

Tony Abbott ally Eric Abetz critical of Malcolm Turnbull over industrial relations



Adam Gartrell, SMH, 22 Oct 2016

A key ally of Tony Abbott has criticised Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull's timid approach to workplace reform and failure to flesh out his "jobs and growth" election mantra with actual substance.

With tensions between Mr Abbott and Mr Turnbull already running high after their public spat over gun control and their showdown over Liberal Party reform, former workplace relations minister and Abbott lieutenant Eric Abetz has thrown more fuel on the fire.

After the PM and former PM contradicted each other in Parliament, one government MP has tried to water down the feud saying they're actually 'old friends'. Courtesy Channel 9.

In a speech to the conservative H.R. Nicholls Society in Melbourne on Friday night Senator Abetz was deeply critical of Mr Turnbull's election campaign, which left the Coalition with a one-seat majority. With Opposition Leader Bill Shorten's union links in the frame after the Royal Commission into union corruption, Senator Abetz said he had expected the Coalition to campaign on the "vital importance" of resurrecting the Australian Building and Construction Commission - the very issue Mr Turnbull used to trigger the July 2 double dissolution.



Tasmanian senator Eric Abetz says a campaign has been under way since the 1970s to deconstruct marriage and "rob it of its meaning". Photo: Alex Ellinghausen

"This provided the Coalition an unbelievably unique opportunity to run a well-founded factually based campaign warning our fellow Australians as to the consequences of electing Labor whilst putting some extra substance to our 'jobs and growth' mantra," he said. "Instead, the limit of our mandate on workplace reform that we took to the people was some last minute minor change on CFA volunteers, protecting migrant workers as well as the ABCC and Registered Organisations Bills."

Not even the un-legislated elements of the 2013 election policy were taken forward, he said. "Those that were critical of the timidity of the Abbott era now have opportunity to quietly reflect on the wisdom and fairness of that unwarranted criticism – at least in comparative terms."



Rising tensions: Malcolm Turnbull and Tony Abbott. Photo: Andrew Meares

Senator Abetz acknowledged that workplace reform was still a sensitive area for the Coalition after the deeply unpopular Howard-era Work Choices. But he said it was a "matter of regret" the Coalition did not seek a mandate for more reform. "We need to tread cautiously yet purposefully," he said. "It is vital that the government advance workplace reform as a top tier priority if it is to achieve its stated desire of pursuing jobs and growth. The hard yards have been done, we have two large reports that don't only recommend change but make an unassailable case why that change is imperative. "All that is needed is the political will. A failure of determination will have a lasting effect on our economy, on employers but above all on workers and their families who will be denied a self-sustaining work opportunity."

Senator Abetz said he will "continue to agitate" for reform.

Mr Turnbull dumped Senator Abetz from the frontbench when he replaced Mr Abbott in the top job last year.