
Black activist Right man for ALP job

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Leading Aboriginal activist Warren Mundine has won the backing of Labor's powerful Right faction to run against left-wing dissident Carmen Lawrence for the ALP presidency.

Mr Mundine's endorsement will ensure a lively "heart-and-soul" campaign for support of Labor's 50,000 rank-and-file, who will participate next month in a party-wide election for the first time. The Right will pitch Mr Mundine, who almost won a Senate position at the 2001 election, as a forceful voice for indigenous Australia in an effort to counter Dr Lawrence's appeal to grassroots members.

But the former West Australian premier, who quit Simon Crean's shadow ministry last December, has also been busy building a support base -- although she is yet to formally announce her candidacy.

The Australian has learned Duncan Kerr, a former Keating government minister, will support Dr Lawrence as part of an informal Left "ticket".

Sydney-based public relations executive Michael Samaras has also joined the Lawrence bandwagon.

Senior Left figures believe Dr Lawrence, who described Mr Crean's leadership as "timid" when she quit the front bench, is well placed to win the ALP presidency. This in turn would give her a powerful platform to reshape ALP policy on sensitive issues such as refugees in the lead-up to next year's election. Under new party rules, Labor's rank-and-file will directly elect a president, who will chair January's national conference in Sydney.

Members will also elect two vice-presidents to be rotated into the top position over the next three years.

Mr Mundine, a cousin of boxer Anthony Mundine, is chairman of NSW Country Labor and chief executive of the NSW Native Title Service.

Nominations for the presidency close on September 19. The party's membership then has a month from October 1 to lodge their votes.

Labor's smaller Centre-Left faction is yet to nominate its candidate. Senior union official and incumbent ALP president Greg Sword has yet to decide whether to run.

"I've made no decision at this point -- it's been a long, hard three years," Mr Sword told The Australian.