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Anti-US sentiment will grow if John McCain wins US election, expert warns

Guy Healy | October 28, 2008

ANTI-AMERICANISM is likely to flare in Australia if the McCain-Palin ticket prevails on November 4, a leading expert on anti-Americanism has warned.

Associate-Professor Brendan O'Connor, a visiting fellow at Washington's Woodrow Wilson Centre, made the comment yesterday following the announcement he will join three other eminent academics to posts at the US Studies Centre at Sydney University.

Both Australian political parties - especially Labor - had "kept a lid" on Australian anti-Americanism and not exploited it for electoral purposes the way former German chancellor, Gerhard Schroeder, unsuccessfully used it in his last campaign, Associate-Professor O'Connor told the HES from Washington.

Against a backdrop of a BBC poll that showed 62 per cent of Australians were optimistic an Obama presidency would improve ties, Associate-Professor O'Connor said there "would be a degree of disappointment, Australians would be dumb-founded (if he didn't win)".

But if Barack Obama did win as polls increasingly suggest, the Rudd Government would have its work cut out for it trying to replicate the "amazing level of access" former prime minister John Howard enjoyed with US President George W. Bush.

Equally, a McCain-Palin win would be "quite challenging for alliance management for Kevin Rudd" given how Mr Bush and Sarah Palin "fitted" centuries-old stereotypes of Americans being populist, anti-intellectual and culturally unsophisticated, he said.

Associate-Professor O'Connor said the most striking insight from working in Washington was how US policy formation was so "multi-headed, with a variety of branches of power and sources of policy-making: being here you get a sense of this being an enormous machine".

"This bureaucracy tries to make decisions but is far less coherent than we get a sense of from outside the US; all these branches are not moving in same direction or singing off same page," he said.

Political scientists Margaret Levi and Associate-Professor O'Connor join the centre's permanent staff. Public health expert Lawrence Gostin and public opinion analyst Simon Jackman will lead research projects at the centre next year.

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