

Dr. John Robert HEWSON

Leader of the Opposition 3 April 1990 to 23 May 1994



- John Hewson became the 24th Leader of the Opposition when the Liberal Party was defeated in the 1990 federal election by the Labor Government led by Prime Minister Bob Hawke. He succeeded Andrew Peacock.
- Member of the House of Representatives for Wentworth (NSW) 1987-95, Shadow Minister for Industry, Commerce, Infrastructure and Customs 1994, Shadow Minister for Finance 1988-89, Shadow Treasurer 1980-90.
- Replaced as Leader of the Opposition in 1994 by Alexander Downer.

As Opposition Leader

- In 1991 he produced *Fightback* a comprehensive manifesto which committed the Liberal Party to far-reaching free market reform, and included a proposal for a 15 per cent goods and services tax (GST).
- Strongly argued for a move away from much of the Medicare system. Proposed patients meet a much higher share of their individual costs and that bulk billing be limited to pensioners and welfare recipients.
- During the 1993 election campaign, Hewson was unable to answer a question about whether or not a birthday cake levied with the GST would cost more or less under the Coalition. He stumbled over his response saying it depended if the cake was decorated or not, or had ice cream in it. This was later cited by a number of media commentators as the moment Hewson lost the election.

Political life

- From 1976 to 1983 employed as economic adviser to Treasurers Phillip Lynch and John Howard.

Personal life

- Born 28 October 1946 in Sydney, New South Wales.
- Educated at Kogarah High School, then at the University of Sydney graduating in economics.
- Achieved a master's degree from the University of Saskatchewan in Canada, and a second master's degree and doctorate in economics from Johns Hopkins University in the United States.



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- Economist with the International Money Fund (IMF) 1973-75. Senior economist with the Reserve Bank of Australia 1975-77.
- Professor of Economics University of NSW 1978-87, became a director of Macquarie Bank 1985-87.
- In December 1967 married Margaret Deaves. They were later divorced. In October 1988 married Caroline Somerville in Adelaide, divorcing in 2004. In 2007 married Jessica Wilson.

Life after politics

- Director and Chairman of ABN AMRO Australia 1995-98, Columnist with *The Australian Financial Review* since 1998, Chairman of Global Renewables Limited 2000-04.
- He became Professor of Management at Macquarie University, and Dean of the Macquarie Graduate School of Management 2002-04.
- In August 2006 gave an in-depth interview to Andrew Denton on the ABC TV program *Enough Rope*, discussing politics and aspects of his personal life in detail.
- Appeared as a political commentator on ABC TV during the 2010 federal election campaign and makes regular contributions to political commentary.

Character

Hewson found that he could survive comfortably on three hours sleep which provided almost enough waking hours for his ambitions...Hewson was a unique and risky prospect for the Liberals: an academic economist who believed in free markets, ... a product of financial deregulation which had made his fortune and was basic to his values...Hewson openly declared he was not a career politician; he had come to do a job. His entire rationale as leader was to commit the Coalition to free market philosophy and then win an election on this mandate as a prelude to imposing it on the nation.

Kelly, Paul, *The end of certainty: The story of the 1980s*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 1992.

Did you know?

- His ancestor Colonel John Hewson was a prominent figure in Oliver Cromwell's New Army, and later signed the death warrant for King Charles I.
- In 2003 opposed the Howard Government decision to take part in the Iraq War.
- He has had the shortest parliamentary career of any Opposition Leader to date.
- As Leader of the Opposition Hewson is said to have had a photograph of Prime Minister Paul Keating behind his desk indicating the personal nature of the contest between the two men.

Sources

Abjorensen, N., *John Hewson: a biography*, Lothian Books, Melbourne, 1993.

Wallace, C., *Hewson: a portrait*, Pan McMillan, Sydney, 1993.

Further reading

Kelly, P., *The end of certainty: The story of the 1980s*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 1992.

Megalogenis, G., *The Longest Decade*, Scribe Publications, Melbourne, 2006.



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