

## Unions hugely influential in swing to Labor: Mackerras

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The union movement's targeted marginal seats campaign played an "absolutely critical" role in generating a dramatic swing to the Labor Party in Saturday's federal election, according to renowned political analyst Malcolm Mackerras. Predicting the Coalition will win 74 berths in the 150-seat House of Representatives, with 70 going to Labor and six to crossbenchers, Mackerras said yesterday that he believed union campaigning had an impact in "pretty much all marginal seats".

"In my personal opinion, union campaigning was absolutely critical in producing the result," he told *Workplace Express*.

Mackerras, a visiting fellow at the Australian Catholic University's Public Policy Institute in Canberra, says the Coalition "did the right thing" by not pushing the key elements of its IR agenda.

He said "very few" voters would care about the ABCC or the Registered Organisations Bill, which he said were about Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull needing to "reconnect" with his party's business base and could not be sold more broadly.

**Unions campaigned** in 28 mostly Coalition-held [marginal seats](#). Labor has won 10 of those seats and is ahead in another four. It also won two seats (Paterson and Dobell) that had been held by the Coalition but became notionally Labor after electoral redistributions (see the [compilation](#) of swings and Labor gains and possible gains in the 28 seats, prepared by *Workplace Express*).

**In NSW, the AEC [predicts](#)** Labor has wrested from the Liberal Party the key marginal seats Eden Monaro, Lindsay, Macarthur and Macquarie. Paterson and Dobell (see above) were already notionally Labor seats after redistributions. Unions NSW secretary Mark Morey says all seats targeted by unions in that state had an average 5.5% swing to Labor, which he credits to "12 months of on-the-ground campaigning and organising" that "moved the debate back to issues that matter to working people".

He said delegates had "taught and upskilled" hundreds of activists throughout the campaign and Unions NSW was now determined to build on the infrastructure and to ensure it translated into growth for the union movement.

**In Queensland**, the Labor Party is ahead in the Liberal Party marginal seat of Forde (with a current swing of 4.49%) and has won Longman. QCU secretary Ross McLennan predicted five seats in which unions "campaign strongly" might change hands. McLennan said the result "vindicates" its campaign to "[put LNP last](#) to protect weekend penalty rates, save Medicare, create local jobs and properly fund education and health".

She said local jobs was a "critical issue" especially in the north and far north of the state, but the Coalition "ignored important questions about the future of industrial relations" and voters "barely heard a word about the ABCC".

**In Victoria**, the Labor secured strong swings in marginal seats it already held by Labor, such as McEwan and Bruce. Labor and unions' fears appear to have been borne out that the CFA dispute could cause a backlash against Labor in Victoria, after the State Labor Government sacked the CFA board and the Emergency Services Minister resigned (see [Related Article](#)).

ACTU president Ged Kearney said unions were "really proud of the result" as Victoria was at a "high watermark" and it was particularly "difficult to swing" the state's voters.

**In Tasmania**, where Labor has is likely to win all three Liberal-held marginal seats, an ousted Coalition MP has taken to social media to vent his frustration. Ousted Bass MP Andrew Nikolic yesterday took to [Facebook](#) to accuse the union movement, Labor and GetUp of running a "dishonest, nasty, personal campaign in Bass built around the core lie of Medicare privatisation".

Alleging "this is what dishonesty looks like", Nikolic said GetUp spent \$500,000 and imported 90 activists into Bass. In another post on election day he asked Facebook friends to share a message warning constituents not to risk their vote "on a return to the cost, chaos & dysfunction of Labor-Green-independent (union controlled) government".

Unions Tasmania secretary Steve Walsh told *Workplace Express* the result was a "vote of confidence in the trade union movement" and claimed Nikolic's "failure" to state his position on penalty rates and other IR policies had "come back to bite him".

He said the ACTU had provided Tasmania with two grassroots campaigners, while hundreds of activists had campaigned in the state since September last year, conducting "10,000 conversations" via door knocks, phone calls, street approaches and workplace meetings. Walsh said unions had campaigned on issues that "really resonated" with voters, such as penalty rates, education and health.

**Whatever the result nationally**, Kearney said the Coalition's "failure to offer a substantive IR policy leaves them with absolutely no mandate for significant changes or indeed any policy that seeks to undermine workers' rights, pay or job security".

Likening the union movement's campaign to *Your Rights at Work* (see [Related Article](#)), Kearney told *Workplace Express* that union organisers and thousands of volunteers were "active in every marginal seat, fighting for the issues our members care about – Medicare, school funding, decent jobs, strong super and penalty rates".

But unlike the Your Rights at Work campaign, Kearney said the union movement would now be "keeping the campaign infrastructure" and will continue to "build the trade union army brick by brick, person by person".

"We are not letting it go this time".

**Meanwhile, Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull has expressed confidence** that he will be able to form a majority government, despite doubts about the future of the ABCC bill (see [Related Article](#)). His government had fallen short of achieving a majority on election night in the House of Representatives, with a [handful](#) of the 150 House of Representatives seats undecided.

Poor Coalition showing in both houses threatens joint sitting. In the Senate, the Coalition is likely to secure only 28 of the 76 seats, according to election analyst Geoff Lambert.

He expects, on the numbers available at 2am on Sunday morning, that Labor will have 27 seats, the Greens nine, Xenophon three and others nine.

Lambert says the data for the Senate "is as good as it's going to get for at least two weeks".

Another psephologist, William Bowe, predicted on Sunday that at best the Coalition will win 27 Senate seats.

The Coalition's likely reduced minority status in the Senate, together with at best a slim majority in the House of Representatives, might have dashed its joint sitting plan (see [Related Article](#)).

Coalition frontbencher Josh Frydenberg [conceded](#) on Sunday that "the numbers are not there to pass those [IR] bills". "We're not going to get the numbers in the double dissolution", he told the ABC's *Insiders* program on Sunday morning.

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