

PRESS CONFERENCE GIVEN BY THE RT. HON. H. HOLT,  
PRIME MINISTER, AT PARLIAMENT HOUSE, CANBERRA,  
ON 20TH JANUARY, 1966

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MR. HOLT : No doubt you have been advised by now that I have been elected Leader of the Liberal Party. For me this is not only a great honour but a tremendous opportunity to do things for Australia which I hope will advance the interests of this country and the wellbeing of its people.

It is the first time in twenty-one years - in other words in the whole history of the Liberal Party of Australia - that the Federal Parliamentary leadership has changed. That statement is in itself quite a remarkable tribute to the man I have succeeded. Sir Robert founded the Liberal Party and was its Parliamentary leader throughout its history until this point of time.

I can claim to have been a supporter of the party from the outset. At its first public meeting held following its formation, I announced my own intention to apply for membership, and I have been an active member of the party since that time - active in the organisational affairs as well as in the parliamentary party, and today the party has done me the honour of electing me to lead it.

The principles which attracted me to the Liberal Party in the first instance are a truly Australian outlook, a determination to preserve for the Australian people freedom for the individual, opportunities and incentives for the individual, with the emphasis on freedom of the individual. These things have endured throughout the life of the party, and I believe these principles are the reason why we are attracting at this time so many young people either to our ranks or to our political support.

It is this dedication to principle, the preservation of freedom which I believe has enabled us to deal in a flexible fashion with the great variety of problems which have confronted Australia during our years of existence as a party and more particularly in the years - a long period of more than sixteen uninterrupted years in which we have exercised office in Australia.

I believe that by dedication to these principles and their application to the problems which lie ahead we should be able to continue the successful administration of Sir Robert Menzies and face the new problems which lie in the future for us.

In a sense it is the end of an era, although of course by no means the end of a great public career because Sir Robert is a man of not only domestic stature but of international stature; but in a sense it is the end of an era. A transfer of political authority in these circumstances inevitably produces some fermentation and yeasting, some stocktaking, and the new administration will be facing up to the problems and challenges fortified by our friendly association together in the past and inspired by the principles which our former leader has done so much to establish as a fundamental aspect of the Australian character.

You will have learned that this morning's proceedings produced a new leader, but the election for a Deputy Leader resulted in Mr. McMahon gaining that appointment. We were fortunate to have a choice between two very able and sincere

men, and the Whip has informed me that the voting was very close.

I am quite certain that the teamwork that has always existed between Mr. McMahon, Mr. Hasluck and myself will continue in the future. As to our relations with the Country Party, I am able to inform you that Mr. McEwen and I have had the most cordial discussions together about a future association. We see no problems in continuing the close relationship which existed between Sir Robert and Mr. McEwen. I have been, of course, closely associated with him for more than thirty years in the Parliament. We have been warm personal friends during that period and we have every expectation that we shall have a close and effective teamwork together as the leaders of our respective parties.

I imagine there may be one or two things you would like to know about, where we go from here. I am not proposing to discuss party matters at this point. I would expect to have a full press conference with you some time in the course of the next week. I am not making a full statement about Sir Robert's service at this point. As I mentioned to the party meeting this morning, I will be proposing to my colleagues and also the Opposition party leaders that the Parliament place suitably on record and at some length Parliament's own tribute to this great Parliamentarian when in the course of the first week the Parliament meets. I would also be proposing to have a suitable occasion in the precincts of the Parliament (which would probably take the form of a Parliamentary Dinner) at which again an opportunity could be presented for Sir Robert in turn to meet the Parliament and those associated with it and express himself as he would wish. Quite clearly there must be a Parliamentary recognition for a man whose career was unique in Australian Parliamentary history.

Today there were moving tributes paid to Sir Robert by several executive members of the joint parties. At the time when we were making these expressions of appreciation I had made it known that there would be other opportunities when this could be done for public record.

QUESTION : The Cabinet and the Ministry - when are you going to announce them?

MR. HOLT : Well, I will be having discussions in relation to this. It is a large operation, of course, due to the resignation of Senator Paltridge and the Prime Minister's retirement. These are two of the major portfolios, but they affect more than two appointments, quite obviously. Not only will I need to give a good deal of thought myself to this but it will be necessary to discuss with the personalities concerned and then later to have discussions which are customary between the leader of the Liberal Party and the leader of the Country Party before an announcement is made.

QUESTION : Do you think you will be ready by Tuesday?

MR. HOLT : I would not expect it to be later than Tuesday.

QUESTION : Do you intend to live in Canberra, Mr. Holt?

MR. HOLT : I live here now!

QUESTION : At the Lodge?

MR. HOLT : Frankly, although I was optimistic, I have not got as far as working out such things.

QUESTION : Will you go to the Lodge?

MR. HOLT : Not immediately. Sir Robert will be occupying it for a while. I don't want to live in the Kurrajong, of course. All my family are in Melbourne and I will want to maintain some contact with them. I won't be disposing of my home - we are having an election.....

QUESTION : Do you plan to maintain regular contact with the Press Gallery?

MR. HOLT : I am afraid so! If you can remain as friendly as you have been in the last week I will see a lot of you. I said in the party room this morning that I felt I could claim that everyone present was a friend. I also like to think this is true of the Press Gallery.

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