

The Senate

Committee of Privileges

Person referred to in the Senate

Professor David Peetz

124th Report

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REPORT

1. On 29 November 2005 the President of the Senate, Senator the Hon. Paul Calvert, received a submission from Professor David Peetz, seeking redress under the resolution of the Senate of 25 February 1988 relating to the protection of persons referred to in the Senate (Privilege Resolution 5).

2. The submission referred to statements made by Senator the Hon. Eric Abetz in question time on 8 November 2005. The President, having accepted the submission as a submission for the purposes of the resolution, referred it to the Committee of Privileges on 30 November 2005.

3. The committee met in private session on 1 December 2005 and, pursuant to paragraph (3) of Privilege Resolution 5, decided to consider the submission. In agreeing to the attached response, the committee has decided to recommend its incorporation in *Hansard* without change.

4. The committee **recommends:**

That a response by Professor David Peetz in the terms specified at Appendix 1, be incorporated in *Hansard*.

John Faulkner
Chair

APPENDIX ONE

RESPONSE BY PROFESSOR DAVID PEETZ PURSUANT TO RESOLUTION 5(7)(B) OF THE SENATE OF 25 FEBRUARY 1988

On 8 November 2005, in question time, Senator Abetz in his capacity as Minister representing the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations made a number of claims regarding me. These included that I was engaged in 'moral equivocation about terrorism', that I am therefore one of the 'extreme people' in public debate and that I 'will have no compunction whatsoever about deliberately misrepresenting' government policy. These allegations about my attitude to terrorism were made in response to a question from Senator Brandis about government proposals regarding unfair dismissals. In turn, this question and the subsequent reply were prompted by an interview with me on *AM* the preceding week concerning the Workplace Relations Amendment (Work Choices) Bill.

The Minister's allegations were based on a selective and misleading quotation from a poem I wrote four years ago, while living in Quebec City, and which was published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 17 September 2001. The poem was called "The President and the Terrorist", although the Herald amended the title to simply read "The Terrorist". The message of the poem was simple and tragically prophetic: that responses to terrorism that kill innocent people will only lead to more violence and advance the terrorists' cause. A reading of the poem demonstrates this:

The President and the Terrorist

The President opened the door, and saw inside his room
A ghostly apparition, with face of blood and doom
'Twas the Terrorist he looked upon, at first he could but stare
Then flew at him with fists enraged...they merely sailed through air
He picked himself up off the ground, and turned to face the ghoul
"You murdered untold innocents! There's none have been so cruel!
You're working with the Devil! All evils, rolled in one!
Good will overcome evil, and justice must be done!"
The Terrorist replied "With some of that, I must agree.
Yes, evil will be overcome by good, but sir, you see
I know you are the evil one, and good is on my side!
You are the force of Satan, and that is why I died"
The president spat out the words "You shattered countless lives!
I'll wipe out all of you so not a single one survives!"
"But just how will you do that?" the Terrorist then asked
"You don't know where we are, you cannot see behind our masks!"

“We’ll send in troops, and bombers too” the President replied
 “Destroy all your headquarters, you can’t forever hide!”
 “We’ve done it pretty well this far, so I can call your bluff.
 You may get one or two of us, but that is not enough!”
 “We’ll bomb all those who harbour you, destroy your evil friends
 We will not stop our torment till your reign of terror ends!”
 The Terrorist was pleased at this, the outcome he could guess,
 “And untold innocents, they will be caught up in this, yes?”
 The President’s blood pressure rose, his face went vivid red
 “We won’t be satisfied till every one of you is dead!
 This is a war we’re in now, and your sort will rue this day!
 It can’t be helped if some civilians die along the way.
 We must put an end to terrorists! We’ll crush you in the ground!”
 At this, the Terrorist leapt up and gave a gleeful sound
 “Yes!” he yelled, “You must ensure you blast us into sand!
 You must attack with every ounce of force you have at hand!”
 The President was yelling too, his voice was almost shrill
 “We’ll squash the flames of hatred in you men who live to kill”
 The Terrorist was joyful, “yes, blood it must be spilled!
 You must fan the flames of hatred that keep us growing still”
 The President, though, couldn’t hear, above his own loud voice
 As both screamed out, in unison, “it’s war! There is no choice!”
 At this the Terrorist saw no need to discuss things more
 Pleased with his work, this ghoulish monster faded through a wall
 His whole game plan was playing out now, right before his eyes
 As he settled down and waited for the body count to rise

There is no ambiguity about terrorism in this poem – the terrorist is a ‘ghoulish monster’ who is ‘waiting for the body count to rise’. The message of the poem was obvious to those who read it. For example, an Iranian living in Quebec City wrote to me on 15 September 2001:

I got goose bumps as I was reading what u wrote. I think and feel the same way. Since the day it happened I’ve been watching news and hoping that I wouldn’t hear the attack is being linked to Iran because I grew up in Iran and I’m so afraid that something like this will bring more blood and misery to people who have been stroked by war and revolution and sanctions.

Arcadia Flynn, who ran a poetry web site, wrote on 18 September 2001

‘The President and the Terrorist’ is indeed a powerful poem (and how true!). With your agreement, I’d like to email it to some friends.

The poem has been unquestionably been misrepresented by the Minister. The use of phrases like ‘moral equivocation about terrorism’, ‘extreme’ and ‘no compunction whatsoever about deliberately misrepresenting’ are designed to discredit me and dissuade me from participating in public debate on industrial relations. Equally, the

attack is aimed at dissuading the Australian Broadcasting Corporation from broadcasting any of my analyses on industrial relations, as the Minister also claimed that ‘The ABC does itself and the Australian people no service by presenting someone like David Peetz as a “respected academic”’.

It is necessary here to briefly outline my qualifications to speak on industrial relations matters. I am professor of industrial relations at Griffith University, have several years experience working in the Senior Executive Service of the then federal Department of Industrial Relations, have undertaken a number of projects for the International Labour Organisation, and am currently president of the Association of Industrial Relations Academics of Australia and New Zealand. None of this was acknowledged by the Minister. In referring to me as ‘Mr Peetz’ the Minister even sought to ignore my standing as a professor.

Instead, the Minister asserted that I did ‘research sponsored by the ACTU’. He failed to mention that this research was funded by the Commonwealth Government through the Australian Research Council, and was approved by the then Minister for Education, Dr Kemp. Nor did he mention that I have done research and consultancy work for such employers as Brisbane City Council, Redland City Council and Queensland Rail, and for the Department of Workplace Relations and Small Business under a Liberal Minister. He asserted that I was ‘reported as being a singer in a trade union choir’, failing to mention that I left the Brisbane Combined Unions Choir, after a short period, in 2000. He asserted that I wrote ‘poetry for the Workers Online web site, which calls him its “resident bard”’, failing to point out that my poems (uncensored by that publication) satirised both sides of politics, that I wrote as many articles for the *Courier-Mail* as I wrote poems for Workers Online in 2005, that I have also written pieces for the employers’ magazine *HR Monthly*, have been interviewed by or had my research quoted in such outlets as *Business Review Weekly*, *Management Now*, the *Australian Financial Review*, *Business Queensland*, and a large number of newspapers, or that I have also been published in major national and international journals such as *Industrial Relations*, *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, *Journal of Industrial Relations*, *International Journal of Manpower, Relations Industrielles*, *Australian Journal of Labour Economics*, *International Journal of Employment Studies*, *Economic and Labour Relations Review*, *Labour and Industry*, *Australian Bulletin of Labour* and *Asia-Pacific Journal of Human Resources* and by reputable publishers such as Allen and Unwin and Cambridge University Press.

While I am deeply concerned by these attempts to portray me as an extremist and terrorist sympathiser, I will not be dissuaded from speaking on industrial relations matters in public. However, my deeper concern is for the impact that such attempts at character assassination have on discouraging informed debate in Australia today.

David Peetz
Professor of Industrial Relations
Griffith University.