

Union split over McMahon

A SPLIT has emerged in the ranks of the region's powerful left-wing unions as anger over the installation of Lylea McMahon as the preferred preselection candidate in Shellharbour grows.

On Wednesday, AWU branch secretary Andy Gillespie warned Labor powerbrokers that they risked a challenge from a union-backed candidate at next year's state election if Shellharbour branch members were not given a rank and file vote.

Mr Gillespie singled out Ms McMahon for public criticism after she was one of five preferred candidates nominated by Premier Morris Iemma and expected to be endorsed by the ALP national executive this morning.

He did not rule out a leftwing union revolt like the one which occurred in the 2002 Cunningham by-election that saw Michael Organ become the first Greens MP in the federal lower house.

Mr Gillespie's call for Mr Iemma to rethink his backing of Ms McMahon was echoed yesterday by CFMEU construction division assistant state secretary Peter Zaboyak, who said his members could not support Ms McMahon because of her position as a senior human resources officer for BlueScope Steel.

Mr Zaboyak said there was a lot of anger over Labor's move to deny rank and file party members a say in their candidate. A meeting of Illawarra unions is expected to be held this morning to plan further action.

But left-wing opposition is far from united. The *Mercury* has obtained a copy of a letter written by NSW Public Service Association (PSA) general secretary John Cahill and sent to State ALP general secretary Mark Arbib on Wednesday, supporting Ms McMahon.

Mr Cahill wrote: "I have personally known Lylea for over 10 years ... and during that time Lylea has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to the trade union movement and the improvement of employment conditions for working men and women.

"She has been an active member of the PSA for many years, representing the PSA as a delegate to the South Coast Labour Council and serving as a PSA Women's Councillor.

"Lylea served as the secretary-organiser of the South Coast May Day committee and has been a strong advocate for the rights of workers and their families."



Union Tussle:
Left wing unions have split over Premier Morris Iemma's support to make Lylea McMahon Labor's candidate for the new seat of Shellharbour. The AWU says it may run a spoiling candidate in the seat.