

# Brethren claim pre-arranged meetings held with PM

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The Exclusive Brethren says it had meetings with Prime Minister Helen Clark and other ministers before the last election.

But Helen Clark says her encounters with the Brethren were while she was out in public and felt like she was being "stalked".

TV3 last night reported it had been given detailed minutes written by the Exclusive Brethren following meetings in 2004 with the Prime Minister.

Meetings were also held with Cabinet ministers David Benson-Pope, Rick Barker, Annette King, Pete Hodgson and David Parker, it said.

The minutes showed Brethren members met Helen Clark twice before the election.

Labour has criticised National over its association with the Brethren, who met the then leader, Don Brash, before the church funded a \$1.2 million anti-Labour, anti-Greens campaign at the election.

National deputy leader Bill English said Labour was showing "breathtaking hypocrisy" and had been "lying" about its contact with Brethren.

"These minutes show there has been detailed discussions," he told TV3.

Exclusive Brethren spokesman Tony McCorkell said the Labour Party had been "a little dishonest" in saying it had not met church representatives "when the Brethren have clearly identified themselves".

But Helen Clark said the meetings were not formal ones, but encounters while she was out and about at public events.

"There's nothing formal about people crowding in on you on public engagements. I'm known for being a pretty polite person so when people come up you tend to engage in conversation, then you realise, hang on, there's a number of people here. What is going on?"

TV3 said the minutes of a meeting in Greymouth in 2004 showed Brethren members shook hands with the Prime Minister and that she asked what the men did. They talked about the economy and employment law.

Mr McCorkell said the minutes showed the meetings with Helen Clark were "pre-arranged, there is no question about that".

He said she had also met Brethren members privately in a room at a Nelson school.

Helen Clark said: "I feel it's like being stalked. These people surround you in public places when you're out on your ordinary business."

A spokesman for the Prime Minister said last week that she had increased her security after a member of the Exclusive Brethren accosted her in Parliament before the last election.



Helen Clark

This revelation came after Mr McCorkell said Helen Clark had asked for a policy document the Brethren prepared in 2003 "after meeting with Brethren members".

The Prime Minister's spokesman said at the time that as far as she was aware, she had never had a scheduled meeting with Brethren members.

"On occasion, Brethren members have come up to her at public meetings," the spokesman said.

"There was one occasion in the Nelson area when she found herself surrounded by them. She extricated herself by asking them to send her any documents they had."

- NZPA