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Electoral Finance Bill passed into law

| Tuesday, 18 December 2007

The Electoral Finance Bill has just been passed into law after a day of furious debate.

The bill was supported by Labour, the Greens, New Zealand First and Jim Anderton in its third and final reading, passing by a majority of 63 votes to 57.

Opposed to the bill were National, the Maori Party, Act, Taito Phillip Field and United Future.

National says the bill is an assault on democracy and will suppress free speech, but the Government insists it is essential to stop wealth individuals or organisations "buying" next year's election.

The bill puts a cap on the amount of money that third parties can spend on campaign activities and extends the regulated spending period from the current three months before an election to the whole year in which an election is held.

In its original draft the bill presented numerous problems and the Electoral Commission said it would not be able to define some of its clauses.

A select committee made some changes, and during the bill's committee stage the Government put in more than 150 amendments.

Ministers now say it is workable, but National maintains the legislation is a shambles that will lead to litigation.

The bill was drafted in response to the Exclusive Brethren's initially covert, \$1 million campaign against Labour and the Greens during the 2005 election.

Former prime minister Mike Moore yesterday said it was wrong in principle and would not work.

"They are using a sledgehammer to smash a few nutters. . .it will do the opposite of what's intended," he said.

"There are a lot of people out there who just for the sport of it are going to test this law and have a go, just for the pure hell of it.

"I think we can guarantee there will be court action."

Mr Moore, and other opponents of the bill, are predicting individuals and organisations will deliberately flout its provisions to create controversy.

- NZPA

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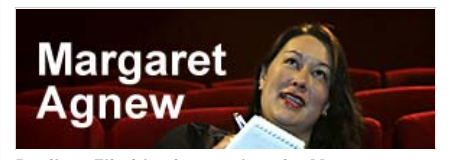
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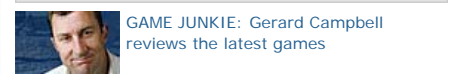
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