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COMMENT

Exclusive Brethren: Plight of the Wrong Cause

By Craig Young

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If, as predicted, the Australian Labor Party wins the Australian federal election tomorrow, then the Exclusive Brethren may face well-deserved retribution for their repeated attempts to subvert Australian state and federal politics.

According to Melbourne's Age, the ALP wants at least four Australian federal government agencies to investigate the shadowy right-wing sect, which is alleged to have given an undeclared \$A370,000 donation to erstwhile Prime Minister Howard at the last federal election in 2004. The Australian Federal Police, the Australian Taxation Office, Australian Electoral Commission and Austrac have all been asked to scrutinise Exclusive Brethren financial relationships to the dying Liberal federal government.

Most seriously, the Exclusive Brethren are alleged not to have declared the transfer of considerable monetary sums across borders. This may be an offence under two pieces of federal legislation- the Anti-Money Laundering and Counter-Terrorist Financing Act 2006 and the Financial Transactions Reports Act 1987.

In addition, the ALP alleges that the sect also made false declarations about domestic financial transactions. It may have also used misleading names in electioneering pamphlets. Finally, it may have also used a front company, "Willmac", to avoid restrictions placed on the scope and scale of Australian federal electoral donations. The Australian Federal Police have replied that such investigations are already underway.

Indeed, something similar appears to have occurred in Tasmania during this very campaign. According to the Tasmanian Mercury's Luke Sayer (22.11.07), there is a mysterious possible case that involves a mailout of anti-Green election material from a particular address. However, while the property is apparently surrounded by EB residences, the business person at the centre of this possible debacle was perplexed at this, and would like the EB sect to clarify that he is not involved with them. Tasmanian Green Senator Christine Milne, has said that if this is the Exclusive Brethren, they have breached Australian federal election law.

To offset accusations that it is a partisan organisation, the Exclusive Brethren have tried to make a contribution to one ALP candidate for campaign expenses, but ALP Leader Kevin Rudd has quite rightly labelled the Exclusive Brethren as an extremist sect. Predictably, the Exclusive Brethren have accused the ALP of attacking a 'religious minority'. With ALP victory almost certain after tomorrow's election, the Exclusive Brethren will probably now find itself under scrutiny on both sides of the Tasman.

Tough. Perhaps our own Labour-led government might want to emulate its trans-Tasman counterpart, and expand the scope of its own investigations into this thoroughly unpleasant organisation's activities over here?

Sources:

Michael Bachelard: "Brethren in ALP's firing line" Melbourne Age: 23.11.07

Luke Sayer: "Sect takes aim at Brown" Tasmanian Mercury: 22.11.07

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