



PRIME MINISTER

FOR PRESS:

THE VOTING SYSTEM

Statement by the Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. William
McMahon, C.H., M.P.

Mr. Whitlam has stated that a Labor Government would amend the electoral laws to abolish preferential voting and to introduce the first-past-the-post system. He qualifies his statement by adding that this would not be done until the re-election of his government after a first term of office.

The full implications of these announcements should be understood by every Australian.

Mr. Whitlam is totally incapable of enforcing the qualification that this radical change would not be introduced in the first term.

He cannot guarantee that he will remain the leader of his party. His leadership has been seriously challenged in the past. Given a taste of power, more significant challenges may be anticipated.

Anyhow, Mr. Whitlam is the servant and not the master of his party's policies. He must obey the directions of the A.L.P. Federal Conference or risk expulsion. He has shown, particularly in policies on arbitration sanctions, that he is willing to reverse his policies at the crack of the whip from outside.

If first-past-the-post voting is the policy of the A.L.P. as now reluctantly revealed by Mr. Whitlam, there will be inevitable pressures to introduce it as soon as possible.

First-past-the-post is a bad system.

Its effect in this country would be to destroy the smaller minority parties and Independent candidates. That is what it is intended to do. That, in fact, is why it is used in some overseas countries.

The intention of the Labor Party is crystal-clear: Once having gained power it would remove any possible threats to its future. This is a real and very serious threat. Labor aims, therefore, to neutralise and emasculate small parties such as the Australia Party, the D.O.G.S. and the D.L.P. so as to ensure that the preferences of any such groups (or new political groups which may emerge) can never be turned against it, however extreme or offensive its policies may be.

Mr. Whitlam's announcement is the death sentence for such groups. It would be the destruction of valuable checks and balances, the end of minority voices vital to a healthy democracy.

It is a strange irony of fate that those minority parties whose second preferences have been directed to Labor in the past are to be rewarded by extinction against the possibility that they may show some independence of spirit in the future.

Under first-past-the-post, it is readily possible for a political party polling considerably less than one-half the vote to gain power.

And once in power, it would be extremely difficult to remove.

Mr. Whitlam's second aim is to weaken the rural vote throughout Australia. He knows that country people by substantial majority support the Liberal and Country parties. He knows, too, that three-cornered contests (where both Liberal and Country Party candidates are present) tend to be successful against Labor so he is seeking to make such contests impossible. Under first-past-the-post, a three-cornered contest would divide the coalition vote and allow a minority Labor candidate to win.

Once again, the Labor Party is seeking to deny freedom of choice.

It is seeking to destroy the total value of every vote cast in Australia for small groups or Independents.

The right of such groups to exist and assert their influence is fundamental to the Australian political scene.

This electoral issue, carefully suppressed by Labor until now, emerges as a major factor for evaluation in this campaign.

CANBERRA,

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