

The Senate

Committee of Privileges

Person referred to in the Senate

Professor Barbara Pocock

126th Report

February 2006

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*Senator Johnston, who questioned Professor Pocock at a committee hearing referred to in her statement, did not participate in any of the proceedings of the committee leading to this report

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REPORT

1. On 3 February 2006 the President of the Senate, Senator the Hon. Paul Calvert, received a submission from Professor Barbara Pocock, Director, Centre for Work and Life, University of South Australia, 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 comments made by Senator the Hon. Eric Abetz in question time on 29 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 6 February 2006.

3. The committee met in private session on 9 February 2006 and, pursuant to paragraph (3) of Privilege Resolution 5, decided to consider the submission. After deciding to recommend to the Senate that an agreed statement be incorporated in *Hansard*, the committee contacted Professor Pocock and the statement at Appendix One has been agreed to by Professor Pocock and the committee in accordance with Resolution 5(7)(b).

4. The committee **recommends:**

That a response by Professor Barbara Pocock in the terms specified at Appendix One, be incorporated in *Hansard*.

John Faulkner
Chair

APPENDIX ONE

RESPONSE BY PROFESSOR BARBARA POCOCK PURSUANT TO RESOLUTION 5(7)(b) OF THE SENATE OF 25 FEBRUARY 1988

On 29th November 2005 in question time Senator Abetz, in his capacity as Minister representing the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, said that I had misled parliament. He went on to question my independence calling me 'supposedly independent'.

Specifically, Senator Abetz referred to my appearance before the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Committee's Inquiry into the Work Choices Bill. Senator Abetz said that I had 'failed to disclose union-funded research totalling well over \$500,000. She also failed to disclose a period of full-time work with the United Trades and Labour Council and two years working for the former leader of the Australian Democrats.'

I regard the statement that I failed to disclose facts to a committee of the Parliament as a serious allegation. My reputation as a reliable person who does not lie or mislead is of great importance to me, both professionally and personally.

Senator Abetz is factually wrong on the three charges of 'failing to disclose' that he levels at me under privilege. These facts are easily tested by reference to public sources and to Hansard.

Since 1987 I have received funds from the ACTU for research projects (including ACTU contributions to research projects funded in the main by the Australian Research Council) to the value of \$55,000 (\$30,000 for research on long hours of work, \$5,000 for research on precarious employment and a \$20,000 contribution to an ARC Linkage grant).

I have received research funds of \$87,000 for other union-linked projects. This includes the project I mentioned to the Committee that I am undertaking with unions on the effects of low pay, to which union organisations are contributing funds of \$72,000 (much less than my estimate before the Senate Committee).

Since 1987 my research has been supported by funds of over \$1.4 million. Of this, only 10 per cent is made up of funds from union sources (\$142,000). This is close to the level of support I have received from non-ARC government bodies (federal, state and local), and less than support from large corporations. This is well below the \$500,000 alleged by Senator Abetz. The bulk of support for my research has come from competitively won, peer-assessed ARC grants through the Commonwealth Government.

Over my twenty years of active research I have undertaken significant projects on vocational education, industry restructuring, industrial relations theory, work and family, family friendly conditions in Aboriginal legal services, work/life balance, part-time and casual work, equal pay, and women's employment, as well as women's representation in unions and union reform.

Senator Abetz implies that having received funds from unions, I am no longer independent. In fact, I have been a critic of many union activities as my publications show. However, my research often pursues analysis of employment issues as they affect the disadvantaged, including the low paid and women. These issues are also of obvious concern to trade unions. This coincidence of concern explains union support for my research into low pay, long hours and precarious employment and their effects upon Australian workers and their families. It does not, however, mean that I am a paid advocate for unions, just as I do not become a spokesperson for a corporation or a Commonwealth government agency when they contract me to research a particular issue. I guard the independence of my analysis with vigour. However, this is the conflation that Senator Abetz suggests. It is wrong.

The second allegation that Senator Abetz makes is that I failed to disclose that I had worked for 'a period of full-time work with the United Trades and Labour Council and two years working for the former leader of the Australian Democrats'. As is readily apparent from public web sources (including my own web site and that of the University of Adelaide), I worked for the United Trades and Labour Council from 1986-88 and for Senator Stott Despoja for fourteen months in 2001-02. I have also worked - and for longer periods - for the Reserve Bank of Australia and the NSW Government and, for the last seventeen years, as a university academic. I did not disclose any of these facts to the Senate Committee for the simple reason that *I was not asked*. To suggest that I 'failed to disclose' my employment history is disingenuous to say the very least.

Senator Abetz makes his misstatements in an attempt to undermine my reputation as an independent researcher. He fails to acknowledge that I have been an academic for seventeen years and my research has been widely published in Australia and internationally. It has been funded from many sources, and I have received seven ARC funded projects following a rigorous process of peer-review. I have a national and international reputation as an expert on industrial relations, best exemplified by my Queen Elizabeth II Research Fellowship 2003-2007.

My research is on the public record and has been for many years. However, Senator Abetz's attempts to malign my reputation were made a short time after I represented, with others, the shared grave concerns of 151 Australian academic experts about the Government's Work Choices Bill before the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Committee. At that appearance, Hansard records that Senator Murray suggested that questions from Government Senators about sources of funding for my research were 'McCarthyist stuff'. This is a suggestion which deserves close study. It will not affect my own efforts to bring research evidence to bear on questions of public importance in Australia, and I hope that it will not affect

other researchers, whose work should be considered on its merits, not sullied by factually inaccurate personal attacks made under privilege in our parliaments.

Barbara Pocock
Professor
Centre for Work and Life
University of South Australia
31st January 2006