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Haines martyred on the altar of victory

Elections, Comm - Results

By PETER BOWERS

ADELAIDE: Martyrdom for gamblers who take reckless risks and lose is a peculiar Australian form of beatification, testament to the national disposition to take a punt on anything from wall-walking flies to wire-walking politicians.

Having chanced leadership, future - the lot - on winning the South Australian seat of Kingston, having tried Icarus-like to defy gravity - and crashed - the moment for martyrdom had arrived for Janine Haines, ex-senator, ex-leader of the Australian Democrats, ex-everything.

By gaining 26 per cent of the vote in Kingston, Haines had done better than any other Democrat in any election for Senate or House since Don Chipp formed the party 12 years ago.

But 26 per cent left her third, behind the Labor member Gordon Bilney (37 per cent) and the Liberals' Judy Fuller (33 per cent).

For months, she had been leading in the opinion polls, but her support appeared to fall away in the last week of the campaign.

Eight-thirty o'clock in the disco bar of Hallett Cove Tavern on a boozy Saturday night may seem a mite incongruous for martyrdom to be proclaimed.

That the Democrats present were not sure whether it was a celebration or a wake elevated the poignancy of the occasion.

Their leader had been cut down at the moment of a famous victory for her party at large. Those Democrats know how the sailors on HMS Victory felt at Trafalgar when their Lord Admiral was dropped by a French sniper.

It is to be seriously doubted whether Malcolm Fraser or Bob Hawke could have got through



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such an evening without a tear, a runny nose or a quivering lip.

All that came from Janine Haines's eyes was the sharp light of someone who knew exactly what she had to say and had to do.

"We weren't so lucky down here in Kingston," she said. "That was a risk we all knew we were taking 14 months ago.

"It looked good up until about Tuesday, when the dirty tricks campaign started." (Hisses).

"The hissing is fine but it is not going to change the result. We knew this was likely to happen as a consequence of the change made to the Electoral Act, which the Liberal and Labor parties did a couple of years ago to remove that section of the act that prohibited candidates, Members of Parliament, from lying to the electorate.

"And, Joves, they have used that to advantage in Kingston.

"However, it has only been in Kingston that that has happened, and the irony of it all is not only has the Liberals' misinformation

campaign ensured that Labor retains the seat, but the Call to Australia [Party] has made it absolutely inevitable that Labor will hold the seat.

"So much for God's law. He must be smiling on somebody.

"So, go on with your drinking and celebrations. We do have something to celebrate: the party is more viable than ever before.

"It will continue under a new leader to progress as it has in the last few years. Whoever that new leader is, I wish her or him very well, indeed. You've got a tremendous team to work with and a tremendous leadership. Thank you."

Ms Haines told reporters that voters swung to Labor in the last three days as a consequence of a number of extremely misleading advertisements and pamphlets put out by both her major opponents.

"That's politics," she said. "I have no regrets. I did the right thing, I made the right decision, I took the right risks, and the results have been shown around the rest of the country."

What was she doing now?

"What I am doing now is standing here looking slightly stupid with a bunch of flowers."

Ms Haines was coping with disaster by doing what few politicians can do in the circumstances - not taking herself too seriously.

"I have no idea what I will be doing from tomorrow onwards."

What she knew with absolute certainty was that she was out of politics forever.

Anointing time had arrived. Up stepped Michael Elliott, Australian Democrat MLC in the South Australian Parliament.

"Janine took a huge gamble and looks like being the martyr of the cause," he declared.