

## **turmoil within NSW religious right**

Written by ASP Staff

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Federal Opposition Leader Tony Abbott's support for a Member of the NSW Legislative Council whose pre selection is under challenge, is further proof( if any were needed) that individual liberty and freedom is in grave danger from wowserism.

The MLC, David Clarke, has stacked Liberal Party branches and fixed pre selections across NSW in a bid to take control of the NSW Division of the Liberal Party. It is a bid that has been widely perceived as successful.

Clarke is seen as a spokesman and leader (at a political level) of Opus Dei, a lay Catholic organisation with goals analogous to Catholic Action, which was headed by Bob Santamaria and which split the ALP 60 years ago and kept it out of office for 16 years.

Clarke's supporters in NSW formed a faction called the religious right, although members preferred to call their faction the "mainstream". The faction's policy is that of the Right to Life movement. It is opposed to abortion, to contraception, to research into the medical uses of stem cells and to providing aid to African groups endeavouring to combat the spread of AIDs through the use of condoms.

They are all policies that Tony Abbott pursued, administratively and without fanfare when he was health minister in the Howard government, and which, in the final washup, were identified as contributing to the defeat of the Howard government.

Concern that the NSW Liberals are running into the same problem has turned Clarke supporters who owe their positions to Clarke's control of the numbers, into opponents. It has split the religious right into two camps – one camp calling itself the 'right' and the other comprising Clarke loyalists.

Clarke is the member for the 'north-west metropolitan province'. He is being challenged by the chief executive of the Civil Contractors Federation David Elliott, who is backed by the NSW State president Nick Campbell and Clarke's former lieutenant, Alex Hawke. The latter knocked off a sitting member with the backing of the religious right at the last federal election.

Their concern is that if the Liberal Party is seen as nothing more than a front for Opus Dei it will not succeed at the next State and Federal elections. The State leader Barry O'Farrell is

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determined to keep controversy out of the public arena, and so is Tony Abbott, who has written to State selectors calling for support for Clarke.

Abbott's case is that if Clarke loses his pre selection the party will split and lose, at State and Federal level.

He is right. But for how long will the Liberals be able to paper over a split of these dimensions, and should they? It is not honest for the Liberals to put themselves forward as standing for traditional values when what they are offering is Right to Life.

Clarke's people have offered a deal with the Left. They will swing their numbers behind Catherine Cusack, who is a prominent member of the moderate or "Left" faction, in return for support Clarke, who is on the far right of the social spectrum.

What a terrible spectacle. There is an honest alternative to the political corruption of the major parties with their deals based on the grab for power instead of principle. It is the Australian Sex Party, and I urge you to support it at the next elections.