

## Political propaganda or just more political rhetoric

Abalinx - A voice from the pavement 7 July 2013

Walking along the pavement in Scullin, one can often see the difference between manmade cracks and those made by a machine in the paving stones. Not so with politics as it is sometimes difficult to differentiate between what is rhetoric, pork barrelling, propaganda and mere waffling. Since Kevin Rudd became Prime Minister again, Labor lost no time in giving their "Labor hope" the so called "Rudd carpet" treatment to ensure that no holds were barred, no barriers too high to tear down and certainly not allowing any criticism of his leadership. Let us be clear about one thing, changing the leader of a failed government cannot change years of neglect, rising costs of living, stupid taxes imposed on a people already burdened and policies that are antiquated.

Over the next two months, Australians will be subjected to a barrage of what one could call in time of war, propaganda, a war of war against the Australian people. Online presence will be massive, news media will be overwhelmed and political statements about what labor has for the future of Australia will be the norm every day until the election is over.

Mind you, walking the pavement it is easier to look up at the sky and see the heavens above, maybe even the clouds that come over the horizon as if a veil is being placed above our heads. It will be the same with information about what is good for the Australian people and what wonders the Australian labor party can do for them. It will be a veil of labor, a facade of rhetoric to mask the wrongs and failures over Labour's policies and their mismanagement of this country's assets.

Even now, the new government ministry is floundering and trying to readjust to its new power status, struggling to come to grips with its responsibilities while the rest of the country and its people look on in despair and wish an election was earlier rather than later. The longer the election is called the more misery the Australian people have to put up with and making promises will not change the minds of a people under any circumstances.

Let us not forget the negative politics, the negative behaviour of our government ministers, the failed policies that have cost lives, the lack of a suitable border protection, increased taxes, rising utility costs, loss of our car and manufacturing industries, families struggling to make ends meet and small businesses going under. It is not hard to guess why the voice from the pavement has chosen to take the walk to the other side of the political divide to gain some security and peace of mind. Labor has failed and changing the leadership will not change the lives of Australians overnight. Abalinx - A voice from the pavement



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## It's the economy stupid: power and persuasion in Australian politics

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Rhetoric designed to persuade and influence is applied in the political, corporate and sporting worlds as part of every change strategy. But it is just that: rhetoric. When newly-minted treasurer Chris Bowen spoke of the "careful management" of the economy, it was not rhetoric. It was propaganda, and it set a dangerous precedent.

When Julia Gillard, in one of her last statements as prime minister said the Australian economy was "growing, stable and strong", she was speaking to a diffuse electorate. She was keen to underpin her government's authority on the strength of the economy in order to move it away from the political mud heap it had driven itself into. For Gillard it was a political truth.

Gillard's statement, however, should be viewed as a set-piece of political rhetoric. It had been washed and scrubbed clean by a phalanx of media relations wonks before it was set free to run among the voters.

The paradigm shift in political discourse that accompanied the dramatic change in parliamentary leadership in the Australian Labor Party is not new. It is a strategy to keep fans alive to their sporting teams when they fail to make the grade. A new coach and a new rhetoric designed to persuade and influence will not, however, help the Australian cricket side to bring home the Ashes.

If viewed in this light and combined with the variety of set pieces from the past three years – including "real Julia" and fake Julia – it was harmless rhetoric. It neither altered the direction of the markets nor had an impact on the thinking of the governor of the reserve bank.

Bowen, however, has provided a different view of the economy. He has stated it is none of the above: not growing, not stable and not strong. It is, he said, a week after Gillard's announcement, uncertain and requiring "careful management". There may be some truth to Bowen's claims: leading economists have indicated that Australia's predicted economic slowdown will be worse than earlier predictions.

Bowen was following Gillard in speaking to the wider electorate. He was speaking to the voters who had watched from the sidelines as Prime Minister Kevin Rudd was replaced by Gillard in 2010 who was then replaced by Rudd.

For Rudd and Bowen the time was ripe for another equally dramatic replacement. The political rhetoric that had sustained the latest Rudd leadership change — similar to the various metaphorically bloody political party leadership changes since the end of World War Two — also had to change.

It is important here to reflect on the Australian political discourse that has existed for more than 65 years since the end of World War Two. It has included the rhetoric of persuasion and influence and focused on the ballot box and the regular election process.

Political persuasion and influence was a vital part of political campaigning leading to a general election. It worked best during a six week period of sustained advertising, media coverage and other traditional elements of political discourse including speeches, rallies, fiestas, and politicians wandering around shopping centres kissing babies.

Unlike election campaigns in developing countries, where propaganda as power and persuasion through vibrant street theatre was an important tactic due to low literacy rates, election campaigning in developed countries was relatively sedate and well, frankly, boring.

Rudd, Bowen and their policy and media strategists decided to change the game. Mild, boring political rhetoric designed to persuade and influence had to be replaced by power and persuasion. By propaganda.

It was a clever tactic. Bowen's statement did not directly contradict Gillard's. What it signalled was its intent as a deliberate tactic to create economic – rather than political – uncertainty. It was designed to shift the gaze from the political road smash within the party towards the billboard image of an economy that was now in the same precarious position it was in immediately before the global financial crisis in 2008.

The fabrication of truths is the central element that sustains propaganda. Bowen's fabrication that the Australian economy required careful management would have gone unnoticed and unreported if stated by opposition spokesman Joe Hockey. It would have been viewed as a set-piece of political rhetoric in the wider political discourse.

The unprecedented length of the election campaign, when combined with the drastic need to shift the focus from the political upheaval within the Labor Party, gave Rudd and Bowen a tactical advantage. Propaganda has surfaced in Australian politics.

**DISCLOSURE STATEMENT.** Richard Stanton does not work for, consult to, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organisation that would benefit from this article, and has no relevant affiliations. University of Sydney does not contribute to the cost of running The Conversation. The Conversation is funded by CSIRO, Melbourne, Monash, RMIT, UTS, UWA, Canberra, CDU, Deakin, Flinders, Griffith, JCU, La Trobe, Massey, Murdoch, Newcastle. QUT, Swinburne, UniSA, USC, USQ, UTAS, UWS and VU.

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