



Vanguard

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Learning hard lessons about Labor

Later this year Australia will have another federal election. The Rudd Labor government is well into its third year in office, and the Australian people have learned some hard lessons from the experience.

Among large sections of the people the relief, enthusiasm and hope that followed the defeat of the Howard Liberal government in 2007 has been replaced with disappointment, frustration and some anger. The Labor government has persisted with similar anti-worker, anti-people policies and actions as its discredited predecessor and has failed to realise the hopes of many.

In a few key areas, the lessons have been particularly hard and difficult for people to accept. What has really changed from the Howard era?

Anti-worker laws

The essence of Howard's vicious industrial laws has been retained in Rudd and Gillard's *Fair Work* legislation.

The legal right to strike is so limited and conditioned that it is virtually gone altogether.

Unions and workers still face crippling fines for a myriad of breaches, while construction industry workers are still threatened and abused by the ABCC with their fascist powers of interrogation and penalty. Lack of union rights of entry and unfair dismissal laws continue to cripple workers' ability to organise. Gillard has escalated attacks on unions and workers with her threat that "breaking the law will meet the full force of the law".

Climate back-down

The Rudd government has responded weakly to the challenges of climate warming and protection of the environment. At Copenhagen they fell in behind the US, offering paltry reductions in carbon emissions, and at the same time denouncing poor and developing countries for standing up to the rich and powerful polluters. At home, their few token investments into alternative energy sources have collapsed or been abandoned, while stimulus money has flowed through



Rights at Work campaign - Opposed by Liberal, sold-out by Labor

to meet the infrastructure demands of the multinational coal and mining companies.

'Intervention' land-grab

'Intervention' in Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory is being used to push Indigenous Australians off their land, opening the way for land-grabbing by the mining companies. The Racial Discrimination Act has been distorted and used to extend oppressive powers to Centrelink recipients and other vulnerable people.

Privatising education

In education, Deputy Prime Minister Gillard has pursued policies that transfer public funding to private schools, and introduced a regime of assessment and grading of schools that accelerates privatisation and attacks teachers' unions.

Another deputy sheriff for the US

While other countries are withdrawing and announcing deadlines, the Rudd government has given an open-ended commitment to the US war of occupation in Afghanistan. It slavishly endorses almost every US foreign policy position and offers bases and other facilities for the US to extend its presence in the Asia-Pacific region.

Bosses not satisfied

Yet, in spite of Labor's grovelling

before big business, the ruling class of foreign and local corporate monopoly bosses and the reactionary Business Council of Australia are still not satisfied. They want unions completely smashed and are using the new Liberal leadership to push Labor into even more concessions.

Election year

In this election year, the struggles of the working class and broader sections of the people will be overshadowed by the competition between Labor and

Liberal as to which can best serve this ruling class. Both serve big business and neither will change Australia for the benefit of the people.

Regardless of the parliamentary games, struggles will continue to break out and further lessons will emerge.

Howard was knocked off when the working class led the mobilisation of the people.

What is needed now is absolute confidence in the working class and ordinary people to again defend their rights and roll back the push to reaction.

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