

Switch will spark row in Labor Party

By MICHELLE GRATTAN in Jakarta and RUSSELL BARTON in Canberra



The Prime Minister, Mr Hawke, effectively dumped Labor policy on East Timor yesterday — and has begun to pave the way for Australia to vote with Indonesia on the issue at the United Nations.

Mr Hawke said yesterday that next month's visit to East Timor by a parliamentary delegation would increase understanding and informed debate in Australia, "which will lead to a decision by the Government as to how it should cast its relevant vote in the United Nations".

Mr Hawke effectively abandoned the ALP's national conference policy — to withdraw recognition of the incorporation of East Timor — in his comments after a round of weekend talks with President Suharto and other Indonesian leaders.

Mr Hawke's policy reversal is certain to open divisions in the party over Timor. A Federal Labor MP, Mr Fry, yesterday strongly criticised the Prime Minister's moves.

Mr Hawke made it clear that he believed the party's official policy was irrelevant and not in Australia's interests—although he said the Government would decide on its UN vote closer to the time when it was to be cast.

Mr Hawke wants to use the parliamentary delegation, to be led by a former Defence Minister, Mr Morrison, to allow the final stage of the policy switch — a pro-Indonesian vote in the UN — to be made as nearly as possible on a consensus basis.

Mr Hawke also said at the weekend that his Government would not implement party policy to resume aid to Vietnam while Australia was trying to play a mediating role between ASEAN countries and Vietnam to promote a peaceful Kampuchean settlement. ASEAN countries are firmly opposed to the resumption of aid.

Mr Hawke's unloading of the Timor policy could produce some embarrassing debates at State ALP council meetings in Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia over the next few weekends.

The ALP policy, endorsed last year, says that the party "will continue to support United Nations resolutions which promote the rights of East Timorese" and opposes Australian military aid to Indonesia while it occupies East Timor.

But Mr Hawke said the military aid program is "continuing and will continue".

The former Government voted with Indonesia last year against a motion supporting self-determination for East Timor.

Mr Hawke is expected to seek ALP national executive backing for scrapping party policy on East Timor. He is facing attack from Labor MPs for jettisoning the policy.

Mr Hawke can use the 29 June national executive meeting to head off a row at the scheduled Caucus meeting in July.

The executive has the power to "interpret" Labor policy between meetings the party's supreme policy-making body—the national conference, held every two years. But there could be difficulties with this tactic because policy on Timor is precise.

Mr Fry said last night Mr Hawke had sacrificed principles for ex-

COMMENT Michelle Grattan

Bob Hawke has already given the Labor Party one firm message on his first overseas trip. He, his Cabinet, and political realism will determine the Labor Government's foreign policy, not the ALP's ideologues. As his entourage proceeds, the Prime Minister sheds inappropriate policies like the old clothes they are: colorful items that might be worn in Opposition but which look decidedly garish in Government.

Withdrawal of the Australian contingent to the Sinai, derecognition of the incorporation of East Timor, resumption of aid to Vietnam, banning of uranium sales to France until it stops nuclear tests: each policy has been declared irrelevant or delayed by the Labor Government in its first three months.

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pediency in his Indonesian talks. He said Australia would not have lost anything by retaining strong opposition to the Indonesian takeover of East Timor.

Mr Fry said there was a lot of Caucus support for his pro-Timor position and there would inevitably be a debate at the Caucus meeting next month.

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UK links 'diminished'

JAKARTA.—On the eve of his visit to Britain, Mr Hawke has reaffirmed his view that Australia will eventually become a republic. He said the relationship with Britain had diminished over time.

Mr Hawke told a questioner at a Press conference in Jakarta yesterday that he thought Australians would "some time down the track" decide that they would be best served by being a republic within the Commonwealth. But he again stressed that republicanism was "not an item of urgency on my agenda".

Mr Hawke will meet the Queen in London. One item to be raised is the future of State Governments' links with Britain and the Crown. The Federal Government wants to end the situation under which State Governments approach the Crown, through the British Government.

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