

# The machinery of the 2007 federal election

John Shipp reviews

## *Inside Kevin07: The People, The Plan, The Prize*

by Christine Jackman  
(Melbourne University Press, 2008,  
320 pages)

If you are looking for hard-hitting political analysis of the Kevin07 campaign in the 2007 federal election, this probably is not the book for you. That being said, Christine Jackman's purpose in writing *Inside Kevin07* seems to have been to tell a more personal drama about flesh and blood people on the inside of a modern political campaign machine, which she does exceptionally well.

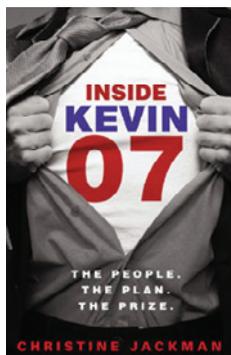
*Inside Kevin07* contains a colourful cast of backroom dealers, marketing gurus, push-pollers, focus group buffs and senior electoral staffers. Each character is explored both through their official role in the campaign, but also through their personality and character (both flaws and strengths), serving to remind us that the grey-faced political apparatchiks, we on the outside love to hate, harbour the same needs and flaws as we do.

Nevertheless, it is difficult to believe someone can rise to be ALP National Secretary despite being as agreeable as Tim Gartrell is depicted by Jackman, especially coming from the most ruthless and factional of political arenas, the NSW ALP.

Since the sources Jackman used to inform her work and the subjects that her work depicts seem to be mostly the same, it is unexceptional that they are treated more glowingly in Jackman's book than they might otherwise have been.

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Jackman highlights facts of historical note, such as the revelation that ACTU National Secretary Greg Combet (now a federal Labor MP) actually hoped to negotiate a compromised industrial relations reform package with the Howard Government, but Labor knew this would blunt their biggest weapon against Howard in the lead up to the 2007 election. Labor was happier to see the coalition destroy itself than engage the government in negotiations to find a middle ground between flexibility and 'fairness.'

Jackman goes into excruciating detail about the sting on Liberal campaigners distributing fake 'Islamic Australia Federation' flyers, an incredibly embarrassing moment for all Liberal supporters of tolerant and liberal-minded disposition.

Some important questions arise

from the events covered by *Inside Kevin07*. Was Howard the wily politician he was made out to be, or had the electorate been itching to vote him out as soon as they were offered a credible Labor alternative? The question that will continue to preoccupy commentators for years to come is whether or not Peter Costello could have performed better if he had been made PM some time prior to the election campaign. It would certainly have been much harder for the ALP to cut through with their old vs. new narrative that it built its campaign upon. Jackman seems to skirt the issue, but it is covered more fully in Peter van Onselen's *Howard's End*, which is a useful companion to *Inside Kevin07*.

Despite being an absorbing and educative insight into the inner-workings of a modern campaign war-room, you can't help but come away from *Inside Kevin07* disappointed about the road Australian politics is heading down. Australia has never enjoyed inspired leadership, as Donald Horne pointed out in his *The Lucky Country*: 'Australia is a lucky country run mainly by second-rate people who share its luck.' If the trend towards symbolism over substance and publicity over policy continues, all sides of politics will have to play along, to the vast detriment of long-term policy outcomes.

The blog Larvatus Prodeo admonishes *Inside Kevin07* as 'a genealogy of advertising slogans.' This shouldn't be so much a criticism of the book, but of Australian politics in general, and the modern ALP in particular. If there is one criticism to make of *Inside Kevin07*, it isn't critical enough of Rudd's preference for trivial media engagement, and his avoidance of mature in-depth scrutiny. But again, this book is more a political drama than a polemic, so it is unremarkable that it only confronts Australia's slide into political decadence in passing.

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