



Pictured with Leader of the Opposition the Hon Bill Shorten MP

YOUR STORY

Abuse victims reeling from Clayton's apology!



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On Monday 22 October 2018, the Prime Minister of Australia, the Hon Scott Morrison MP, delivered the National Apology to Victims and Survivors of Institutional Child Sexual Abuse at Parliament House in Canberra.

I was very fortunate to have been one of the 800 'Wonka' gold ticket holders invited to Canberra to attend at the Great Hall of Parliament House as the Apology was conveyed.

Albeit a good intention might have been there, many of those attending felt aggrieved and angered by the government's lack of compassion and understanding of their personal situations.

Indeed, some were infuriated by the lack of consultation with victims in the organization of the event, particularly the logistics involved in the co-ordination of travel arrangements, which in some cases were made with little or no notice by the National Apology Secretariat.

Once again victims and survivors of systemic abuse in institutions found themselves helpless and at the whims and mercy of yet another system.

The government just doesn't get it, victims and survivors are fed up with having to navigate, and stressed to the hilt when it comes to negotiating political and bureaucratic systems; after all it was a system that allowed the abuse to happen, a system that covered-up the abuse, the system that accepts no responsibility for the abuse, the system that has minimized accountability, and the system that created another system to deal with the system to lessen any culpability or responsibility of the system for what that system did!

And just as the former PM, Mr Turnbull ignored victims and survivors in developing the National Redress Scheme, so too had our latest PM, Mr Scott Morrison who had ignored the views, wishes, concerns and the most basic expectations of victims and survivors in facilitating the National Apology.

Many victims - most with no support persons - were expected to travel from interstate the day before; there were no contingency arrangements; many missed connecting flights because of cancellations and re-routing caused by inclement weather conditions, and some were delayed in transit and arrived the next day, after the National Apology!

Many felt that the PM's heart wasn't really in it, that he was arrogant and just pandering to the moment and paying lip service to abuse victims and survivors.

The PM was booed and heckled during his address in the Great Hall; to many, his words were scripted and hollow.

At one point the PM said he understood the anger and hurt felt by survivors of childhood sexual abuse, but then he asked those present to stand together and hold hands in solidarity.

The PM might have thought his action as some sort of empathetic and symbolic support, but nothing could have been further from the truth as many in the Great Hall were gobsmacked and took offence!

Obviously the PM is oblivious, doesn't fully understand, or could never comprehend that the traumatic effects and impact of sexual, physical, mental, emotional and other abuse shapes a person's life, makes them who they are and prevents them from being who or what they could have been.

Sexual abuse affects victims, their families, and associates every day of

their existence, in all that they do, in any company they are in, and in any undertaking they might endeavor.

Asking victims and survivors to hold hands might have seemed like a touching gesture, but many sexual assault victims aren't comfortable with touching, or being touched by members of their own families, let alone strangers.

When the Leader of the Opposition the Hon Bill Shorten MP delivered his speech many were of the opinion that his address was much more relevant and poignant.

There was resounding applause for mentions of, and when pictures of Julia Gillard and the Leader of the Opposition shown, more so when they entered the Great Hall.

The National Apology was supposed to have been a watershed moment in Australia's social history, but alas many abuse victims and survivors are bitterly cynical and suspicious of its long term results.

It feels to many as if the National Apology was just another system hiccup, another Clayton's apology where much is promised but the reality is naught!

And interestingly, once off the stage our PM was generally inaccessible because he was surrounded by his goon squad and corralled by the media.

The whole thing about the occasion of the Apology was that it was supposed to be about the victims and survivors - their day - not about politicians, not about point scoring, and certainly not a popularity contest to see who could get more media attention.

For the government the day in Canberra ended with a deep sigh that they got away with it again!

For abuse victims and survivors the day ended just like it did at the sunset of the Royal Commission: everybody left in limbo with no support or clue what to do, or where to go next?

Now as for the National Redress Scheme, it was suggested by many victims and survivors that the benefits of any redress scheme should be without favor or prejudice; that any financial recompense should be

equal across the board - not discriminatory.

It was put forward to the Federal government that victims should not feel that they are being singled-out and classed into bands, tiers, or grades; that the severity of the abuse perpetrated against them, and the effects suffered between them should in no way be reduced, minimized, diminished, or exclusionary.

It was proposed by myself and others that it would be more just and fair to all victims - and of benefit to the Federal government too - for no lump sum to be paid because lump sums can be squandered in an instant, but rather a fortnightly benefit payment similar to a tax-free pension for life.

But alas - the government had already made its mind up with victims and survivors now being financially sodomized by the Redress Scheme.

The Morrison government seems oblivious to the fact that the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse received over 68 thousand enquiries.

If you consider each enquirer represents a voting family of four, the government is at odds with over 272 thousand people who could well decide marginal seats come the next Federal election.

So what next?

After years of cover-up, denial, and inaction by institutions victims are very angry and so frustrated at their treatment by the system.

After years of emotional trauma, anger and disappointment welling up, many victims feel they have nothing to lose; how long before a survivor explodes and goes berserk?

The government is playing with unstable gelignite that could well blow-up in its face in more ways than one.

It is time to take victims and survivors seriously.

#Helon