

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

PRESS RELEASE 524#

Cardinal Pell Flexes his Political Muscles

In Anticipation of an Abbott Win

5 September 2013



Illustration: Matt Golding

<http://www.theage.com.au/federal-politics/federal-election-2013/church-lobby-in-win-over-charities-watchdog-20130831-2sxqs.html#ixzz2dsnUnnyF>

Religious Institutions of Australia are not only laughing all the way to the bank with taxpayer subsidies of educational institutions. They are determined to do so without any rules, regulations or accountability.

The pressure applied by the Sydney church through the charities debate has raised the question of the access and sway it may enjoy under Australia's first Catholic Conservative prime minister and his Catholic-strong frontbench. This includes Kevin Andrews, Barnaby Joyce, Joe Hockey, Malcolm Turnbull (a convert), Andrew Robb and Christopher Pyne.

The Fairfax, not the Murdoch Press have revealed Archbishop Pell's recent lobbying against the Labor Party's Charities Commission, a paper tiger that might one day breathe fire. Royce Millar in the *Age* of 1 September 2013 wrote an article: *Church Lobby in Win over Charities Watchdog*. DOGS find his reporting of interest. The impact of the 'purple' economy of the Australian supernatural industry on our Australian democracy is the result of decades of church lobbying and backroom deals. State Aid to religious schools is only part of a multi-billion dollar industry. But the entanglement of Church and State in this country is further exacerbated by billions of dollars in taxation expenditures, otherwise known as exemptions. In order to get a handle on this enormous expenditure, the Labor Government followed the UK and Canada with a watered down version of a Charities Commission. Even this captured bureaucracy (headed by Susan Pascoe, an ex-employee of the Catholic administration) is too dangerous for the Australian Catholic Church lobby.



Royce Millar Investigative reporter on the *Age* has this to say:

If Tony Abbott is elected prime minister on Saturday he will abolish the watchdog established by Labor to keep an eye on the billions of dollars received and spent by Australian charities each year. Why?

The answer, in part at least, may be the lobbying power of church conservatives, the Catholic Church in particular, and the office of Sydney Cardinal George Pell, more particularly still.

And their focus has not been the Coalition alone. Labor insiders acknowledge the impact of Cardinal Pell's office as it reduced the scope of its new national regulator, the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission.

*Charity leaders, church heads and political insiders have told *The Sunday Age* about the lobbying campaign over charities regulation by the Sydney archdiocese, notably Cardinal Pell's business manager and chief political envoy, Danny Casey....*

Labor senator Ursula Stephens has watched the campaigning over the commission at close quarters, including from her former position as parliamentary secretary for social inclusion, where she had responsibility for reform of charities regulation.

A proud Catholic, she confirms heavy lobbying of both sides of politics, including by the national Catholic Bishops Conference and separately by the clearly more anti-regulation Sydney archdiocese.

She says she had "absolutely" no doubt that Cardinal Pell's representatives had had a big influence on opposition family and human services spokesman Kevin Andrews' promise in mid-2012 to abolish the commission, well before Labor detailed its final, amended form in Parliament, a position he reiterated last week.

"I'm well aware that Sydney lobbied the opposition very hard on this issue, says Senator Stephens. "They got to Kevin Andrews early."...

Over 20 years a string of commissions and committees has called for better regulation of Australia's \$43 billion charitable sector.

In 2010, the Productivity Commission slammed the regulation regime shared by the Australian Taxation Office, the Australian Securities and Investments Commission and the states as too complex, too costly, and too short on transparency.

Labor's response was the new charities commission, which opened for business in January. It is meant to be a one-stop shop that keeps a register of charities - there are 60,000 large ones and 600,000 not-for-profit groups in all - helps them meet their obligations, and investigates them when they don't.

Given the Liberals' ideological commitment to the idea of small government, suspicion about a national regulator is arguably consistent with the Liberal philosophy.....

On Friday Catholic Education Melbourne issued a statement of support for the Coalition's policy. It was sent to The Sunday Age by Cardinal Pell's Sydney office.

But if Mr Andrews has enjoyed some spiritual guidance in his policymaking from Cardinal Pell, he is not alone.

After its initial tabling in mid-2012, the charities legislation was repeatedly amended, with some of its more demanding reporting requirements removed, especially for churches.

Notable among the changes was a watering-down of clauses requiring small religious bodies - local parishes - to account for their income.

Another was to remove the onus on organisations to prove they work in the public interest.

The Sunday Age is aware of frustration among some Labor insiders that some of the amendments allowed the churches greater cover when, arguably, they should be facing more, not less, scrutiny.

Senator Stephens says that, as Labor shaped its charities bill, the Catholic Church in particular pressed hard for modification in countless meetings with Assistant Treasurer David Bradbury.

Did the church have a major hand in softening Labor's charities regime? "Yes they had a victory there," says Senator Stephens.

LISTEN TO THE DOGS PROGRAM

3 CR : 855 ON THE AM DIAL

12 NOON SATURDAYS

ALSO ON PODCAST