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Sect member funded anti-Greens campaign

David Marr
January 20, 2007

A MYSTERY Sydney businessman belonging to the Exclusive Brethren sect spent \$370,000 on advertisements and pamphlets during the 2004 federal election, according to the Australian Electoral Commission.

This finding follows a year-long investigation sparked by Senator Bob Brown into the funding of seven sets of advertisements and pamphlets in the last federal election. All attacked the Greens and called for the re-election of the Howard Government.

Though they were all authorised by members of the Exclusive Brethren, the sect's elders have always denied their church had any role in organising the campaign in NSW, South Australia and Tasmania.

The Electoral Commission has found that Willmac Enterprises Pty Ltd, a company wholly owned by Mark William Mackenzie, paid for all those ads and pamphlets in 2004. Mr Mackenzie is a sect member who runs a modest business selling and servicing pumps in Miranda.

This week, Mr Mackenzie told the *Herald* he was pressed and "unable to comment at this point". Sect leaders also declined to answer the *Herald's* questions.

According to Electoral Commission records, only three other organisations spent more than Willmac Enterprises to campaign on their own behalf during the 2004 elections. Willmac outspent the Wilderness Society, private health lobbyists, leading trade unions, the National Union of Students and even the Forest Industries Association of Tasmania.

Contrary to longstanding claims by the Exclusive Brethren, the commission found Willmac's \$370,000 was all the company's own money. The commission concluded: "There is no evidence that Willmac Enterprises received any gifts or donations from other sources that contributed to the costs of the advertisements and pamphlets."

Since late 2005, Exclusive Brethren leaders have claimed the cost was met by several individual members of the sect all acting alone. A spokesman, Warwick John, told the *Herald* the advertisements had been financed by "several individual Sydney businessmen".

Senator Brown is not satisfied by the commission's findings. "The presentation of the Exclusive Brethren activities has been as individuals feeling strongly about spending maybe \$10,000 each to join in an election campaign as every other citizen might do," he told the *Herald*. "But what the electoral office tells us is that it was all highly co-ordinated across the country. It was done by Willmac, which was set up just before the election and closed down just afterwards ... The whole set-up was one of deceit."

The Electoral Commission did not investigate complaints first raised by Senator Brown that names and addresses given by sect members on that electoral material did not comply with requirements of the Electoral Act. In particular, Senator Brown accused Mr Mackenzie of naming an apparently deserted North Rocks property as his address during the campaign. This was also the address of Willmac Enterprises.

Phil Diak, a spokesman for the commission, said the senator had not presented "appropriate evidence" to commence an investigation. Asked what evidence the commission would require, Mr Diak said: "I wouldn't be able to predict that."

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