

Adelaide is great despite Matt Abraham

Written by fiona patten

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Matthew Abraham and David Bevan are morning show hosts on Adelaide's ABC AM radio station, 891. Two of their regular guests are former ALP Senator, Chris Schacht and the current federal Member for Sturt, Chris Pyne. In preparation for my trip down to Adelaide for our Party party last week we found a transcript of their program on the morning that the Sex Party announced its registration by the Electoral Commission. It made for interesting reading - more for the things that were left unsaid than those that were spoken.

Summing up the way in which each of the four commented on the Sex Party, Matt Abraham's comments were all negative. David Bevan's and Chris Pyne's were roughly evenly divided and Chris Schacht was pretty much defending the rights of the party all the way through. Chris Schacht was a champion of free speech and civil liberties during the Hawke and Keating administrations, so its not surprising that he would be positive about a new civil liberties party no matter where its roots lay.

Matt Abraham made four comments during the segment – all of them quite negative. Shouldn't he be even handed on issues like this you ask? Not on your life.... Abraham has an agenda here that he's not telling his listeners about. He's one of an increasing number of political journalists in this country who are also very committed Christians but who fail to declare their personal bias when commenting on sex, censorship, abortion, euthanasia etc. I am certain that Michael Atkinson feels safe when interviewed by Abraham especially on R rated computer games.

Not only is Matt Abraham one of the Catholic church's main media men, he was also instrumental in bringing Contempt of Parliament charges against myself and Robbie Swan in 1996. Abraham sought out an interview with us in that year over comments we had made elsewhere about a Coalition backbencher and his wife who had been caught on a security camera in a Canberra adult shop purchasing X rated films. Nothing wrong with that you say, except that the next day, the backbencher was due to vote in a Joint Party Room meeting to endorse a ban on X rated videos. Knowing that he was going vote for the ban, we cried hypocrisy and called on the MP to resign or risk being 'outed'. Our rationale was that elected members had no right to tell the electorate one thing via their policies but to do the opposite in their own lives. If every MP did this the nation would soon become so cynical of politicians that the institution of Parliament would be severely damaged. We had no intention of naming the politician ourselves but wanted to put pressure on him to out himself.

During the interview on Matt Abraham's radio program, he was much more aggressive and combative about the issue than you would normally expect from an ABC interviewer. Through a series of cleverly orchestrated questions he finally got Robbie to say that he thought it would be in the public interest for the backbencher to be identified and to account for his behaviour. Not long after this we received a summons from the Privileges Committee of the federal parliament stating that the comments made on Abraham's program were enough for two Contempt charges to be laid against us. The specific charge was 'threatening a member of parliament in the line of their duty' and if found guilty, we could be placed in custody 'at her Majesty's pleasure'.

How was this possible when we had not even identified the MP in question? Apparently this didn't matter. The fact that we had said we might out any MP over this issue was enough to scare all of them and put them off their game and that constituted a contempt.

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In the end we were found not guilty of the contempt but in summing up, the Privileges Committee found that if we did the same thing again then we would be found guilty. Work that one out if you can.

However the most galling point of the whole episode was that we felt Abraham had set us up by not declaring his strongly held religious affiliations and beliefs - which clearly included a profound dislike of X rated films and an even greater dislike of the industry that produces them.

Despite Adelaide residents such as Matt Abraham and Michael Atkinson the first Adelaide get together was a great night. Some very imaginative people came up with some great ideas for promoting the party in South Australia and nationally. And who knows we maybe on the ballot at the SA state election in March next year.