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UNION CAMPAIGN SMASHED HOWARD

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UNION CAMPAIGN

‘An active Rights at Work presence swung seats’

Campaigning by Your Rights at Work local groups swung a number of seats against Howard. **Jim Nilon**, Rights at Work campaign co-ordinator in the seat of Blair in Queensland spoke to **James Supple** about why.

“WE’RE JUST pouring over the results now, but we can say prior to postals and pre-poll votes the figures show a 10.8 per cent swing in Blair.

That’s way above the national swing, and if you examine all the seats where the ACTU and other unions adopted seats of their own the swings were demonstrably larger wherever there was an active Your Rights at Work presence.

The CFMEU in the seat of Dawson [achieved a] 14 per cent swing. A number of unions got together and targeted the seat of Leichhardt based on Cairns and achieved a 15 per cent swing.

And I think if you listen to the language of Kevin Rudd as the campaign progressed across the six weeks, by about week four he wouldn’t say three sentences without mentioning working families and WorkChoices. That was clearly coming through in their polling and their focus group exercises.

[This electroate is] extremely diverse. The new boundaries [include] just about all the town of Ipswich which is enormously fast growing. It’s the domicile for Brisbane’s workers. The other votes are made up of the Lockyer valley then down to the Shire of Boona [which have] high levels of National Party support. Pauline Hanson enjoyed strong votes in these areas.

Late in 2006 I was appointed to set up a community campaign committee to turn [the seat] over WorkChoices.We used databases of people that had expressed interest through the various days of action that happened, through the Rights at Work website, and got together with local ACTU affiliates in Ipswich.

Thousands of people across the country took part in local Rights at Work campaigns

We tried to spread our wings into the local community into what we thought would be support bases from community groups—different church groups, unemployed housing groups, disability groups—people that would be sorely affected by a dog eat dog world of industrial relations that WorkChoices represented.

Hundreds of people turned up in orange shirts on election day to hand out, people who had never been involved in the political process before.

Most of [those involved] were union [members], but they weren’t the usual suspects. We have people that were paid up members of the Greens, people that were avowed conservative voters, but unionists none the less.

We gathered support over a 12 month period and got to the point where we had people involved who were apologizing to us because they weren’t members of a union.

Our goal with the whole of the campaign was not just to knock over WorkChoices. The union movement had frankly disengaged from the community. We needed to re-engage so that a generation of young people understood the value of collective [organising].

“I was seconded by the ACTU [to the area] but we’re currently trying to set up a model of activity and engagement for the future. We don’t want to get into this parlous position again.

We also don’t want a Kevin Rudd government to take the win for granted.

When you get the national campaign manager for the Liberal party acknowledging that WorkChoices was [what] undid John Howard we want to make sure that everyone understands that.”

Union mass protests crucial to anti-Howard campaign

HOWARD’S DEMISE should be dated back to the mass delegates’ meetings called by Victorian Trades Hall Council and Unions NSW in April and May 2005.

The way the mainstream media talks about the election, the Rights at Work campaign was just an advertising war funded by the unions. Some unions even talk about simply educating people about the laws as the key to changing votes.

In fact the union campaign of mass demonstrations and delegates’ meetings laid the groundwork for Howard’s defeat.

It was clear in 2004 that Howard intended to use his Senate majority to pass drastic anti-union laws. The building and metal workers’ unions in Victoria were in the government’s sights first—so they called for union delegates’ meetings to start the campaign. The left organised petitions calling for resolutions for mass action to be put at the meetings.

The size and militancy of the delegates’ meetings surprised the union officials. Workers responded because they were desperate for a fightback against Howard’s attacks.

The Victorian meeting overwhelmingly endorsed a day of action on June 30 (the day before Howard got control of the Senate). So strong was the national mood to defy Howard that NSW and Queensland union councils were forced to join the Victorian action.

On June 30, 2005 over 100,000 unionists marched in Melbourne, and the following day stop work meetings were held across NSW where attendance was estimated at over 40,000.

Then on November 15 the ACTU called a nation-wide day of action. Over 600,000 people left work to protest against the WorkChoices legislation which was about to go into the Senate. It was passed on December 2.

While the ACTU called more mass rallies in 2006 and 2007, the emphasis shifted to community education and TV advertising against the laws—and calling for a vote against the Howard government.

The mobilisations of delegates were crucial to the success of the ACTU campaign. It was the delegates who led the discussion in workplaces and the wider community about the industrial relations laws and built the sense that it was possible to defeat Howard. As a result 60 per cent of the population opposed the laws by the time they were passed in 2005—and Howard was never able to undermine that opposition no matter how much he spent on taxpayer funded advertising.

Without the mass union rallies the ACTU advertising and marginal seats campaigns would not have had the same impact. It was the huge union rallies which stopped Melbourne, Sydney, and Brisbane that made workers realise they had the power to stop Howard if they acted together.

Howard took his ideology of individualism way beyond most people’s notion of basic fairness. In doing so he generated his nemesis, the very thing he feared most—collective mobilisation by the working class both on the streets and at the ballot box—and laid the basis for his own humiliation.

ANNE PICOT

IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN

One of Bush’s ‘staunchest allies’ gone

IRAQ MAY not have been one of the key issues in the election campaign, but it was an aspect not lost on international observers, particularly the US media.

The *Los Angeles Times* said that “the Bush administration lost one of its staunchest political allies” in John Howard. And the *Chicago Tribune* subtitled its report “Long-serving leader was strong Bush ally”.

The *New York Times* report, with the title “Ally of Bush is defeated in Australia” said that “Mr Howard’s defeat, after 11 years in power, follows that of Jose Maria Aznar of Spain, who also backed the United States-led invasion of Iraq, and political setbacks for Tony Blair of Britain”.

George Bush commented that he had lost a “good friend”.

While Kevin Rudd’s promise to withdraw combat troops means that two-thirds of Australia’s military personnel currently in Iraq will stay, Howard’s defeat is a further political blow to the US occupation.

With so few allies left, it is getting harder and harder for the US to justify the Iraq occupation to its own citizens. There are many flaws in Rudd’s rhetoric around the “war on terror”—such as his support for the war in Afghanistan. But when the new prime minister of one of the US’s strongest allies argues publicly that the war was a mistake and that the troops should get out it strengthens the anti-war case being put by activists in the US and everywhere.

THINGS THEY SAY DURING A FEDERAL ELECTION

“I am an honest man, I have never lied to the Australian people”
John Howard two days before polling day

“I had some tough times on the campaign trail and I would be the last to say that I was prince perfect”
Tony Abbott struggles to justify his decision to stand for the Liberal leadership

“Why punish the worm? Everyone in Australia likes the worm”
Kevin Rudd slams Howard’s ban on the worm in their debate

“I don’t think [cost of living] is a vote-changing issue”
Peter Costello

“I’m not interested in arid debates about Left, Right, Centre, up or down.”
Kevin Rudd when asked if Labor was still a party of the Left

“a swing to the ABC”
Kerry O’Brien fails to contain his glee on election night

“People are using religion and race to divide an electorate at election time. It is disgusting.”
Political commentator Laurie Oakes on the Lindsay leaflet scandal

“It touched absolutely every base, including one that I’ve not heard very often, and that was a statement of appreciation of his predecessor”
Kim Beazley on Rudd’s acceptance speech

“a Seinfeld election, a show about nothing”
Mark Latham’s judgment on the election

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FEDERAL ELECTION

Landslide vote demands real change

By James Supple

The crowd in the Canberra tally room waves Howard goodbye on election night

FINALLY JOHN Howard has got what he deserved. This time, there was no way his government could avoid a crushing election defeat.

The swing against him was the largest in any election since 1975. John Howard and three other government ministers lost their seats in the election rout.

But media commentary has sought to downplay the extent to which the electorate voted for any real change. They claim that Rudd won because people were looking for a change in leadership but not a change in policies.

For example Paul Kelly of *The Australian* claimed the result was basically due to the fact that Howard had stayed too long and was out of touch, and that Rudd offered "new leadership".

But the crushing blow delivered to the Liberals was not a case of people wanting change for change's sake—it was based on a rejection of Howard's hated policies.

Opposition to WorkChoices was the key. Polling by Essential Media during the campaign found that 88 per cent of those who identified themselves as shifting to Labor said WorkChoices was their main reason. The electorate saw the laws for what they were—a massive free kick for the big corporations to attack working conditions and make us work harder for less pay.

This was combined with anger about interest rate rises and other economic issues like the cost of food and petrol prices which Rudd cleverly tapped into.

WorkChoices also symbolises the wider neo-liberal agenda designed to drive down ordinary people's living standards to boost corporate profits. This agenda remains intensely unpopular.

Every survey of public opinion in recent years has found an overwhelming consensus amongst the population for increased government spending on health and education, for an end to privatisation, in support of union rights, for distributing society's wealth more equally and against war. The idea that Australians became conservative under Howard is a myth.

The importance of the campaigns against Howard's treatment of refugees and his support for the "war on terror" to his defeat should also not be discounted.

Scandals like children overboard, Vivian Solon's deportation, Mohamed Haneef and the lies about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction helped tar Howard as a ruthless liar who was prepared to do anything to hang onto power.

Howard's racism became so discredited by scandals that it became a liability for him, not a vote winner. People became immune to Howard's wedge politics, meaning exercises such as the indigneous intervention failed to win popular support.

Union campaign

The credit for Labor's election victory goes largely to the trade union Rights at Work campaign.

It was the unions that won the argument against WorkChoices way back in 2005. Since then opinion polls have consistently registered around 60 per cent opposition to the laws.

This meant that even with Beazley as leader Labor maintained a lead in the polls, despite his lack of popularity. The minute Rudd took over and Labor was seen as vaguely competent the party's vote soared.

The cases publicised by the unions of workers who had their pay slashed or working conditions cut under the laws were immensely powerful.

But just as important were the mass delegates meetings and protests nation-wide. These could even have stopped the Liberals introducing the laws in the beginning if the ACTU had been prepared to escalate its campaign of demonstrations and industrial actionIn fact had the unions waged such a concerted campaign against any number of Howard's attacks in his 11 years in power—whether the 1996 budget cuts, the GST, the previous waves of industrial relations reform or even refugees—Howard might have been long gone. Despite its decline in membership, the union movement remains a powerful force for change, because of its potential to champion the interests of working people everywhere.

The unions deserve the credit for keeping WorkChoices at the centre of the election campaign, and making it a decisive factor in many marginal seats.

Without the union campaign, Labor could very easily have lost the election. Rudd ran a conservative campaign, stressing the similarities between himself and Howard. Instead of trying to capitalise on the opposition to WorkChoices, Rudd continually qualified his plans to "tear up" the laws and has spent much of the last year distancing himself from the unions.

As John Robertson, the head of Unions NSW, put it: "Rudd could barely bring himself to mention to word union during the campaign".

Raised expectations

Unfortunately, Kevin Rudd has no intention of breaking with the neo-liberal agenda.

As *The Australian* commented approvingly: "there are few deep disagreements… between the new government and its conservative opponents." But the right-wing press have expressed one concern: "the expectation of some of [Rudd's] own supporters."

The vote against Howard expressed an overwhelming desire for change. But it is clear that Rudd is going to dash the hopes of those who want to see a sharp break with Howard's policies.

The challenge ahead is to unite unions, Greens, Labor supporters and the left in a new mass movement to demand an end to the agenda of neo-liberalism and war. Building that movement from below is the only way we are going to get real change.

Bennelong: the sweetest blow of all

John Howard's defeat in his own seat of Bennelong symbolised the rejection of his government. **Mary Yeager**, co-ordinator of the Bennelong Your Rights at Work campaign spoke to **John Morris**.

"NO ONE in their wildest dreams thought we would [defeat Howard in his own seat].

So we were anxious, just like in the other seats targeted [by Your Rights at Work] of Robertson and Dobell on the Central Coast.

There was a 'time's up' factor and Workchoices was certainly the main issue. Since the election it's noticeable that people seem happier [wherever you go] in shops or the gym.

On election day over 19 booths there were ten workers per booth [spread] over two hour shifts.

The [local] teachers started activity eight months out, particularly Judy King, the Principal of Riverside Girls High School. She had a sign outside the school saying "We are a society not just an economy" prior to the election.

There was John Howard's visit to Eastwood Public school [for the school fete] where the federal police wouldn't let us in.

But the highlight was the Granny Smith apple festival [in Eastwood]. We had a marching group, with a brass band and slogans such as "Your Rights at Work: the core issue"—we kept it positive.

When we stopped in front of the prime minister, Maxine McKew came over and danced in front of the band and the crowd gave an enormous cheer—it couldn't have been better!

In the Lindsay electorate [where I also helped organise the campaign] we had been doing street stalls and leafleting stations for two years but were not targeting workplaces and we needed to get in to see union members there.

So in the lead up to the NSW state election we conducted a campaign in Nepean Hospital against the Liberal opposition who had promised to move state workers over to the federal IR system.

Over six weeks we received 2000 signatures on our petition—that's 2000 conversations.

Radiographers and nurses didn't want to go onto the Federal IR system. We then had a billboard put up and drivers hooted when they went past.

When we went doorknocking, in every third house people said we know all about that, we work at Nepean Hospital—the hospital has 3500 workers.

After that we came up with [the idead of] collecting 100,000 signatures to present to Kevin Rudd [during the federal election campaign]."

Mary Yaager

Working class voters savaged Howard

THE VOTE against Howard represents a polarisation against the government by working class voters.

Howard's landslide win in 1996 was based on the desertion of a chunk of Labor's traditional working class base to the Liberals, after 13 years in which a Labor government introduced neo-liberal policies that reduced living standards. Now those voters have deserted Howard in droves.

Some of the largest swings against the government were in working class seats in the western suburbs of Sydney like Parramatta, and the south-east of Melbourne like Holt. Strong Labor booths in Parramatta like Westmead recorded swings of over 15 per cent and booths in Seven Hills recorded swings of 10 per cent and 14 per cent. By contrast swings in the richer northern parts of the electorate were around 5 per cent.

Western Sydney seats like Chifley, Greenway, Lindsay and Werriwa, which swung heavily to the Coalition in 1996, were amongst the seats which swung heavily to Labor.

But as Mark Davis pointed out in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, there was also a huge swing to Labor in regional centres like Cairns and Lismore, allowing it to pick up seats like Leichhardt with a 12.7 per cent swing and Page with a swing of 9 per cent. In the outer suburbs of Cairns there were swings of 17 and 18 per cent. This represents a huge swing towards Labor by the working class in the larger regional towns.

The opposition to WorkChoices shows that class is still a fundamental divide in Australian society. Inequality has accelerated under Howard. The number of millionaires increased by 10 per cent in the last year alone. In 2005-6 the wealthiest 20 per cent of households had 61 per cent of total Australian household wealth, while the bottom 20 per cent had just 1 per cent.

His government consistently attacked unions while cutting corporate tax rates from 36 to 30 per cent and pouring billions into private schools and private health insurance.

But with WorkChoices he attacked not just one section of workers but the entire working class. All workers—whether in unions or not—were threatened by the laws. With rates of unionisation and the general level of workers' strikes and demonstrations low, working class people mobilised against the government in the only way they saw available—by delivering it a thumping blow at the ballot box.

ELEVEN AND A HALF YEARS IN POWER

HAS HOWARD CHANGED AUS

By Phil Griffiths

WHEN JOHN Howard won the 2004 election, the newspapers were gushing. Here was the leader who had tapped into the psyche of ordinary Australians, who understood them and related to them.

After eight years in power, Howard had not only been re-elected, but won such a decisive victory that the government would control the Senate for the first time since the late 1970s.

Howard had boasted, in 1996, that the times would suit him, and here was the proof. Australians were fundamentally conservative, and Howard represented that mood.

Three years later, the Howard regime lies in ruins and the Liberal Party is in disarray. The Lord Mayor of Brisbane is the most senior elected Liberal in the entire country. Former ministers admit that Australians hated WorkChoices, and that the government should have ratified the Kyoto Protocol. Some even regret that they didn't say "sorry" to the stolen generations. There is now a competition to junk the Howard legacy as quickly as possible.

Right through the election campaign, journalists breathlessly warned that the polls would tighten, that the government had a chance of winning, and that the prime minister was the best political campaigner in the country. But the Liberal campaign was a litany of failures and disasters.

The government started the year 10 per cent behind Labor, and never caught up. Tax cuts in the budget didn't win any votes; massive tax cuts at the start of the campaign were ignored; promises to save hospitals from being closed or run down by state Labor governments had little impact; vicious attacks on Labor's trade union links failed; and the government was reduced to promising to save the Indonesian rainforest orangutangs.

Yet since the election debacle, the media has faithfully stuck to one argument—the electorate is conservative and Labor won because Kevin Rudd positioned himself as a conservative. Rudd boasted about being an "economic conservative", and me-tooism became a feature of Labor's campaign.

This argument is just as flawed as the idea that Howard reflected the popular mood.

In fact, Australians have become less conservative and more social democratic and pro-trade union under Howard's rule.

For instance, in 1996, when Howard was elected, just 17 per cent wanted an increase in social spending while 57 per cent wanted tax cuts. According to a massive survey of Australian social attitudes taken in 2005, after nine years of Howard 47 per cent wanted an increase in social spending while 34 per cent wanted tax cuts.

After nine years of Howard—before Workchoices—79 per cent of people wanted "a law to protect all workers in Australia against unfair dismissal", with just 11 per cent against; and 69 per cent saw award wages as "the best way of paying workers and setting conditions" with just 12 per cent against. Only 10 per cent thought "a lower minimum wage is the best way to solve unemployment", with 73 per cent disagreeing.

When Howard came to power, over 60 per cent of people thought unions had too much power; the figure after nine years of Howard was under 40 per cent.

Then we have the issue of the US Alliance, the centrepiece of Coalition foreign policy. In 2001, after the 9/11 attacks, 58 per cent of Australians believed the US Alliance was "very important"; slightly higher than the figure when Howard came to office. By 2005 the figure was 35 per cent, and it has dropped further since then.

We are entitled to ask: exactly which argument did John Howard win?

Howard's record in power

The story of the Howard government is really the opposite of the media version.

Howard came to power as the beneficiary of working class hatred for Paul Keating and a government that had betrayed them—firstly with the "recession we had to have", which took unemployment to 11 per cent and mortgage interest rates to 20 per cent, then with a ruthless restructuring of work that saw profits start to recover in the early 1990s while jobs remained scarce.

From the very start, the Liberals attacked the working class and the poor. Union rights were undermined and billions of dollars in welfare stripped from the budget. When the economy began to boom, those cuts in welfare for the poor remained, while billions were handed out for private schools and private health insurance.

One of the most appalling legacies of the Howard government is the 30,000 people who are admitted to hospital every year with dental and gum diseases that are life-threatening. The human and financial cost is astronomical, but Howard and Costello refused to reinstate funding for a Commonwealth dental scheme. People had to be forced to learn to look out for themselves.

At first, there was resistance to Howard's cuts and attacks on the unions. Just months after Howard was elected, hundreds of thousands of workers protested against his budget cuts and new industrial relations laws. When Howard and Chris Corrigan tried to smash the Maritime Union of Australia, the trade union movement rallied behind them and Howard tasted defeat.

Howard then proposed a Goods and Services Tax. The result was that in 1998, there was a significant swing to Labor, which won the two-party preferred vote, but narrowly failed to win the election.

Howard trying not to watch on election night

From that point onwards, Howard would continue to attack workers' rights and funding for essential social services. But he was only able to hold on to power using scare campaigns about terrorism and the most blatant racism.

In 1998, it was Aboriginal people, who were accused of wanting to get control of 98 per cent of the continent through Native Title claims.

In 2001, it was the disgraceful attack on asylum seekers, and the deliberate lies about children being thrown out of boats by their refugee parents. "We do not want those kind of people here," Howard declared.

The Tampa crisis saved the Howard government. Early in 2001, with mass opposition to the GST, Howard had suffered a 10 per cent swing at a by-election, and the president of the Liberal Party had warned Howard that people saw the government as "mean, tricky and out of touch".

By 2004, the government was even more disliked. Hundreds of thousands of people had marched against going to war in Iraq. Labor led in the polls as millions rejected the direction Australian society was taking. This time Howard was saved when Labor backtracked on its promise to pull Australian troops out of Iraq, by the perception that Mark Latham was dangerous, and by a ridiculous promise to keep interest rates low.

Howard's interest rates promise was a reflection—not of confident economic management—but desperation. When the spin doctors found the slogan worked, they pushed it relentlessly.

The problem was that Howard's economic program had been based on stripping away workers' rights and unleashing whatever boom he could conjure up.

As in all booms, there was a period where this meant rising profits and slowly rising real wages; but by 2006, the boom was starting to reach its limits. The result was six interest rate rises—caused directly by the mixture of a global boom and Howard's "bring-on-the-boom" policies.

TRALIA?

Liberal racism became a liability

Everyone agrees that Workchoices and rising interest rates destroyed support for the government in the working class suburbs of Sydney, Brisbane and Adelaide, where the swings against Howard were massive—often over 10 per cent. The trade union campaign against Workchoices is rightly seen as pivotal to the destruction of the Howard government.

But the government had known for over a year that it was in trouble, and yet for all the money they spent on polling, and all the ruthless efficiency of their scare campaigns, they were unable to drag enough working class people back to voting for them. Indeed, in the middle of the year, Howard told his MPs that he could not repeat the successful scare campaigns of 1998, 2001 and 2004.

He was unable to scare people with "terrorism" because enough people saw that the Iraq war was not about making the world safe, but a vicious attempt by American imperialism to grab Iraq's oil.

The anti-war movement in Australia might be weak, and the protests might have mostly been small since 2003, but all the small and seemingly insignificant acts of opposition kept the issue and the argument against Howard alive, and people mostly listened.

The appalling arrest and deportation of Dr. Mohammed Haneef exposed the brutal cynicism involved in Howard's terrorism scares.

In the last week of the campaign, in a now infamous incident, Liberal supporters distributed a fake Labor Party leaflet in the western Sydney seat of Lindsay.

This was a desperate and calculated attempt to whip up vicious anti-Muslim racism for electoral gain.

As the *Financial Review* pointed out "Lindsay is one [seat] where a bogus campaign based on race and Islam could have gained traction. In 2001 Pauline Hanson's One Nation polled 5.15 per cent of the vote".

Outrage about the Lindsay incident quite possibly also tipped Howard's seat of Bennelong, with its large influx of recent migrants from China, Hong Kong and Korea, over the line.

The Liberals also tried to play the race card in the seat of the neighbouring seat of Macarthur, by supporting the campaign against the opening of an Islamic school. Both seats saw massive swings against the government.

We saw more racist appeals in the Queensland seat of Moreton, where local Liberal MP Gary Hardgrave said that locals "needed a break" from an "influx" of Sudanese refugees. Hardgrave also lost his seat.

By now, most people can see through their racism. People had grown sick of Howard's ruthless use of lies and wedge politics to hang onto power.

This is a tribute to the ongoing efforts of the campaigns for refugee rights, and against anti-Muslim racism.

When Howard launched the Tampa crisis in 2001, support for "boat people" had sunk to just 9 per cent of the electorate.

Determined and successful campaigning in support of asylum seekers has seen that rise to well over 30 per cent. Given that Labor has never supported the rights of asylum seekers, this is a remarkable result.

Even amongst millions of people who agreed with Howard locking up refugees, there was dismay and disgust at what happened to them, and a desperate desire for some alternative. There was a limit to their willingness to go along with Howard's racism.

Far from reflecting the desires of the electorate, Kevin Rudd's conservatism is also at odds with the desires of ordinary people.

We didn't want the Liberals' tax cuts, and we don't want Labor's. Most people want the money spent on decent hospitals and schools—and public transport.

Getting rid of Howard is a huge achievement. But it will not produce the kind of society ordinary people want or need.

For that, the core social-democratic values of society need to be organised around, and fought for.

KEVIN RUDD'S ACCEPTANCE SPEECH

What will Labor be like in office?

By David Glanz

AMID THE euphoria of election night every word from Kevin Rudd, Julia Gillard and Maxine McKew was cheered to the rafters.

Rudd's acceptance speech was no exception. But if we know one thing already about the new prime minister, it is that every word is weighed and measured.

Among the thanks and the platitudes, Rudd set out to make some important points.

The speech gives more than a few pointers to how Labor will behave in office.

I want to… publicly recognise Mr Howard's extensive contribution to public service in Australia.
These words went much further than the usual courtesy. They indicated that Rudd sees himself building on Howard's legacy, rather than erasing it.

Rudd knows that the core of his voting base loathes Howard. By praising him, Rudd was doing two things—putting his supporters on notice to lower expectations and sending a message to business that he represents a safe pair of hands.

Former British Labour prime minister Tony Blair invited Margaret Thatcher—the hardline neo-liberal Conservative leader of the 1980s—around to his official residence for tea.

While Rudd may not be putting on the jug for Howard in the near future, he wants to reassure the business sector.

It was a point he made again later in the speech:

I will always govern in the national interest. And my door will always be open to men and women of goodwill who want to participate in making our country even greater in the future.
Rudd made it clear before the election that the unions could expect no special favours. So who then are these "men and women of goodwill"?

It is very likely that they are industry and finance leaders, chief executives and the like.

In practice, this is what is always meant by the "national interest".

The concept of the nation appears to bind us all together. But while economic "reform" is hailed as in the national interest, pay rises are not.

The 1998 attack on the Maritime Union was justified by the "national interest", but the picket lines that defended the union were not.

Invading Iraq alongside George W Bush is deemed to be in the national interest, but building an anti-war movement is not.

The national interest is what advances the interests of our rulers.

I want to put aside the old battles of the past, the old battles between business and unions, the old battles between growth and the environment, the old and tired battles between Federal and State, the old battles between public and private.
Rudd was attempting to sound reasonable, middle of the road. But the battles between business and unions are real—the product of business' drive to increase profitability and hold down the share of production going to workers in wages.

Dismissing the "old battle" is code for retaining the bulk of WorkChoices, not least the clauses that make union organising difficult and striking complicated.

Balancing growth and the environment sounds similarly reasonable. But in Rudd's world, this means pursuing the furphy of "clean coal", exporting greater amounts of uranium, and continuing to pour billions into road-building programs.

We already know what Labor means by putting aside the battle between public and private.

In NSW, the Iemma government is planning to privatise the Sydney Harbour ferries and electricity distribution.

In Victoria, the Brumby government is moving beyond using public-private partnerships to build tollways and railway stations to their introduction in schools.

This guarantees poorer outcomes as businesses have to pay more to borrow capital and have to factor in their profits.

Of course, Rudd also wanted to reassure his supporters.

And through all this to make sure we keep our economy strong but make sure it delivers for working families as well… I will be a prime minister for all Australians. A prime minister for Indigenous Australians; Australians who have been born here; and Australians who have come here from afar.
Where Howard promised in 1996 to govern "for all of us", marking an end to supposed special privileges for Indigenous Australians and other minorities, Rudd was prepared to give a nod towards social justice and multiculturalism—without, of course, using the terms.

And he made special mention of asbestos campaigner Bernie Banton, noting that "you have been supported in your fight by the great Australian trade union movement".

Rudd sees himself building on Howard's legacy, rather than erasing it

But there was no mention of abolishing WorkChoices or of restoring to unionists the rights that make it possible for us to fight for justice, as Bernie Banton did.

While the ACTU's Your Rights at Work campaign and the mass mobilisations by workers that helped lift Labor into a winning position went unremarked, Rudd was keen, however, to talk directly to others.

I extend our greetings tonight to our great friend and ally, the United States…
This statement was designed to send a signal, both domestically and overseas, that a Rudd government would continue to be a fervent supporter of US interests.

We already know that Rudd is bringing some troops back from Iraq only after consulting the US. And he has signalled a willingness to send more soldiers to Afghanistan.

By mentioning "our great friend and ally" in his acceptance speech, while failing to note a single concrete commitment to the workers who had just elected him, Rudd was confirming his conservatism.

What we stand for

SOCIALISM

Capitalism is a system of crisis, exploitation and war in which production is for profit, not human need. Although workers create society's wealth they have no control over production or distribution.

We stand for socialism, the creation of a society in which the workers will make the decisions about the economy, social life and the environment.

The Stalinist system that once existed in countries like Russia and Eastern Europe had nothing to do with socialism but was a form of state capitalism.

WORKERS' POWER

Only the working class has the power to create a society free from exploitation, oppression and want.

Liberation can be won only through the struggles of workers themselves, organised independently of all other classes and fighting for real workers' power—a new kind of state based on democratically elected workers' councils.

REVOLUTION, NOT REFORM

Socialism cannot be created by gradual reforms as some in the Labor Party believe.

The capitalist state—parliament, the military, the law—is a weapon of class rule and must be overthrown. There is no parliamentary road to socialism.

INTERNATIONALISM

The working class exists in all countries and the struggle for socialism knows no national boundaries.

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Crucial to a workers' movement smashing the capitalist state is a revolutionary workers' party built out of the day-to-day struggles around economic and political issues.

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LABOR IN POWER

Trying to strike an impossible balance

By Jarvis Ryan

THERE IS a contradiction at the heart of the new Labor government's approach to managing the economy.

On the one hand, Kevin Rudd clearly struck a chord during the election campaign with his emphasis on the "personal economy". Where John Howard looked out of touch when he told workers they had never had it so good, Rudd's "working families" mantra tapped into disquiet about everyday expenses like the cost of petrol, groceries and childcare, and the big issues of job security and housing affordability.

In his more populist moments, Rudd has attacked oil and retail monopolies and promised more corporate regulation, including greater penalties for cartels.

But he spent much more time trumpeting Labor's pro-business credentials. Rudd and shadow ministers such as Wayne Swan (treasury) and Lindsay Tanner (finance) promoted Labor as "the real party of economic reform", pledging to accelerate productivity growth and set up a "razor gang" to slash government spending.

Labor cannot please both business and its working class supporters

Rudd's declaration that he is a proud economic conservative succeeded for the most part in placating employers' concerns about union influence within the ALP, but raised serious doubts about Labor's commitment to redressing inequality and rebuilding Australia's decaying infrastructure.

Labor's approach is extremely contradictory, combining social democratic rhetoric with an enthusiastic embrace of free market globalisation. On the one hand, Labor leaders argue there is no alternative to embracing the market. On the other, they pretend they can control the excesses of the system and that the market can be made to be fair.

But even the most cursory examination reveals that "free" market capitalism has ushered in a new era of corporate dominance. Globally, just a few hundred corporations exercise enormous power over governments. Against this reality, Rudd's promise to set up petrol and grocery price watchdogs looks pitiful.

Rudd and his senior advisers accept that markets are the most desirable and efficient means of addressing social problems. So, for example, they remain committed to carbon trading as a means of regulating greenhouse emissions, when much more radical measures, such as nationalisation and higher corporate taxes, are needed.

Labor's adherence to the economic orthodoxy of neo-liberalism means it gives priority to implementing policies and arbitrary benchmarks decided by a small number of unelected figures, rather than identifying social priorities and developing policies and targets accordingly.

Thus Labor is committed to keeping inflation between 2 and 3 per cent, reducing the rate of tax paid by companies and individuals, and maintaining a budget surplus of least 1 per cent of gross national income.

Pledging to restrain expenditure sits well with big business and right-wing commentators, but the vast majority of people want more government spending on services and infrastructure. In fact there is a crying need for it.

Ah yes, reply the conservatives, but government spending is inefficient and will fuel inflation.

In fact, inflation is rampant in areas where the government has ceded ground to the private sector. The price of education, health and childcare have all increased at well above the general inflation rate in recent years.

More government spending and regulation is needed to promote social cohesion and reduce costs.

Some of Labor's policies are a step in the right direction. Investment in public education promotes equity and economic growth. But the proposed changes do not go even close to far enough. And there is a worry that in some areas Labor will be even more right-wing than the Liberals.

Rudd has boasted about taking an axe to the public service. "When I talk about a razor gang, I am dead serious,'' he told reporters.

Labor's finance spokesman Lindsay Tanner claims to have identified $10 billion in savings that would include cuts to the public service.

Although Rudd promises the emphasis would be on cutting bloated administration, the razor gang mentality sits uneasily alongside Labor's promise to improve service delivery, and signals that workers—including public servants—could have quite a fight on their hands to win even small pay rises and improvements in conditions.

The contradictions in Labor's approach will become increasingly apparent as Rudd's team settles into office, and especially if there is a downturn in the economy.

WHERE TO FOR THE LEFT

Preparing for new challenges under a Rudd government

HOWARD'S DRAMATIC defeat has given heart to all of us who want to see a better society. It was victory for the left, and the union movement in particular.

As well as Howard's defeat, there were two important steps forward for the left to come out of the election campaign.

One was the Green vote, which not only held up but increased slightly. The represents one million people who were prepared to challenge Kevin Rudd's conservatism.

The existence of an established left electoral alternative before Labor comes to power federally is important, and something that was absent under the last Labor government. The Greens' senators could play an important role in helping popularise and give strength to resistance outside parliament under the new government.

If Rudd betrays those who voted for him, the Greens are in a good position to make sure the resulting anger finds a left-wing expression, and does not benefit right-wing populists who pretend to offer an alternative.

The other step forward was the formation of Rights at Work local groups around the country.

The Rights at Work campaign has laid the basis for rejuvenating the union movement, involving many thousands of people in political activity, many of whom were drawn into the campaign by the mass union demonstrations and delegates' meetings. In some places local groups have been able to bring together unionists, Greens and Labor supporters in common activity.

Sadly, Kevin Rudd is not going to undo the damage of eleven and a half years of Howard. During the campaign he raised expectations that over a range of issues he would bring significant change. But the detail of his policies indicates that this is not the case.

WorkChoices is the clearest example. The election result was a clear rejection of the laws—even key Liberals such as outgoing workplace relations minister Joe Hockey has concluded "Labor has an undeniable, overwhelming mandate to abolish Work Choices."

But Rudd plans to maintain most of the key anti-union measures Howard introduced, like the ban on pattern bargaining, the construction commission, the ban on union right of entry and anti-strike laws.

There has been considerable disquiet from some union leaders about this. For instance John Robertson, the head of Unions NSW, told the *Sydney Morning Herald* that "the difference between this guy [Kevin Rudd] and the last mob is that this guy doesn't want to kill us".

Since the election Robertson has urged Labor to move quickly to abolish WorkChoices. He also argued that Labor should legislate to allow workers to opt out of AWAs signed under Howard, instead of having to wait up to five years until their expiry as Labor advocates.

These are the sort of demands that need to be put on Kevin Rudd by the unions.

They need to be backed up by continuing the Rights at Work campaign.

This means both that the Rights at Work local groups need to be sustained and that there should be union national days of protest.

Kevin Rudd is deeply committed to neo-liberal economic policies—what he has called "economic conservatism".

In all likelihood not only will he leave intact much of WorkChoices, he will launch yet further attacks on public services and the unions.

For instance he has talked of taking a "meat axe" to public service jobs to reverse the expansion of the public service under Howard.

On foreign policy Rudd is also extremely committed to the US alliance.

While he is set to pull combat troops out of Iraq, he intends to balance this by committing further troops to Afghanistan.

As the deaths of three Australian soldiers there in the last two months indicates, further Australian troop commitments could lead to greater casualties than Australia has yet experienced in George Bush's "war on terror".

The US adventures in Iraq and Afghanistan have destabilised that whole region.

There are any number of potential flashpoints that could explode into new wars. And there is still the danger that the Bush administration will attempt an attack on Iran before it leaves office in twelve months time.

Kevin Rudd is bound to back up the US in any future conflict, and this will put him at odds with the majority of the Australian population.

This means that sustaining the anti-war movement remains important.

Kevin Rudd will end up radically disappointing the people who voted for him. Labor's commitment to managing capitalism means that it often forces through attacks on working class living standards in order to serve the interests of business. The records of both the state Labor governments and the last federal Labor government provide plenty of evidence for that.

But these attacks also hold the prospect of uniting Greens, unions and Labor supporters in a new mass movement and of forging a united left alternative to neo-liberalism and war.

LEFT ALTERNATIVE

Greens eat into Labor's base in Melbourne

By Judy McVey

Consolidating the union support developed during the campaign is a key task for the Greens

THE GREENS' campaign in the seat of Melbourne was a model of how to increase the party's support by breaking into Labor's working class base.

Adam Bandt increased the Greens vote by 3.4 per cent, gaining 22.4 per cent of the vote—the highest vote for the Greens in the lower house nationally.

With 20 per cent of the vote still to be counted, the Greens may take second place from the Liberals after the final count and distribution of preferences. The Liberals are currently only a few hundred votes ahead of the Greens. Labor's Lindsay Tanner looks set to win the seat with just over fifty per cent of the primary vote.

Adam ran an energetic campaign of doorknocking and four rounds of letterboxing, as well as addressing community forums on issues ranging from Iraq and Afghanistan, the Barwon 13 (who are being held in Victoria's Barwon prison on so-called terrorism charges), to nuclear power and public transport.

On one Saturday morning, 14 stalls were set up in different shopping centres across the electorate.

As Adam explained, this hard work paid off: "Many people were surprised, telling us that they hadn't heard from the other parties.

"We understood that the key task of this election was to defeat Howard and that the ACTU Rights at Work Campaign was tremendously successful."

This meant the Greens were potentially squeezed, with left-wing voters shifting back to Labor because of the desire to get rid of Howard.

The Greens across Victoria responded by making it clear that their preferences would flow directly to Labor ahead of the Liberals and the Democrats. The seat of Melbourne campaign letterboxed a special leaflet explaining preferences titled "How to safely vote Howard out".

The campaign focused on WorkChoices, emphasising that unlike Kevin Rudd's half-way compromise, the Greens policy was to completely abolish WorkChoices.

Union support

Discontent with Labor's policy within the union movement led to two Victorian unions supporting Adam's campaign—the Electrical Trades Union and the firefighters' union.

In addition the medical scientists union recommended its members to vote Greens 1 and Labor 2 in all lower house seats.

All three unions, as well as the Finance Sector Union, supported the Greens in the Senate.

Adam's union support gained widespread media coverage, and led to the unions funding the installation of huge billboards calling for a vote for the Greens on two centrally-located union offices.

Greens supporters attended mass meetings held during the nurses' and teachers' strikes with anti-WorkChoices leaflets. The campaign also presented a wider alternative to neo-liberal policies, arguing for public services and a $30 per week increase for pensioners, instead of Rudd's $31 billion spending on tax cuts.

A Greens leaflet posed the question: "What kind of world do we want for ourselves?" Linking climate change, working conditions and war, they opened up a dialogue on anti-capitalist change.

Adam Bandt targeted the large public housing areas in the electorate that are Labor strongholds. Over 5000 high-rise public housing tenants received a Greens mail out arguing for services not tax cuts.

Earlier Adam had also backed the campaign against the state Labor government's plan to increase rents for public housing tenants. This led to his endorsement by Lyn Dixon, a leading member of the North Richmond Tenants Association.

The Greens were unequivocal in supporting refugees. Adam's opposition to Kevin Andrews's attacks on Sudanese refugees led to backing from African community associations and built a new layer of supporters in key public housing areas in Flemington.

As a result a number of people from local African communities came out to help the Greens on polling day.

There was a swing to the Greens in every polling booth, with particularly large swings in housing commission and working class areas—4.3 per cent in Hotham Hill, 8.2 per cent in Newmarket, 7.8 per cent in North Melbourne and 4.4 per cent in North Melbourne Central. A similar decline in the Labor vote in these booths shows that these swings came from those who would usually support Labor.

There were also large swings in inner city areas with a high proportion of white collar workers, such as 7 per cent in Brunswick South, 6.9 per cent in Clifton Hill and 6.1 per cent in Fitzroy North.

The Greens increased their Senate primary vote from the last election in the seat of Melbourne by 5 five per cent to 30 per cent. In at least two polling booths, the Greens received more Senate primary votes than Labor. At another, 44 per cent voted for the Greens in the Senate.

Adam's campaign showed that by targeting working class issues, it is possible for the Greens to win over traditional Labor voters . The challenge now is for all Adam's supporters to stay active and help build the grassroots movements which can force Kevin Rudd to deliver real change.

We are off to a good start with the Greens endorsing and speaking at the Human Rights Day rally organised by Unity for Peace on December 9. By helping to build this and other activist events, the Greens can continue to build wider electoral support as well a be part of rebuilding the left more broadly.

Chance to become real opposition to Rudd

THE GREENS' vote at the election was stronger than many expected. In the context of the momentum to come in behind Kevin Rudd to defeat Howard, the Greens' vote nationally increased slightly in the lower house and by just over 1 per cent in the Senate.

In Tasmania the Greens secured 17.6 per cent of the senate vote—enough to get Bob Brown elected on first preferences. Although Kerry Nettle failed to get re-elected in NSW, the party elected extra senators in SA and WA.

This result means that the Greens have solidified a base of committed supporters. Over 1 million people voted for the Greens in the Senate as a left alternative to Labor—sending a message that they wanted Rudd to go further in undoing WorkChoices, dealing with climate change and putting money back into public services.

Kevin Rudd's conservatism will eventually disappoint those who voted for him—whether over his plans to retain much of WorkChoices, introduce budget cuts or his pro-US foreign policy.

Disillusionment with Labor offers the Greens the opportunity to further increase their support—particularly among Labor's working class base.

However it is not inevitable that the Greens will benefit from disillusionment with Labor. If working class people do not identify with left alternatives as an expression of their anger, they can be drawn behind right-wing parties instead. This can even mean the growth of extreme, racist right-wing groups, seen in the way that Pauline Hanson attracted those left behind by globalisation.

The progress made by the Greens in this election in taking up working class issues, especially WorkChoices, and in drawing support from unions were important steps forward. This was most clear in the seat of Melbourne.

Working class orientation

But this is not an orientation which is universally agreed within the party. Much of the Greens material produced during the campaign continued to present Labor and Liberal as the same—an approach that did not help win over Labor supporters who were desperate to get rid of Howard.

In addition many Greens campaigns did not make it clear that a Greens vote was an anti-Howard vote—that voters could use their preferences to vote Greens 1 Labor 2 and still prevent the Liberals being re-elected.

In Melbourne this threatened to derail the great work done by Adam Bandt's seat of Melbourne campaign, when a Greens candidate in another Victorian seat issued how-to-votes which suggested voters could direct preferences either to Liberal or Labor.

This was immediately seized on by Labor in an attempt to discredit the Greens in the eyes of Labor voters.

The links forged with unions during the campaign are particularly important. These need to be strengthened by Greens supporters helping to sustain local Rights at Work groups and campaigns by the unions to demand the complete abolition of WorkChoices.

The Greens will hold a share of the balance of power in the new Senate. However relying on the Senate cannot be the Greens main strategy for pressuring Rudd. As we saw during the period of the last federal Labor government, the Liberals were quite happy to vote with Labor when the government pursued neo-liberal policies. This means the key arena of struggle will be on the streets, not in the parliament.

The Greens as an organisation come from the social movements. Many Greens members, as well as Greens parliamentarians, have a track record of grassroots activism. But as a party the Greens have not mobilised around key struggles.

With one million people who now look to the Greens as a left alternative to Labor, the party could be a powerful force if it tried to mobilise its supporters to resist Rudd's attempt to continue with Howard's policies.

When Greens members play key roles within dynamic campaigns it strengthens the party. The increase in Greens support in Tasmania—the biggest in any state in the country—was a result of the campaign against the pulp mill.

If the Greens put themselves at the centre of building the key movements of opposition to the Rudd government, both the Greens and the whole left will be immeasurably strengthened.

JAMES SUPPLE

Solid performance in Sydney—but some reflection needed

THE GREEN vote in the inner city seat of Sydney held up well on November 24.

As *Socialist Worker* went to press, The Greens' candidate Jenny Leong had won about 21.2 per cent of the primary vote.

This represents a slight decline on 2004 when Jenny won 21.6 per cent.

Labor's Tanya Plibersek, the new minister for housing, won this safe seat with a primary vote swing of over 4 per cent.

Overall, the Greens vote was variable compared to the previous election.

The vote tended to hold strong around Chippendale and Redfern and held steady in the Glebe area (all near Sydney University and with a very high proportion of renters and professionals).

Labor enjoyed a slight swing in Newtown and significant swings to Labor in Surry Hills, Pyrmont and at the large Sydney Town Hall booth.

Interestingly, it appears that the main beneficiaries of a slightly lower Green vote in the Balmain area were the Liberals.

The Greens came second in 15 out of 41 booths. Overall, the result reflects the nation-wide swing to Labor—but it also shows that the Greens continue to attract a large constituency of more left-wing voters.

There were several reports of Greens booth volunteers who had to deal with questions from voters sympathetic to the Greens but worried about preferences.

There is no doubt that many would have voted Green based upon a clear understanding of the Greens' preferences (which clearly favoured Labor over the government).

Nonetheless, this is a problem worth reflecting on.

The local campaign mentioned the two crucial issues of WorkChoices (including the Greens' superior policy) and the need to get rid of the Howard government—but it did not prioritise them.

There's no doubt that concern over climate change and the Senate balance of power gave many people another strong reason to vote Green.

But critical reflection is important because the Greens will need to do more than just maintain their vote in the future.

Ultimately, we want to see the Greens challenging and beating Labor in crucial inner city seats like Sydney.

In order to start plotting a successful strategy, it is worth taking a good, critical look at a campaign that was solid, but which did not did not consistently relate to the anti-Howard mood.

TOM BARNES

Socialist Worker

STATE LABOR

NSW GOVERNMENT PUSHES PRIVATISATION FRENZY

Unions, as well as Labor party members and the Greens, are resisting a privatisation push by the Iemma government

A BATTLE against a string of proposed privatisations by the NSW state Labor government was looming as *Socialist Worker* went to press.

The state government has held off making announcements about the future of both the electricity sector and Sydney ferries until the federal election was decided.

Warren Smith, secretary of the Sydney branch of the maritime union told *Socialist Worker*:

"There's a huge range of things on the chopping block. I think their first attempt will be electricity—that's the big one. If they have success there I think [privatisations will] continue.

"All forms of public transport are on the chop—we've heard rumours of water, sections of the waste management service, even lottery. There's a privatisation fire sale going on."

The government argues that it needs to sell off assets to fund the upgrade of roads and hospitals.

It also hopes to get the private sector to help pay for the cost of replacing out of date public transport and building new power stations.

Behind all this is the Labor government's addiction to neo-liberal economic policies. It is desperate to keep down government debt and improve its budget figures for fear of losing the state's AAA credit rating.

As a consequence we will all lose out. Turning public services over to the market means prices rise and service quality declines as corporations cut costs in search of higher profits. Electricity prices in Victoria and South Australia, the only states to have fully privatised power, have risen over the past ten years while prices in NSW have actually fallen.

In South Australia the number of blackouts has soared, due to the sacking of almost 800 maintenance workers.

The state government has suggested it would sell off the retail arm of the electricity industry in order to help finance the construction of new power stations. The United Services Union in NSW, which represents call centre workers in the electricity retail sector estimates that 4000 jobs are potentially at risk if privatisation goes ahead. The sale of existing power stations has also been floated.

Key flashpoint

But the government faces a serious fight. Unions NSW has made it clear that it opposes privatisation of any part of the electricity industry.

Unions are demanding that Labor convenes a special party conference in the hope of winning a vote against privatisation.

This raises then the possibility of a repeat of 1997, when then NSW premier Bob Carr attempted to privatise the electricity industry but was defeated on the floor of the NSW state conference. Unions, left-wing Labor MPs and rank-and-file members combined to oppose the sale.

However the campaign will also need to be fought more broadly if the government is to be prevented from going ahead. Labor governments routinely defy party policy if they think they can get away with it.

As Warren Smith said: "So far there's been positive signs from the trade union movement generally.

"But I think we really need to utilise those community networks that were set up through the Rights at Work campaign, and start to get the community involved, because ultimately privatisation of any form of government service ends in people paying more and those services being made harder to access."

At Sydney Ferries, contracting out to a private operator has been proposed as the solution to a series of accidents, which caused the deaths of five people.

The privatisation plans also involve cuts to services, such as the axing of less profitable ferry routes from Parramatta. Local Labor MP Tanya Gadiel has spoken out against these plans.

The Maritime Union of Australia has promised to oppose any form of privatisation. According to Warren Smith:

"We're going to fight it to the end. We've said privatisation is an absolutely and totally unacceptable option. We've put the state government on notice—we're going to do everything in our power to make sure that privatisation of the ferries is beaten."

The NSW Greens are also planning a campaign against the proposed privatisations. A united campaign between Greens, the unions and Labor members is needed. This can give unionists in the power and maritime industries the confidence to take strike action—which would stop the government in its tracks.

What is happening in NSW is a product of the same neo-liberal economic policy to which Kevin Rudd subscribes.

A victory against privatisation in NSW would send an important message that the new federal Labor government needs to break with neo-liberal policy prescriptions as well.

Teachers in Victoria are planning a further campaign of strikes into next year

Victorian teachers challenge government pay cap

UP TO 10,000 teachers gathered at Melbourne's Vodafone arena on November 21 to vote on the next steps in their campaign against the state government.

Teachers at the mass meeting voted to reject the government's pay offer and to support an official motion for a statewide 24-hour strike on February 14 next year. They also endorsed rolling regional four-hour stoppages to follow.

They then joined a march to parliament house in red union ponchos, which created a huge visual impact. The strike closed 150 schools across the state.

Victorian teachers are the lowest paid in the country—so much so that 400 teachers from Victoria have applied for positions interstate next year, in search of better pay and conditions.

But Premier John Brumby has refused to budge on the government's 3.25 per cent pay limit. Teachers are also fighting to reduce the use of short-term contracts, which can see workers having to reapply for their jobs at the end of every year.

One in five teachers are employed on contracts.

Brumby's pay cap was recently beaten by Victorian nurses, after a campaign of work bans and stopworks in defiance of anti-union laws. Concerted industrial action can see teachers do the same.

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