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Anderton gives Open Response to Brethren

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25th September 2006

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Open Reply to Tim Lough, Greg Mason, Andy Smith, Andrew Simmons, Neville Simmons, Phil Win, and Doug Watt, members of the Exclusive Brethren.

See:

- [Letter From Exclusive Brethren Members](#)

I refer to your open letter of 11 September 2006 to all Members of Parliament. You contend that although you are all senior members of the Exclusive Brethren Church, your actions in the last election campaign were nothing to do with the Church but were all personal. You contend that the criticism of you and the Exclusive Brethren Church which has followed since the election, is “a serious violation of basic civil liberties, including freedom of assembly, freedom of religion, and freedom of speech.”

I have spent much of my political life supporting those rights, so I take seriously any claims that they have been violated.

But when we look closely at the events of the last election and what has happened since, I believe that you are not under scrutiny because of your rights to religious belief, free assembly, and expression of opinion. Nice try. What concerns people, simply, is your apparent lack of openness and honesty.

We are led to believe that your members do not vote. Yet, you campaigned in a general election to influence the vote: extensively, misleadingly, controversially, expensively, and secretly.

You tried to influence New Zealanders towards your agenda. But you did your best to make sure that people did not know the source of the funding in the campaign, your membership of the Exclusive Brethren, your affiliations with Don Brash and the National Party, the similarity with secret

campaigning in Australia and elsewhere, and the amount, purpose, and full nature of what you were doing.

I had a front seat view. Your expensive campaign of misinformation in the Wigram electorate included full page newspaper advertisements in the Christchurch Star and a massive last-minute pamphlet drop (with clear National Party leanings) to most homes in my electorate, all "authorised" by someone unknown to the electorate, not on the Wigram electoral roll, and with a given physical address which was deserted.

I note that although you admit producing and distributing pamphlets on critical issues prior to the last election I cannot find one of your names on any of the pamphlets delivered in Wigram.

Why such secrecy, honourable Exclusive Brethren members who acted as a group of businessmen but not as Church members? The answer is obvious: you wanted to mislead the voters so that you could maximize the political impact. Had people known who you were, they would have discounted the message. You misled for political gain.

Now that more light is at last shining on your hypocrisy, methinks you do protest too much about your rights to belief and expression. If you feel under attack, ask yourself why? I suggest it is not because New Zealanders (including MPs) dispute your rights of belief or expression. They just don't like humbug, and especially humbug dressed up as sanctimony.

I do not hold my breath for your recognition that this was a mammoth political, personal (and probably religious) blunder. Goodness knows what your fellow Church members think of your actions, though you may have misled them too, by creating a siege mentality. I doubt you will apologise to the voters of Wigram, or to the people of New Zealand, for trying to mislead them. But you should. At the very least, I hope there is someone who will call you to account for a massive waste of money.

In short, I support your rights to worship and to political expression. But I do not accept that those rights are under attack. Rather, you are being called to account for what you did. You misled. You played dirty. You dishonoured the causes for which you spent lots of money. So if you do want to stand at the next election, or even campaign for the National Party, I suggest early disclosure, particularly to your business and church colleagues. Indeed, you might consider doing so publicly right now. And I hope you will also consider voting to enhance your rights to participate in New Zealand's democracy – a precious right, of course, which I trust you will foster.

Yours sincerely,

Jim Anderton MP for Wigram and Leader of the Progressive Party

P.S. By the way, your campaign in Wigram may have actually helped. My majority increased by 5372 votes – or 169 %. Made my day!

ENDS