the Howard approach to pensions, single pensioners would be \$20 a week worse off, and couples \$34 a week worse off.

Mr Howard wants to dump an important social commitment of this Government, but he won't admit it.

On Medicare, Mr Howard made the extraordinary claim that the changes made by the Fraser Government to the then universal Medibank scheme did not amount to "dismantling."

The Fraser Government, of which Mr Howard was a senior member, produced five separate health systems in seven years - each one more complicated, discriminatory, expensive and confusing than the last.

Now Mr Howard says he won't "dismantle" Medicare or bulk-billing. Don't believe him. This is the man who once described bulk-billing as "an absolute rot."

On industrial relations, Mr Howard dishonestly tried to deny he intended to abolish the role of the Industrial Relations Commission.

He doesn't deny saying of the Commission: "*We'll stab them in the stomach.*"

And he cannot deny saying in May 1991: "There will be nobody in this room happier than I will be when the role of the Industrial Relations Commission in the wage fixing processes of this country is reduced to nothing more than an optional extra."

For Mr Howard now to play with words, as he did on television this morning, is simply not credible.

On media ownership, Mr Howard will throw diversity to the wolves. Put simply, he is prepared to allow a single proprietor to own a major television network and a metropolitan newspaper in the same city. He is prepared to sacrifice diversity of media ownership to buy the support of influential media proprietors. He confirmed this last week when he and the Coalition voted against the Government's legislation tightening the cross media ownership provisions.

CANBERRA

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