



PRIME MINISTER

STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON PJ KEATING MP

PEOPLE'S CONVENTION

The Opposition Leader's latest position on his so-called "people's convention" is further confirmation that his plans are a blueprint for obfuscation.

It is now absolutely clear that he has no intention of answering the simple question: does he believe Australia should have an Australian as its Head of State?

He now says he is taking his convention a step further by claiming he would put its outcome to a referendum and a Howard Government would support it if his convention reached a consensus. But he would make half the appointments to the convention - thereby determining himself whether he wished there to be a consensus or not.

And a consensus about what? The external affairs power, four year terms, relations with the states? The Republic might not in this context even get a look in.

Mr Howard is now saying that if no consensus is reached a full range of options would be put to the people including a choice for the present system or for a popularly elected President. This sounds like "pick-a-box" politics or a multiple choice test - a referendum is a vote on a Government proposal, the question cannot be a set of choices.

All of this is subterfuge to hide Mr Howard from making a real decision. It is a complete abrogation of leadership to suggest nothing and support nothing.

Mr Howard does not want an Australian as our Head of State but he does not have the leadership strength to say it. Just as Mr Howard is trying to hide his economic and social policies from the Australian people so too is he trying to hide his position on the Republic.

The Government will listen to the people before a referendum is put in 1998 or 1999 and it will then be the people who will decide the future shape of an Australian Republic - not a hand picked elitist meeting claiming to represent the nation.

CANBERRA
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