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PRIME MINISTER

4/95

**STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING, MP
OLD JOCKEY, NEW COLOURS, SAME HORSE.**

I congratulate Mr Howard on his election once again to the leadership of the Liberal Party.

No one has ever doubted Mr Howard's ambition, his persistence and his willingness to stay long enough to see everyone else off the scene - though in the post-Menzies Liberal Party that has not necessarily amounted to an exceedingly long time.

I said after Mr Downer's election, the problem for the Liberal Party is the horse not the jockey, and I was pleased to see Dr Hewson, among others on the conservative side, take up the refrain. But nothing in the election of Mr Howard or his remarks at today's press conference suggests that the Liberal Party understands what it means.

Having put an old jockey on board the horse, the Liberal Party is now trying to change his colours. Mr Howard has declared himself the most conservative leader the Liberal Party has ever had. In the 1980s he was a leading advocate of the New Right. Essentially, he sounds little different these days.

Today he attempted to skirt the issues on which his views reflect the deeply reactionary basis of his politics. But it is hard to say what sounded more improbable - Mr Howard talking about "modernising" Australia, or suggesting that he was a little "l" liberal after all.

Mr Howard is the Liberal Party's most experienced parliamentary member. He is said to be its most articulate spokesman. Yet in his era - in office and out - the Liberal Party has been a comprehensive failure.

No one speaks more eloquently of that failure than Mr Howard. No one speaks better for the fact that the Federal Liberal Party lacks national vision and a national perspective.

And no-one speaks better for the dry, regressive, deeply conservative spirit which has driven every moderate influence from its senior ranks.

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