

tvnz.co.nz**"Razzle up" for Exclusive Brethren**

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The Exclusive Brethren say they are being being treated as a whipping boy by the Labour Party which is planning a major clampdown on election campaigning by third parties.



The church was vilified for its anti-government campaign last election and its Australia-based spokesman is now in New Zealand to advise members how to run campaigns without damaging the group's reputation.

Tony McCorkell offers advice similar to public relations training which he calls a razzle up of the boys.

"That's an Aussie term...I'm going to try to get together with a few of them and have a yarn about how their actions might impact the rest of the church and how we can move forward without the church being embroiled in another situation like it did in '05," says McCorkell.

The religious group caused a headache for Labour and embarrassed the National Party at the last election with its million dollar anti-government campaign and now the government wants to clamp down on that kind of third party advertising.

"It's really about providing a level playing field and that's very much the Kiwi way of doing things," says Justice Minister Mark Burton.

But the government could hit a snag because the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act says everyone has the right to freedom of expression, to voice opinion of any kind, in any form.

However the government has support to try to limit the Exclusive Brethren's activities.

"This was a covert sneaky illegal action they were engaged in, by a political party that doesn't vote," says New Zealand First leader Winston Peters.

But his party's support does not stretch to Labour's plans for other electoral reform, including funding election campaigns from the public purse.

"There's some good parts to this bill, state funding is not one of them," says Peters.

Labour accepts it may have to can that idea but Exclusive Brethren members say they will put up a fight for their right to campaign.

Source: One News

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