



3.

PRIME MINISTER

81/94

STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP

epj

HONESTY DEMANDS POLICIES

The Government awaits with keen anticipation the launch of Mr Downer's self-styled "Directions" statement.

Since his elevation to leadership of the Liberal Party Mr Downer has talked a great deal about his "honesty". He said he was "the most honest and open man you would ever meet". He has also talked about his qualities as a leader. He has promoted an image of himself as a man devoted to "common sense".

Yet Mr Downer's leadership has been distinguished by none of these things - it has been notable for vacillation, and for a lack of honesty and common sense. He said Aboriginal policy would be a defining element of Liberal Party policy and then bowed to the West Australians. He said privacy of the individual was very important to him and then bowed to the Tasmanian Government which denies privacy of the individual. There was no sign of common sense in his handling of these issues, and no more honesty in his handling of them than there was when he said he did not address the League of Rights.

Common sense should tell him that honesty demands that he present to the people of Australia the policies he would pursue in office. That is where honesty in politics begins. It is where leadership begins. Policies are an expression of what a leader and his "team" stand for. Because they are the only means by which the public can judge what the Coalition stands for, in the end they are the only expression which matters.

This morning Mr Downer said he would not present detailed policies because the Government would "unpick" them. He proposes, with shameful timidity, to introduce them close to the election so there will be no time to subject them to scrutiny. This is "honesty and openness"! This is leadership!

We therefore wait to see what he will offer in the way of social and economic policy. In particular we will be interested to know if the Coalition will commit itself to the policies and programs implemented in the Government's Employment White Paper. Or will he say, as he did at the time of its release, that the labour market and training programs are a waste of money? If he would not maintain them, with what would he replace them?

All Australians have a right to know what existing policies Mr Downer proposes to change. If he proposes to cut Government expenditure, what programs will he cut? If he proposes to change the direction of economic policy, what consequential change in social policy does he propose?

It will not be enough to say that the Coalition is "for" employment and "for" the family - or "for" anything else. Nobody has ever been not "for" them. Being "for" something means nothing without explicit policy expression. If Mr Downer intends to use the words "honesty" and "leadership" with any credibility in future, he will have to offer credible alternative policies tomorrow.

CANBERRA
4 SEPTEMBER, 1994