

SPEECH

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Questioner

Speaker Hinch, Sen Derryn

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Senator HINCH (Victoria) (20:14): As I was about to board the flight to Canberra on Sunday afternoon I received a text from an old Canberra hand—as they used to call them—warning me to brace myself because it was going to be 'a very nasty week'. I had already had a taste of it over the weekend as the debate over the looming ABCC brawl played out on Twitter and other social media. There was the charming tweet directed at me showing a picture of a pair of bloodstained hands. Much was made on social media and in the MSM of my comment last week on *AM* that the Turnbull government might get a much sought after Christmas present with the passage of their ABCC legislation, which had been rejected twice before and was the trigger for the double dissolution, which blew up in the government's face, slaughtered their huge majority in the other place and elected minor party senators like me upstairs. What the Santa Claus predictors neglected to pass on was my important qualifier, which I reiterated on Twitter. I said that the government could get their ABCC legislation through, but to get my support they would need to accept some crucial amendments; otherwise I would say, 'Bah! Humbug!' and have no hesitation in voting it down. I repeated that at a press conference yesterday after we got a 24-hour extension from the government to submit amendments to their flawed legislation.

The tweeters who said I would have blood on my hands and would be personally responsible for any future worksite deaths—like that poor backpacker in Perth—had not, I bet, even seen the amendments about worker safety, about increased penalties for the bosses, about more protection for scapegoat subcontractors left holding the financial bag, and about retrospectivity. In fact, Senator Xenophon and I have made huge progress in negotiations with the government over subbie protection, and I thank him and his team for that. I have made progress with other issues, and I thank Senator Culleton for that. I called the tweeters 'Twitter sheep', and they are.

In considering this legislation I have met a number of times with the opposition leader, Bill Shorten; several times with the CFMEU, both here and in Melbourne; with Brendan O'Connor; and with Michael O'Connor. I have talked to union champion Senator Doug Cameron. I have talked with the Minister for Employment, Senator Cash, many times and I have met with the Prime Minister several times, as recently as tonight. And I have worked with the Nick Xenophon Team senators, and Senator Leyonhjelm, and Senator Culleton, and Senator Lambie in looking for genuine amendments that would improve this bill.

I have said countless times that I am pro-worker but anti-corruption. I remember when Norm Gallagher and the BLF used to come and monster me in my radio studio in Melbourne all those years ago. I am proud of last week's successful amendment on whistleblowers, which I co-sponsored with Senator Xenophon. I share Senator Cameron's and Senator Xenophon's fears and worries about some of the behaviour of the commissioner. I am proud of my amendment on ending auditor shams and auditor rorts, plus the promise from the government to extend whistleblower protection into the corporate world. I know, Senator Cameron, that you do not believe that, but I believe we will get our way.

To get my position on these amendments clear I went back to the sage words of my dear old grandma, who used to say, 'What's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander.' The clean-up of the unions must mean a clean-up of employers' behaviour too. There must be sanctions and penalties for employers found guilty of risky practices that lead to death and injury on our building sites.

I have told both the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition, Bill Shorten, that my perhaps naive newcomer's dream is to get an ABCC bill through this place that will be so clean and just and fair that when the next Labor government get in they will not want to abolish it like they did last time. This can and should work for the benefit of workers and employers and work against the thugs, the goons, the liars and the cheats on both sides—yes, the liars, cheats and bullies on both sides. If we can achieve that then I will feel that some lasting good has come out of all this bitterness and brawling and protracted, decades-long 'us against them' class warfare. We can then have a better system for the benefit of our economy and all Australians, and we will all go home from here to a better, more certain Christmas.