

Thursday, 25 January 2006

Call for an independent Judicial Inquiry into Liberals-Sect collusion

National Greens Leader Bob Brown has called for an independent judicial inquiry into electoral collusion between the Liberal Party and the Exclusive Brethren in the last Tasmanian and federal elections.

Today's revelations in *The Australian* show that the Liberal Party was billed for hateful and deceptive anti-Greens ads in Tasmanian newspapers before last year's state elections. The Liberals' campaign head Damien Mantach came directly from Prime Minister Howard's backroom to take control of the state campaign. He was in Mr Howard's employ when the Exclusive Brethren's anti-Green ads were used in at least 3 states – Tasmania, NSW and South Australia in the 2004 federal election.

Electoral Office inquiries show all the federal ads were placed by Willmac Enterprises (a company set up by an Exclusive Brethren member) at a cost of \$390,000 even though different people authorized each advertisement.

Senator Brown today called on Mr Howard to reveal details of his meetings with sect leader ('Elect Vessel') and millionaire Bruce Hales, who lives in Mr Howard's electorate of Bennelong.

"A Liberal Party operative came from John Howard's office and orchestrated a cheat of Tasmanian voters using a little-known sect of extremists. This collusion deceived thousands of voters into changing their vote. Yet Mr Mantach categorically denied any cooperation with the Exclusive Brethren," Senator Brown said.

"Peg Putt's election night commentary was right. Instead of howling derision, the Lennon government should have set up an Independent Commission Against Corruption like that in NSW. Meantime a judicial inquiry into the pre-election collusions is essential," Senator Brown said.

Three senior members of the Exclusive Brethren made the following statement in a letter to the Senate Privileges Committee tabled in June 2006:

"The Exclusive Brethren Church has never at any time or for any reason involved itself in any political activity whatsoever, either by means of advertisements, media releases, leaflets, publications or any other propaganda."

Full text is available on request.

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