

Andrew Bolt: State government's disgrace is too hard to swallow

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ARE any thieves more shameless than the 21 politicians of the Victorian government exposed by Wednesday's Ombudsman's report? First, these Labor politicians cheat taxpayers out of \$388,000. Then they spend \$1 million of their victims' money trying to stop the Ombudsman investigating. And on Wednesday, when they were finally nailed as fraudsters, Premier Daniel Andrews announces he's paid back the cash and no one in his team will face any consequences.

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Wow. Would any other citizen who rorted \$388,000 get off so easily? What a disgrace.

Those 21 Labor politicians were caught out hiring field organisers — the infamous “Red Shirts” — for Labor's successful 2014 campaign and falsely claiming they were doing electoral work instead. That meant taxpayers were slugged for salaries that should have been paid by Labor.

Ombudsman Deborah Glass said 19 MPs made false declarations on time-sheets for these “Red Shirts” — yet none face the sack or charges.

Glass was mild in calling this scam an “artifice”, adding that “misuse of public funds” risks “diminishing further” our already falling trust in politicians. In some ways, this rort was worse, not just because it was shameless but because the government then spent \$1 million of taxpayers' money to stop the Ombudsman from investigating, fighting her in the Supreme Court, Appeals Court and High Court.

Will Labor now repay that \$1 million, too? What other fraudster gets to use their victim's cash to pay for their legal defence?



Victorian Ombudsman Deborah Green. Picture: AAP

And what of Andrews? When the *Herald Sun* broke the news of this rort in 2015, the Premier defended his Red Shirts: “I make no apology for a team of people working as hard as possible to get rid of one of the worst governments this state has seen.”

Now he claims he knew nothing of the taxpayer funding the campaigners in a scheme run mainly by former Treasurer John Lenders and he did not recall discussing it as a member of Labor’s Campaign Committee.

That’s just one more thing about this that’s hard to swallow.