

LIBERAL PARTY OF AUSTRALIA · VICTORIAN DIVISION
ROMSEY BRANCH

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Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Campaign Activities in the Vicinity of Polling Places

The Committee's enquiry into campaign activities in the vicinity of polling places is most timely. The behaviour of some persons during pre-polling at the Victorian Electoral Commission offices in Gisborne prior to the state election on 29 November, 2014 was disgraceful.

The intended function of political party personnel attending pre-polling places is to hand out how-to-vote cards for the guidance of voters. However, this was ignored by Labor personnel and accompanying union associates, who appeared determined to conduct an aggressive and exclusionary, last-minute campaign.

The Labor candidate for the seat of Macedon, who attended the pre-polling place on most days, intercepted voters approaching the pre-polling place and spruiked (certainly the most appropriate word) in their faces down to and, in many cases, through the doors of the Electoral Commission offices. When cautioned by Electoral Commission personnel to maintain the required distance from the entrance, she would modify her behaviour briefly, and then resumed the practice.

The pre-polling place was almost always also attended by auxiliary Labor personnel in the form of relatives of the candidate, children and alleged unionists; persons dressed as firemen, ambulance personnel or the like. These people would flood the zone of approach of intending voters with the clear intent of excluding those handing out cards for the Liberal candidate. Depending upon the numbers present, this practice was pursued in a most aggressive and intimidating way and often involved deliberate physical contact.

In addition to the above behaviour, all of those on the Labor side, including children, continuously attempted to proselytize intending voters in any possible way. For example, a child was shouting that intending voters should vote Labor, '...because my mummy is an ambo'. Persons wore tee shirts with the legend, '\$100,000 Degrees' (a federal issue). While not occurring at the pre-polling site, distressed pensioners stated that they had

received telephone calls from the Labor Party saying that, 'the Liberals were going to cut their pensions' (another federal issue).

The aggressiveness displayed by the Labor side was all the more unpleasant, as many people handing out cards for the Liberal candidate were somewhat advanced in years and less able to cope with confrontation and intimidation. Notwithstanding, Labor personnel made no attempt to abate their behaviour.

The situation was rendered even more unpleasant by weather extremes that occurred during the pre-polling period and from which there was no shelter available.

The recommendations of this branch are:

1. Personnel handing out how-to-vote cards should be limited to a specified number for each party at any one time (electoral commissions can specify numbers).
2. Barriers should be placed to define the required positions of personnel handing out how-to-vote cards.
3. Personnel handing out how-to-vote cards should be permitted to say only the name of the candidate and the party.
4. No form of advertising should be permitted at the pre-polling place or within sight of it, other than party billboards or posters of a defined maximum size (party tee shirts without political slogans might be permitted).
5. Other than personnel handing out how-to-vote cards, no unionists or other supporters should be permitted at or within sight of the pre-polling place.
6. Fixed shelter of some sort would make it unnecessary for persons handing out how-to-vote cards to congregate at the pre-polling place entrance to avoid inclement weather.

Members who experienced the circumstances detailed above will be happy to give personal testimony, should this be required.

Yours sincerely

Robert Phillips
Chairman

Barrie John Sutton
Chairman
MAGDON ELECTORAL COMPLAINTS