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## Church 'not instructing' Brethren's group of seven

NZPA | Tuesday, 17 April 2007

**The seven Exclusive Brethren members who were considering waging another campaign against the Government at the next election were not acting on instruction from the church, its official spokesman Tony McCorkell said today.**

The group was dubbed "the secret seven" for its initially covert pamphlet campaign against Labour and the Greens in 2005.

The group has spoken out about the Government's plans to reform electoral laws.

It is understood that under the proposed changes the cost of "third-party" campaigns would be capped at \$60,000 – far below the \$1.2 million believed to have been spent by the seven Brethren members.

One of the seven, Neville Simmons, said recently the group was considering another campaign against the Government next year and wanted to preserve the right of third parties to have their voices heard.

Whether the group mounted another campaign depended on the will of the seven individuals but it was "under consideration," he said.

Mr McCorkell, who will be in New Zealand tomorrow and Thursday, told Radio New Zealand today that the seven men were businessmen rather than church leaders.

"The seven men aren't acting on behalf of the church and certainly aren't acting on any instructions from Australia or from New Zealand or from anybody in the church.

"They're a group of concerned businessmen, family men, taxpayers that are having their voice and the church hasn't been involved in that.

"It's been unfortunate that yet again the church has been brought into it just because they're members but the church certainly hasn't had anything to do with it," Mr McCorkell said.

The men were a group of concerned businessmen and taxpayers "more than church leaders" and it was a "bit irresponsible" to link their actions to the church.

"If seven Anglicans got together I don't think the Anglican Church would be embroiled."

Mr McCorkell said he had not been aware of all the activities of the group of seven at the last election.

He was aware of the suggestions some of their behaviour was covert.

"Having said that, I certainly wouldn't think that the seven members that are involved in this particular discussion would be a secretive interest group. These people have put their name to it, they're well and truly on the record."

He also suggested Prime Minister Helen Clark's attacks on the Brethren movement itself amount to cheap political point scoring because she does not have much to lose by attacking a church whose members mostly do not vote.

Mr McCorkell said it was up to individual members whether they voted in elections but the majority of Brethren members did not.

He said the church did not stop members from voting but did not encourage them to do it.

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