

Printed October 09, 2007 10:50pm AEST

Pollers says union influence will rise

Sid Marris | September 26, 2007

LIKE them or loathe them voters seem in little doubt that unions will enjoy greater influence under Kevin Rudd's government.

An online poll by The Australian/CoreData, conducted this week, found 39 per cent of readers believe unions will have an all encompassing or considerable influence under a Labor Government.

The poll of over 5300 online readers, found 33 per cent thought there was some influence.

The belief about all encompassing or considerable influence was highest in Queensland, 49 per cent, and Western Australia, 45 per cent and lowest in Tasmania, 24 per cent.

A large proportion of 28 per cent suggested unions would have no influence.

While unions and Labor talk up their history, the links are being downplayed in the lead up to the election, including greater censoring of the Your Rights at Work blog sites and some candidates not referring to their time as a union official.

Unions make up a considerable part of the Labor machinery. As well as large source of donations, union delegates make up 50 per cent of the Australian Labor Party's national conference.

The union movements comprehensive community campaign, Your Rights at Work, has been regarded as responsible for keeping Labor strong in the opinion polls even when former leader Kim Beazley's personal ratings were low and as Kevin Rudd rushed to establish his leadership credentials 9 months ago.

The Coalition has been making sport at question time in parliament noting that 70 per cent of the candidates in the upcoming election have a background as a union member.

While the first half of Labor's alternative industrial relations policy was seen as union friendly – largely negotiated between deputy leader Julia Gillard and then ACTU secretary now Labor candidate, Greg Combet – the second part drew the ire of some unionist, particularly keeping the Howard Government's strict restrictions on right of entry into a workplace.

The Your Rights at Work campaign is beginning to take more of a back seat as the federal election looms.

On its web blog site, moderators are weeding out more provocative comments, sparking angry outbursts from participants.

One user known as Cassandra complains "What on earth are 'they' doing to our Forum?".

"It has changed from a robust information and debating venue into a stifled shadow of its former self," she writes.

"Not only that the 'censor' has apparently decided that my last three contributions attacking the Tories are unfit to be published and without even the courtesy of letting me know what heinous crime I have committed. "

"... We have even lost the ability to edit our own postings so that typo's or small slip ups remain - the 'censor' doesn't seem to correct them!

"If this contribution fails then I will know that I and all the rest of us are wasting our time trying to keep the forum going."

Other users, who use nicknames but have to supply their real name and address to organisers to get on the site, have made similar complaints.

"It's called don't upset Kevin before the election. The Labour party does not won't any controversy that could effect the way people vote. It's all about smoke and mirrors. It's that the truth is a casualty of elections," user EV1, an

electric car enthusiast otherwise known as Doug Korthof, says.

The Treasurer Peter Costello last week mocked Labor over its candidate for Fisher, Darrell Main, whose time as a union official was changed removed from the official ALP website.

Copyright 2007 News Limited. All times AEST (GMT +10).