

THE AUSTRALIAN

TUESDAY SEPTEMBER 14 1976

Hawke should stay with the ACTU

MR HAWKE will announce before the end of the week whether he will surrender his position as leader of the trade union movement and seek to enter Federal Parliament. The choice will be an agonising one for Mr Hawke — one made after long thought and after considerable cajoling and pressure from friends and adversaries. It goes without saying that it will be of the greatest significance to the nation. *The Australian* believes it will be better for Mr Hawke and for the country if he decides to remain as president of the ACTU.

This might not have been the case had the dreams of Mr Hawke's supporters after December 13 been realised. Then, many people hoped fervently that Mr Hawke would enter Parliament quickly and rise rapidly to the leadership. With Mr Whitlam battered by Labor's disastrous defeat, it seemed to many that the only way for the A.L.P. to regain a strong position in Parliament, either in Government or in Opposition, was for it to be rejuvenated under Mr Hawke as leader.

Now, the position has changed. Mr Whitlam, who once considered remaining in a mind-the-shop role, is quite determined to lead Labor into the next election. The sense of urgency about getting Mr Hawke into Parliament has receded and it is fairly clear that he would be regarded by most future Caucus colleagues as a Johnny-come-lately. If elected to Parliament in present circumstances, Mr Hawke would face the very real prospect of a lengthy stay on the backbenches before ascending to the leadership — if he ever did.

Frankly, it must be asked if Mr Hawke could accommodate his nature and his lifestyle to being a backbencher with an uncertain future. He is a gregarious person who knows how to enjoy life — and this is reflected in the way he lives. Working as an Opposi-

tion backbencher entails long hours of drudgery and boredom and a man like Mr Hawke would be tempted constantly to reject these aspects of the role and to break out.

The backbencher's job would also be accompanied by an unaccustomed anonymity. Certainly, there must be times when that is exactly what Mr Hawke would most desire. But the transition from being one of the most important men in Australia to being one of a large number of MPs would, nevertheless, not be an easy one. This was reportedly a factor in Mr Dunstan's refusal to answer the call which went out at one stage for him to leave South Australia and go to Canberra. Would Mr Hawke be able to accept becoming a small fish in a large pond any more readily than Mr Dunstan? More importantly, can Australia afford Mr Hawke's becoming such a small fish?

The country is in a state of continuing economic crisis. The resolution of it depends to a great extent on the role played by the trade unions. The leader of the trade union movement must be a man who has a realistic understanding of the economy and the nature of its ills. He must be someone who speaks with a voice of moderation and who is willing to work toward a consensus on economic goals between labor and the Government. He must also be a person who has the authority to command the support of the movement as he pursues these aims.

Mr Hawke is filling this crucial role as president of the ACTU. If he were to leave, could his successor, whoever it might be, do the same? Answering that question involves a risk that Australia might not be able to afford. Mr Hawke has far more to contribute at the head of the union movement than in the middle of the Parliamentary Labor Party. In his interests, and in the interests of us all, he should stay where he is.