



program publicity

DATELINE **EXCLUSIVE BRETHREN**

Date Issued: November 13

Wednesday 15 November
8:30pm

On SBS Television Wednesday 15, November at 8:30pm **DATELINE** reporter Chris Hammer investigates the little known religious sect Exclusive Brethren and their increasing political involvement in Australia and New Zealand.

While Brethren leaders officially deny political activity, saying it is the work of individual members, Hammer's investigation reveals substantial spending on campaigns in Tasmanian and the last New Zealand elections.

New Zealand Cabinet minister, Peter Hodgson, tells Hammer the Brethren spent ten times more than any other independent group on a campaign which featured anti-Labour Party and anti Green Party advertising.

"There has never been third party financing of that ilk in New Zealand electoral history - nothing like it", he said.

Meanwhile, a furious Prime Minister Helen Clark accused the Exclusive Brethren of participating in a smear campaign alleging her husband was a homosexual. It was later revealed that a private detective had been investigating individuals in the government.

"I mean this is simply creepy. To know that our homes and families were under surveillance because the Exclusive Bretheren wanted them to be," says Peter Hodgson.

During the Tasmanian State election earlier this year, Brethren members wearing bizarre masks hauled anti-Green Party slogans through the streets of Hobart. Their pamphlets closely resembled those distributed in New Zealand.

In the 2004 Federal election campaign, Exclusive Brethren members attended a local Greens candidate's meeting in Sydney's lower north shore, leaving those at the meeting feeling physically threatened.

"The point here is not that a religious group was running a campaign, the point here is that a religious group was clearly crossing the line between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour." - Andrew Wilkie, Greens Candidate.

Chris Hammer was accosted aggressively when he tried to film at a Brethren church in Sydney. The Brethren don't watch television, listen to the radio, attend university or allow members to vote.

For further information or an interview with Chris Hammer please contact Publicist Myka Hoffman on (02) 9430 3784 or myka.hoffman@sbs.com.au