



PRIME MINISTER

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STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P. J. KEATING, MP ELECTIONS AND THE CONVENTIONS OF GOVERNMENT

Just over six months ago, Dr Hewson made an unsuccessful appeal to the people of Australia to elect him as Prime Minister. If he can hold the wolves of his own party at bay, he will no doubt try again in a couple of years' time.

But Dr Hewson's behaviour in recent weeks threatens to undermine the democratic process itself, and to pollute his own leadership ambitions for the future. He has now put himself under a grave obligation to spell out just what his determination to vandalise the Government's budget means to the future of representative democracy in this country.

Does Dr Hewson now concede and accept that any future Liberal Government has forfeited the right to frame and enact budgetary and economic policy? Do his own actions now lead him to conclude that being elected the majority party in the House of Representatives means only that the Government is entitled to whatever power it can negotiate with marginal and minority parties in the Senate? Does he accept that he is trampling on the basic principles of operation of the democratic system of government in this country?

Dr Hewson, who seeks to be elected to power through the conventional method of leading a party to a majority position in the House of Representatives, is the leading participant in a dangerous move to transfer power to the less representatively elected upper house. Down that track lays chaos and potential disaster. Dr Hewson might feel frustrated and cheated that he didn't get what he wanted from the last election, but that doesn't entitle him to take out his petulance on the entire system of government.

There are grave dangers for any country when the power and authority of the elected government is blurred or undermined. There is a very fine line between the Opposition's right to make forceful political capital, and irresponsible, intolerable behaviour. Some time in the next several days, Dr Hewson will walk back from, or over, that line. The media have a duty to inform Australia about the course of action he takes, and to call him to account if he crosses that line.

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