



Just In Time

CLRI(NSW) Social Justice Committee

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Promises, Promises

Introduction

In this issue of **Just In Time** our attention is turned to the promises made by the Australian Labor Party (ALP) prior to their election to Government in November 2007. It may seem that countless things have changed since Prime Minister Kevin Rudd was sworn into office in December, but much work is still to be done. As Mr Rudd noted in his speech to parliament on the 13th of February,

"Last year I made a commitment to the Australian people that if we formed the next government of the Commonwealth we would in parliament say sorry to the Stolen Generations. Today I honour that commitment."

We congratulate the Prime Minister for delivering so swiftly on this most important of promises. But, amidst the celebration, it is our job to remain vigilant and to ensure that our government continues to remain faithful to the promises for which they were elected. In this issue we take a closer look at some of the key commitments made, pre-election, by the ALP and the steps that have been taken towards honouring them.

An end to the silence

In his opening speech to parliament on the 13th of February, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd ended the long "stony, stubborn and deafening silence" that had dominated the previous government's approach to Reconciliation, by saying 'sorry' to the Stolen Generations.

After delivering the carefully-worded formal apology, Rudd made his own personal apology and proceeded to offer further commitments to practical action, designed to complement the important symbolism of the apology.

These commitments included forming a joint policy commission to be led by himself and, leader of the Opposition, Brendan Nelson.

We encourage this joint commission and acknowledge that the support of the Opposition is crucial to elevate this truly national issue above the status of a mere "political football".

However, Brendan Nelson's address to parliament, which followed the Prime Minister's 'sorry' speech, showed a hesitation to fully embrace the sentiment of the apology. Great care will need to be taken to ensure that bipartisan support continues when future decisions and policies are being made, so that Reconciliation does not fall victim once more to "mindlessly partisan politics".



Expression of unity

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and Opposition leader Brendan Nelson hold hands with Ngambri elder Matilda House-Williams, who gave the first ever "welcome to country" address at the opening of an Australian parliament.

Photo:

www.news.com.au/dailytelegraph/story/0,22049,23195790-5001021,00.html

A new “destination for the nation”

In his speech the Prime Minister noted several outcomes which he proposed parliament should pursue:

- § In five years time, all Indigenous four-year-olds living in remote communities are attending early education centres, and are engaged in “proper preliteracy and pnumeracy programs”
- § These children have access to “new educational opportunities” once they have completed preschool
- § Infant mortality rates among the Aboriginal population are drastically reduced through the provision of proper “primary and preventative health care” for Indigenous children in remote areas.

In addition to these, the Prime Minister also suggested actions to be undertaken by the bipartisan policy commission, including:

- § Implementation of an “effective housing strategy” for remote Aboriginal communities over the next five years
- § Closing the gap in life expectancy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians
- § Amending the constitution to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the first Australians.

Importantly, Rudd stressed that future policies regarding Indigenous issues contain “real measures of policy success or policy failure” and that any action undertaken be done so in partnership between government and community, allowing for “flexible, tailored, local approaches to achieve commonly-agreed national objectives”.

This acknowledgement of the importance of engaging with the wisdom of local community leaders in policy formation and implementation is an important step forward from the inflexible attitudes of the past.

It is hoped that collaboration and consultation can lead to improvements in controversial areas such as the Northern Territory intervention (or “invasion” as it is known to some). Aimed at combating child sexual assault, the intervention, introduced by the Howard government, was not welcomed by many Aboriginal people and it has received much negative feedback from the community.

Labor has not made a commitment to cease the intervention, but aims to discard some of its elements. Kevin Rudd and Jenny Macklin, Minister for Indigenous Affairs, have met with community leaders in the Northern Territory to discuss this issue and promote consultation and community involvement in further actions in the region.

It is no overstatement to say that February the 13th was a historic day for Australia – a true watershed moment in the journey towards Reconciliation. While directed towards the actions of the past, it is the apology’s impact on the future that is now most crucial. We must now ensure that our members of parliament, both government and opposition, stay true to their commitments to improve Indigenous education, health, housing and employment; continuing (when the cameras are off) to maintain the spirit of respect and co-operation demonstrated on the day Australia said “sorry”.



"We are sorry"

Ratify Kyoto ... Check!



Within a week of the election Prime Minister Kevin Rudd attended a climate change conference in Bali and signed, on behalf of Australia, the Kyoto Protocol which will come into place this March.

Ratifying the protocol is an extremely positive step in beginning to combat climate change and in taking responsibility for the emissions that we produce. This action is also a positive step in fulfilling millennium development goal number seven of ensuring environmental sustainability.

We commend the Australian Government for taking this step and remind the party of their other commitments to climate change which we look forward to seeing implemented in the near future.

The ALP's other **climate change commitments** include:

- § Setting a 20% renewable energy target by the year 2020
- § Establishing an \$8,000 rebate for solar power, \$1,000 rebate for solar hot water systems, \$500 rebate for grey water piping and rainwater tanks, \$500 rebate to landlords for insulation installation and \$10,000 low interest Green loans for solar systems and water and energy saving measures
- § The investment of \$15 million in a Clean Energy Export Strategy.
- § The investment of \$20 million in a Clean Energy Innovation Centre
- § Investment in a Green Car Innovation Fund to develop and build green cars in Australia.

Refugee and Asylum Seeker Policy

The Labor Party vowed to put an end to the 'Pacific Solution' which came into being under the Howard government. Labor has already taken steps to achieving this by closing detention facilities on Nauru, however centres on Christmas Island will remain active, which calls into question the idea of abolishing the Pacific Solution to make way for the Indian Ocean Solution.

Several refugees being held on Nauru were granted refugee status in Australia, arriving on the mainland before Christmas. Despite these promising steps much more needs to be done to enable Australia to have a humanitarian refugee policy.

The following steps must be initiated to ensure that Australia is on track to a **humanitarian refugee policy**:

- § Reframe the language used when referring to refugees and asylum seekers, abolishing terms such as "queue jumpers" and "illegals".
- § Shift ideological underpinning from those of deterrence and dissuasion to that of responsibility and acceptance.
- § Promote greater community engagement and consultation in future policy making.
- § Reform the refugee review tribunal.
- § Encourage agreement across political parties regarding refugee policy.
- § Encourage a formal apology to refugees for their suffering under the previous government.



Two down, hundreds more to go!

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The road ahead

At this early stage it is impossible to say what the year 2008 will bring, however there is certainly a feeling of change in the air.

There are several commitments made by the Labor Party which we will monitor throughout the year, including:

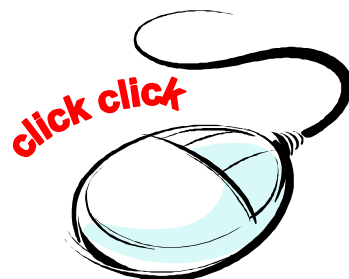
- § Policy which promotes improved Aboriginal health, education, employment and housing
- § The abolition of the Pacific Solution and the implementation of a more humane refugee policy
- § Positive steps towards ensuring the provision of affordable housing and improvement in community housing
- § The commitment to combating climate change, solid emission cuts and greener energy production
- § Maintaining commitments to the Kyoto Protocol
- § Commitment to working towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

Keep reading the CLRI(NSW) publications

Just in Time
and
Watermark

throughout the year for updates on the progress of the Australian government's policy and actions in the areas of Social Justice and Environmental Issues.

Good website!



For a comprehensive list of the Australian Labor Party's promises (and checks on their progress towards keeping them!) check out the **GetUp!** 'Promise Watch' website:

<http://getup.org.au/promisewatch>

Just in Time is an occasional publication of the Social Justice Committee of CLRI(NSW). Members of the committee are: Sr Jan Barnett rsj, Sr Suzette Clark rsc, Ms Sandie Cornish, Br Stephen Cram cfc, Ms Frances Egan, Sr Grace Ellul sm, Ms Jill Finnane, Fr Brian Fitzpatrick osa, Sr Margaret Hinchey rsm, Sr Geraldine Kearney sgs, Sr Anne Lane pbvm, Mr Pedro Moreira, Fr Claude Mostowik msc, Sr Kathleen O'Connor rsj, Sr Sharon Price rsm, Sr Libby Rogerson ibvm. Please address comments or queries to CLRI(NSW) PO Box 259, Rosebery NSW 1445 or clrinsw@ozemail.com.au