



F77/167

PRIME MINISTER

FOR PRESS

3 AUGUST 1977

THE NORTHERN TERRITORY ELECTIONS

On Saturday 13 August, the people of the Northern Territory face a crucial decision. You will be voting in elections for the Legislative Assembly - an Assembly that will take your Territory to self-government.

The next stage of self-government will be implemented in July 1978, and a further stage in July the following year. The Members for whom you vote will have the responsibility of forming a Government, providing Ministers and undertaking the responsibility of administering the Northern Territory.

Elsewhere in our nation, Australians control their own affairs, such as water and sewerage boards, electricity authorities, bus services, forestry operations, the regulation of commerce and industry, fisheries, parks and the planning of towns.

The leader of the Country Liberal Party in the Northern Territory, Dr. Goff Letts, believes, as I do, that the people of the Territory are as capable as any other Australians. He believes, as I believe, that the Northern Territory should have a greater say in the conduct of its own affairs. That is why he and other Members of the Country Liberal Party in the Assembly have worked for constitutional reform.

I am advised that the Labor Party is fearful of self-government, and is engaged in a campaign of misrepresentation and distortion. I would expect no more from a party which, in the Federal sphere, has shown itself incapable of responsible government and incapable of proper conduct in office.

The Federal Government has gone a long way to repair the damage done by the mad extravagance of the Labor administration. In eighteen months we have brought down the level of inflation from around 16% to around 10%. We have exposed the hand-out mentality of the ALP, which had Australians staggering towards bankruptcy.

/We have

We have halted the tax rip-off by indexing income taxes; reigned in the extravagance which is the hallmark of the ALP; introduced responsible new social welfare measures such as the system of family allowances, and placed health insurance on a basis on which it can operate successfully.

The Commonwealth recognises that the Northern Territory has special financial disabilities. Accordingly, the financial arrangements which will be worked out between the Commonwealth and the Territory will have due regard to these special circumstances. There will be periodic assessments of the fiscal disability of the Northern Territory as compared with the States.

The charges and tariffs made for local services will be set by the Territory's own representatives. There is no reason to believe that they will be higher than such charges elsewhere in Australia.

I am confident the people of the Territory will not be deceived by twisted talk about double taxation and crippling charges. I have faith in the people of the North as common sense Australians, and I have faith in Goff Letts and his team who have worked so hard in the interests of the Territory.

I am sure this confidence will be vindicated at your elections.
