

THE Daily Telegraph

Kevin Rudd unveils "New Leadership" slogan

Sunday Telegraph

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By Linda Silmalis

September 16, 2007 12:00am

KEVIN Rudd declared the election on yesterday and launched Labor's campaign as if he were already prime minister.

Even though Prime Minister John Howard has yet to name the date, the Opposition Leader sought to capitalise on the Government's leadership turmoil by unveiling the ALP campaign slogan "New Leadership" and setting out the key platforms Labor will fight the election on.

Organised secretly in an attempt to catch the Government napping, the campaign features all the hallmarks of a full-blooded campaign launch: the plain blue background with the slogan, a slick video and hundreds of ALP luminaries that cheered every sentence of a speech designed to invigorate the party.

With wife Therese watching, Mr Rudd promised to revolutionise education, reform health, act on climate change, abolish workplace agreements and tackle the housing affordability crisis.

As he spoke, Mr Howard - who has refused to be rushed into calling the election - was touring a shopping centre in his electorate of Bennelong, where he is under threat from star ALP candidate Maxine McKew.

Mr Howard promised to serve a full three years as local member if re-elected, after revealing last week he would hand over to Treasurer Peter Costello some time in the next term.

Mr Rudd chose the Dame Joan Sutherland Performing Arts Centre, at Penrith, for the unofficial campaign launch, deep in the suburban heartland where the ALP hopes to win back the support of the so-called "Howard battlers" in a number of key marginal seats.

A major initiative of the speech was a plan for a statutory body to tackle the nation's skills shortage. Mr Rudd said Australians were now, more than ever, ready for a new leadership. "The day I became leader of the Australian Labor party I said that, as a nation, we were at a fork in the road," he said.

"Today, the choice between those two roads is clearer than ever before: a Government bogged down in the past or a new leadership focused on the future."

A key element to Labor's campaign will be a focus on the well-being of working families.

Despite Australia's prosperity, Mr Rudd said it was harder than ever for ordinary families to own a home, with the cost of an average house now seven times the annual wage.

During the speech, Mr Rudd played on the leadership tension between Mr Howard and Mr Costello.

He said: "Does anyone really believe that this Government can now marginally regain any real sense of direction just because, after 11 years, Mr Howard and Mr Costello have declared yet again that they intend to put up with one another and from now on will call themselves a team?"

Mr Rudd also attacked the Liberal party for lacking the courage to replace its leader, despite having no confidence in Mr Howard.

"There is one difference between Mr Howard and Mr Costello," he said.

"Mr Howard has lost touch with working families: Mr Costello has never been in touch."

Mr Rudd was introduced by former SAS major Peter Tinley, who is one of three former military personnel who are standing for the Labor Party.

Mr Tinley served in Afghanistan and Iraq and was a key strategist from the Australian Special Air Service Regiment involved in the planning and leadership of the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003.

The launch included a screening of a campaign video, which featured environment campaigner Al Gore, who applauded Mr Rudd's stance on climate change.

A senior Labor source said the recruitment of the three former military personnel was a major coup for the party.

"It represents a seal of approval for Mr Rudd's plans to withdraw troops from Iraq and to establish a strong regional security focus," the source said.

Meanwhile, Mr Howard, touring Carlingford Court Shopping Centre, posed for photographs, shook hands, hugged and even kissed constituents for more than 1 hours.

"If I am returned and the Government is returned in the coming election, I will serve full term as a member for Bennelong for the full term and I won't be inflicting a by-election on the people of my electorate," Mr Howard said.

Members of the controversial religious sect, The Exclusive Brethren lent their support, shaking hands with the Prime Minister and following his entourage.

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Full throttle...Kevin Rudd is running his election campaign as if he was already Prime Minister.

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