

Victory Speech: William Hughes, Prime Minister (National Labor)

MAY 5, 1917

“It is too early yet to speak with certainty as to the final results of the momentous appeal to the people. But the returns to hand show conclusively that the people of Australia have spoken with a clarion voice in favor of Australia and the Empire. The junto, supported by disloyalists and extremists, has been taught a lesson that it will not soon forget. Australia has been true to herself; sound, stable and sane government is now assured, and the men at the front and the whole Empire know that Australia is going to stand as a united nation, resolute to prosecute this war to decisive victory.

From the latest Senate returns, we have swept the Senate in Western Australia, South Australia, Tasmania, Victoria and, so far, in New South Wales also. There is a fair chance of our doing so in Queensland. In any case, an overwhelming majority in the House of Representatives is assured, and a working majority in the Senate highly probable.

I am very pleased that the electors of Bendigo have voted in such overwhelming numbers for me as the leader of the National party. The figures as they stand give me a greater majority than any candidate has ever received since the establishment of the Commonwealth. I desire to express my keen sense of appreciation of the enthusiastic and untiring efforts of the thousands of loyal workers, men and women, who have worked night and day to ensure my return. In the face of the campaign of vile abuse and gross misrepresentation it might be fairly said that not only the result of the Bendigo election, but the elections generally, are an outward and visible manifestation that the great bulk of the Australian people are behind the “Win-the-War” party and determined to put down the junto and disloyalism at all costs.”

Source: Compiled from The Age, May 7th 1917, page 8 and The Sydney Morning Herald.

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“It now appears quite certain that we will sweep the Senate in every State, as every additional return improves the position of the National candidates. I deeply regret that it seems extremely likely from the latest figures that Mr. Spence will be defeated. I regard Mr. Spence’s defeat as a lasting reproach to all organised Labour, and particularly to the A.W.U. members for whom he has devoted his life, but I feel certain that, although he may be defeated in this contest, his reputation will shine with still greater lustre than it has ever done in the eyes of every honourable man and woman throughout the Commonwealth, whether Labour or Liberal. I am confident, too, that if he is defeated this time before very long he will again be triumphantly returned by the electors to represent them in the National Parliament.

Although the figures are adverse at present, I expect that later results will improve the outlook. I have every confidence that Mr. Bamford will be returned. Of Mr. Glynn’s chance I do not despair. I think, now that his position is improving with every return, that the absent and soldiers’ votes will pull him through.”

Source: Compiled from Sydney Morning Herald, May 8th 1917, page 7 and The Age.