



PRIME MINISTER

135/92

STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER THE HON. P.J. KEATING

WHAT MANDATE?

I think it's a pity that what is said about penalty rates and holiday leave loadings before the election hasn't been totally adhered to in actual the Bill itself..

What is my observation is what is in the Bill on penalty rates and holiday loadings is not the same as what they said before the election. (John Howard on Meet the Press November 1 1992)

I think there is a fair argument to say, Laurie, that they made a promise before the election and in some circumstances that promise may not be met as a result of their reforms.

I think that is simply a statement of fact.. (Peter Reith on Sunday November 1 1992)

It is "simply a statement of fact" that during an election in which industrial relations was a major issue Mr Kennett deliberately disguised his real intentions.

It is "simply a statement of fact" that there is no mandate for what Mr Kennett has actually introduced. The Victorian people know it. And so do Dr Hewson, Mr Howard and Mr Reith.

It is "simply a statement of fact" that Mr Kennett's legislation constitutes a pointless and destructive attack on the rights and living standards of many thousands of Victorians.

At the same time it threatens the national recovery.

In substantial ways it strikes not at inefficiencies but at fundamental social justice, at the reasonable and decent standards of employment and remuneration to which Australians are entitled.

Mr Kennett's legislation undermines not just Victorian workers but the national interest.

By replacing unprecedented industrial harmony with the conflict it took so long to get out of the system, he has destroyed the essential condition for reform of industrial relations - the cooperative spirit which has already produced more than 550 enterprise bargains.

The Federal Government's proposed changes to industrial relations laws recognise that workplace reform must continue.

In many cases that reform is seeing penalty rates, leave loadings and outdated work practices negotiated away, with the support of employees.

The Federal legislation allows for all the reform Mr Kennett wants - on penalty rates, leave loadings and hours worked.

But it also protects people from being forced onto individual contracts. It means that the reforms continue, but no worker is worse off.

In other words, flexibility every which way, but not downwards.

Mr Kennett's legislation is an attack on progress in industrial relations. It is an attack on the economic recovery which Australia is staging in the face of an unfavourable international climate.

The changes I propose create an opportunity for a return to industrial peace, to give recovery the best possible chance, to provide the best climate for continuing essential reform of the labour market, and to protect the rights and living standards of Australians.

Mr Kennett has referred to this as "gutless."

In fact, acts of destruction require no courage.

Looking after people's living standards and protecting them against exploitation while bringing on economic recovery is a much harder thing to do. It requires more courage and more faith in our fellow Australians - and the rewards are much greater.

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LAURIE OAKES: It is not a cover-up, Mr Reith, when they have an election campaign - not only you don't mention these policies but in fact say that no worker will lose any benefit under awards. Surely that's a cover-up if it's not a lie?

PETER REITH: It may arguably be put that they have brought down a policy which was different to what they had said before the election. I'm not -

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