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Labor letters lather

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SUE NEALES
February 19, 2010 12:01am

A FURORE has erupted over letters mailed to every Tasmanian home this week by the Labor Party that at first glance appear to be sent by the independent Electoral Commission.

Only on opening the pamphlet does it become clear it is a Labor mail-out.

The brochure contains a section on why the Liberals cannot be trusted, and a separate flyer featuring a picture of Premier David Bartlett with his wife and children.

As the 220,000 envelopes started landing in Hobart letterboxes on Wednesday, complaints from voters reached the Tasmanian Electoral Commission.

The Liberals were quick to label the letters as "deceptive party propaganda" that provided more evidence of Labor's "negative, dirty tricks".

Mr Bartlett said he knew nothing about the mail-out, while Labor Party strategists claimed it was a standard practice to help elderly, ill or holidaying voters to register for postal votes.

The plain white envelopes, carrying no party logo or insignia, are labelled as containing "Important Election Information" relating to the March 20 state election.



The Labor Party letter campaign which appears to be an Electoral Commission letter until you open it up.

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The first view is of a leaflet headed "Postal voting information 2010" encouraging voters to have their say. It gives a hotline phone number to register for a postal vote.

The Labor Party confirmed yesterday it had mailed the letters to all 220,000 Tasmanian households.

The postal costs alone are more than \$25,000.

The Electoral Commission said yesterday there was nothing illegal about the envelopes or the letter's contents.

Commission information manager Andrew Hawkey said political parties were allowed to mail out forms encouraging voters to apply for postal votes.

Mr Hawkey admitted the commission would have preferred the opening page to have stated more clearly that hotline number was actually run by the Labor Party.

"They haven't breached the Electoral Act, because it's properly marked as material authorised by the Labor Party," Mr Hawkey said.

"The only thing we would have liked is for it to have been more clear on the front of the pamphlet that the voting hotline number was a Labor one."

Labor state director John Dowling said yesterday the volunteers on the hotline had been swamped with calls from voters who had received their letters.

He said staff took down the name and addresses of callers and mailed out official postal-vote application forms printed by the Electoral Commission.

The same forms can also be picked up directly from any post office in Tasmania.

Mr Dowling said both Labor and Liberal parties in recent state and federal elections had distributed similar postal vote mailouts to households.

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ELECTION 2010



Responsibility for election material is taken by editor Garry Bailey, 93 Macquarie St, Hobart.



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