

Guns for votes, ABCC and double dissolution triggers

By John Passant

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(Image via @ChristineEwing7)

The Coalition Government is struggling with internal divisions and crossbench pressures, plus recent polls show it is "on the nose" with voters. [John Passant](#) reports.

REMEMBER THE TWO Double Dissolution triggers?

Let me remind you.

One was a [bill](#) to re-establish the Australian Building and Construction Commission ([ABCC](#)) — an organisation designed to destroy one of the few unions in Australia that fights for better wages in defence of jobs and for safety on building sites.

The other a [bill](#) on registered organisations that will impose similar penalties on union leaders as on company leaders for breaches of director duties.

The two pieces of anti-union legislation passed in the House of Representatives last week — and

didn't they cause a ruckus? This was not mainly because of their anti-worker content, but because of the political machinations of the conservatives and reactionaries to get the ABCC passed.

The real fight to approve these laws will be in the Senate where, if the [Greens](#) and [ALP](#) vote against the legislation, the crossbenchers still hold the balance of power. Both the Labor Party and the Greens oppose the ABCC and the registered organisations Bills.

I wonder what [@TurnbullMalcolm](#) conceded to [#OneNation](#) to get its support for [#ABCC](#)? It won't be pretty. [#auspol](#)

— John Wren (@JohnWren1950) [October 23, 2016](#)

That means the [Nick Xenophon Team](#) senators, [One Nation](#) senators, [Jacqui Lambie](#), [David Leyonhjelm](#) and [Derryn Hinch](#) will be crucial to getting the Bill through the Senate. Jacqui Lambie opposes the ABCC. The other parties and individuals, apart from Liberal Democrat David Leyonhjelm recently, have all said they support it.

That leaves Leyonhjelm as a possible deciding vote, at least for now. The Senator is a libertarian, which supposedly means he favours freedom — for guns, for individuals, for groups, for organisations but, most important of all, for markets. In rhetoric, at least, he is vehemently against state regulation.

Leyonhjelm expresses the contradiction that is neoliberalism and its political love child — libertarianism. In normal circumstances, he would vote for state intervention in the form of a powerful and draconian government body like the ABCC to undermine freedom of association and action by workers. You see, neoliberalism and libertarianism are not anti-state. They are both anti-worker movements that are quite prepared to use the state to smash or curtail unions.

So why, then, may Leyonhjelm vote against the ABCC? There are a couple of reasons. Some concepts like gun ownership are preeminent expressions of his false individualism. Second, Tony Abbott allegedly did a [deal with him](#) on only banning the importation of the rapid fire [Adler A110 shotgun](#) for a year if the Senator voted against Labor amendments to a social security Bill. He did — but in light of the failure of the States and Territories to agree on classifications, the import ban remains.

Conflating licensed firearms owners with terrorists. When you don't know what you are talking about, you should STFU.

<https://t.co/Z4JXo8HtnG>

— David Leyonhjelm
(@DavidLeyonhjelm) [October 18, 2016](#)

Leyonhjelm feels betrayed. So he has threatened to vote against the ABCC unless the Turnbull Government removes the gun ban.

At first, when asked about whether he would trade off the gun ban for a yes vote from Leyonhjelm on the ABCC, Prime Minister [Malcolm Turnbull did not rule it out](#). It took

him five hours to say he wouldn't do a trade.

Then former PM [Tony Abbott jumped in](#) saying he was all about defending the sacrosanct [John Howard](#) gun laws and he and his office knew of no such deal. He was stirring the pot and Turnbull shot back at him in question time saying [Abbott knew of the deal](#) but that he, Malcolm, would never undermine Australia's strict gun laws.

In reality, Leyonhjelm's threat is meaningless. If he votes against the ABCC, something unlikely in my view (but who knows how obstinate and contrary old rogue libertarians can be?) a joint sitting will pass the law. The figures in any such sitting, by my calculation, look to be 115 for the ABCC and 109 against. All Leyonhjelm could do, at best, by voting against the ABCC is delay its passage until a joint sitting. Turnbull can call his bluff.

More importantly, the Abbott versus Turnbull gun stoush is a sign of a weak government. It is not just that it has a bare one seat majority in the House of Representatives. It is that it is divided. What the Abbott rebellion makes clear is that the battle between reactionaries and so-called moderates is tearing the Coalition Government apart — slowly but with gathering pace.

There are specific differences too between the Coalition parties which highlight this less reactionary division. Like the Nationals in New South Wales and their agitation

against the short-lived [greyhound racing ban](#) there, some [Nationals in the Federal Government](#) are [less than impressed](#) with the ban on importing the Adler. This is not the only issue where the Nationals and others are getting antsy.

Nationals MP [Andrew Broad](#) [threatened](#) to bring down the Government if, as is likely, the Senate rejects the same-sex marriage [plebiscite](#) and, much less likely, Turnbull allows a free vote for Liberal MPs in the Parliament. Reactionary Liberal National Party member [George Christensen](#) sits with the Nationals in the Federal Parliament. He has [argued](#) a [free vote breaches the Coalition agreement](#). The implication is that Turnbull would be tearing the agreement up if there is a free vote, with who knows what consequences.

It is not only that. The Turnbull Government cannot get all of its contentious economic proposals such as tax cuts for big business through Parliament — although [Labor bent over backwards](#) to help the Government deliver \$6 billion in cuts.

The Coalition Government is also "on the nose" with voters. Recent polls [show](#) that if an election were held now Labor would romp it in.

This is a weak government. The overwhelming conservative and reactionary anti-worker cross bench in the Senate may prop it up for a while, especially if there is no opposition mobilised outside Parliament. However, one concerted

push from unions and workers and a Labor Party Opposition rediscovering the reality of class and social struggle could sweep it aside in weeks.

Otherwise, a Coalition government under Turnbull, or Abbott, or [Morrison](#), or [Bishop](#) (fill in your candidate here) could limp along for a few more years, with massive damage to us all.

Read more by [John Passant](#) on his website [En Passant](#). You can also follow John on Twitter [@JohnPassant](#).

Andrew Broad will withdraw support for govt if there is a parli vote with no plebiscite, will vote w electorate
<https://t.co/YImKOBM2fj>

— Gabrielle Chan (@gabriellechan) [October 10, 2016](#)

The forthcoming Federal election and the ongoing attacks on unions and workers, by [@JohnPassant](#) [#ABCC](#) <https://t.co/zhrRmJRpxT>

— IndependentAustralia (@independentaus) [March 23, 2016](#)

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— Sandi
Keane
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[September
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