

19



PRIME MINISTER

STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP ELECTION, MARCH 2

Today I called upon the Governor-General and recommended that the House of Representatives be dissolved, with a view to holding an Election for the House and half the Senate on March 2, and he has accepted my recommendation.

The proper thing has been done: the Parliament has run its full term and the Australian people will make their decision in full knowledge of the Government's record and the directions we have set for the country. They will know exactly where we stand and where we intend to go.

This will be an Election about leadership. We seek a further mandate for the Government that has given Australia an increasingly creative role in the world; that has created an outward looking, diverse, competitive and successful trading economy; and provided strong economic growth and record growth in employment.

It will be an Election about both domestic and foreign policies, because the two cannot be separated.

At stake is Australia's continuing emergence as a successful partner and player in Asia and the Pacific. Therefore, the continued growth of the Australian economy, the prosperity of Australian society, and the jobs and opportunities of Australians in the next century are at stake.

Three years ago we said we would re-start economic growth and employment. And we have. Australia has recorded an unprecedented 17 quarters of continuous growth and 720,000 new jobs have been created. This will be an Election to decide whether the authors of these policies will continue to guide Australia's progress.

For all the success of the last three years, much remains to be done if we are to continue to reduce unemployment and the Government will be seeking a mandate to continue the policies and programs which are working for us now.

The future of Australia's universal health care will be at stake in this Election. So will the Accord and our flexible and fair industrial relations system which is delivering high labour productivity, low inflation and the lowest incidence of strikes in 55 years.

The Election will also determine the prospects for our having an Australian as our head of state - Australians will have to decide between a Labor government which will guarantee they have a vote on this issue, and a Coalition which is divided on it and led by a man who is passionately opposed to an Australian republic.

Also at stake will be the environment. The Coalition's appalling record gives every reason to believe that Labor's massive investment in repairing and conserving our environment is at risk.

These and many other differences add up to a profound philosophical gulf between the Government and the Coalition about what kind of society Australia should be, and what kind of nation we can be.

Whatever the present tactics of the Coalition, the fact remains that most of Mr Howard's front bench were, just three years ago, avid supporters of the most radically right wing program ever put to an Australian electorate - and none was more avid than Mr Howard.

Australian voters have a right to know in detail the choice they face - the policies and the people responsible for them.

I am therefore asking Mr Howard to engage in 2 head to head public debates with me on ABC Television. In addition I will be asking the Coalition to join in further public debates on more specific policy issues. I am seeking debates between me and my three most senior ministers - the Deputy Prime Minister Mr Beazley, the Treasurer Mr Willis and the Foreign Minister Senator Evans - and Mr Howard and those who would fill these portfolios in a Coalition government, namely Mr Fischer, Mr Costello and Mr Downer.

Labor's platform will be constructed on a proven record of achievement. We have detailed policies to address the continuing needs of Australia and Australians. We have a strong team of leaders. And we have above all a desire to continue the remarkable progress and stability which is Australia's story as we approach the 21st century.

CANBERRA

27 January 1996