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[Stuff](#) > [News](#) > [National News](#) > [Story](#)

## Brethren meet top Nat

By KAREN ARNOLD - Sunday Star Times | Sunday, 11 March 2007

**National party deputy leader Bill English met with members of the Exclusive Brethren last week and says he will continue to do so despite his party's attempt to distance itself from the church.**

The Sunday Star-Times can reveal three Exclusive Brethren men had an appointment with English, the Clutha/Southland MP, at the National Party office in Invercargill on Wednesday.

The meeting coincided with fresh revelations that Exclusive Brethren were behind anti-Labour pamphlets distributed at Auckland airport last year, accusing the government of leaving New Zealand open to a terrorist attack.

Exclusive Brethren members have also said they were behind a \$1m campaign using pamphlets and newspaper advertisements to discredit the Green and Labour parties prior to the 2005 general election.

English refused to comment on what the men discussed with him but said it was a constituency matter.

"I just treat them like constituents. I don't exclude them from seeing me.

"I hope that anyone can come through my office and get a hearing. I don't have a way of screening them and I'm not going to."

English said he didn't know the trio were Brethren until they arrived for their appointment on Wednesday morning, although he conceded he had seen them before.

"I recognised them from election meetings from the past," he said.

Labour Party president Mike Williams wasn't buying English's explanation. He believed English should be disciplined, saying his dealings with the Brethren were an act of insubordination, given National leader John Key's reported comments and stance against them.

The party's former leader Don Brash resigned during the fallout from Nicky Hagar's book *The Hollow Men* on the Exclusive Brethren links to National's 2005 election campaign.

After Key took over the party leadership in November he said: "We won't have a bar of the Exclusive Brethren, thanks very much. We can look after ourselves."

But yesterday Key said he supported English.

"I'm not going to ask my MPs to vet their constituents on the basis of religion and I would expect my MPs to provide a service and help to any member of their constituency."

There was a difference between that and the financial support the Exclusive Brethren had offered in the past, he said.

"On a party level, we don't want to hear from them."

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