



## The fall of the hollowman

**W**hat a difference six years makes. On Sunday Kevin Rudd was back in Brisbane for the launch of his 2013 election campaign. It was where he launched his successful campaign in 2007. Back then he had grandiose plans — an emissions trading scheme, a national desalination and urban water fund, a solar future.

This time his main promise was in relation to training and apprenticeships.

Perhaps he thinks we could afford to worry about climate change when the economy was good but it is a luxury now things are much worse. Or perhaps climate change never was "the great global moral, economic and environmental challenge of our age".

Back in 2007 his speech made promises on "the education revolution", the education tax refund, childcare rebates, petrol prices and grocery watch. In fact it was brin-



Kevin Rudd with smiling supporters on the campaign trail back in 2007.

ful with proposals.

This time it was surprisingly light on. It was mainly a defence of the Labor Party's values and historic record.

In 2007 the speech was directed at the nation. This time it was directed at the party faithful. Last time it was the speech of someone who expected to win. This time it was the speech of someone who expects to lose.

This time Rudd is threatening to take over the TAFE system from the states.

It sounds remarkably similar to 2007, when he said that if the states did not implement his plan to fix hospitals he would take over the health system by mid-2009. He didn't.

He said he'd end the blame

**"Soon people figure out that the person who believes in everything really believes in nothing"**

game between the Commonwealth and the states. He didn't. He said: "As Prime Minister, the buck will stop with me."

He passed it. Kevin Rudd's problem in this campaign is that he is much better known by the public than he was when they voted him into office.

Rudd has never understood what it means to govern. He has never understood that to

accomplish something, a minister or a prime minister must design it, think of the risks and take measures to prevent them, assemble resources, map out a plan for implementation, follow through on it, and deliver results. He believes that governing mostly consists of making grand statements.

The highlight of Rudd's career will be the apology to the stolen generation. It was a ges-

ture, a declaration. After it was given, no one's life improved. It wasn't about that. It was about making the giver and the receivers feel better.

Rudd thought he could do the same on border protection. He declared he would have a more humane policy. As far as he was concerned that was it. He didn't think about how this would lure fifty thousand asylum seekers to Australia, how a thousand people would drown trying to get here.

He didn't think about the consequences, let alone design a workable policy.

As we mature, we learn that our actions have consequences. We learn to think about the consequences they will

have on others. Likewise for governments it is the results of policies that count, not their intentions, because that is what affects people's lives.

Back in 2007 Kevin Rudd declared "the reckless spending must stop". Perhaps he believed it. Perhaps he thought that by saying it, something would happen. But it didn't. He went on to unleash spending without precedent in recent times. Future taxpayers will spend decades paying it off.

Back in 2007 Rudd declared he was an economic conservative. Then after the financial crisis, he declared: "I've always called myself a social democrat." Now he is declaring: "I am an economic nationalist".

Which is it? Well, to tell the truth, he doesn't know either. It all depends on the forum and the prevailing political needs of the day. To get elected in 2007 he needed to look responsible. To match the Katter Party in Queensland today he needs to talk tough about foreign ownership.

People in public life hold views on different issues with varying levels of conviction.

One of the most important is economic policy. Rudd does not look to his convictions to determine economic direction. There is nothing to be found there. He looks to polls, focus groups and the media.

Wayne Swan claimed that Rudd does not hold any Labor values. It is worse than that. He does not hold strongly to any values other than his own political advancement.

It was at first a strength. He could be anything he needed to be at the moment it was necessary. But after a while people figure out that the person who believes in everything really believes in nothing.

And that is why Sunday's speech rang so hollow.

More than anything else, Rudd's campaign launch was about Tony Abbott and his supposed "\$70 billion of cuts".

I counted him mention this figure six times in the speech. There is not a skerrick of evidence behind this allegation.

Last Friday Rudd claimed there was a \$10 billion hole in Abbott's program.

When that exploded in his face he didn't apologise, he showed no contrition, he multiplied the figure by seven and intensified his fear campaign.

Rudd's campaign launch was a hollow speech running from a poor record under cover of a monstrous scare. It will achieve the results it deserves.