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Anderton on the spot over party

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A name change for Jim Anderton's new party has brought into question his continued insistence he has a right to remain in the Labour-Alliance Government.

Mr Anderton said in April he would leave the Alliance at the election and lead a new party to the polls. However, he has insisted he is still the parliamentary leader of the Alliance and that he is continuing to carry out the duties he was elected to.

Yesterday, he said he would make an announcement on joining the party when Parliament rises, likely to be on Thursday.

But any such announcement would appear unnecessary after an announcement that the party, which was to have been the Progressive Coalition, will now be known as Jim Anderton's Progressive Coalition.

A spokesman for Mr Anderton told NZPA the change was so people would be able to easily identify the party Mr Anderton represented at the election.

He has already stood for three different parties -- Labour, New Labour and the Alliance.

"Jim's still getting people coming up to him saying 'I voted for you last time, voted for the Labour Party,'" the spokesman said.

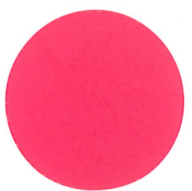
Such confusion could even lead to people voting for the Alliance, rather than Mr Anderton's party.

Jim Anderton's Progressive Coalition would have trouble running an effective campaign because the early election meant they had not registered in time to get campaign funds and taxpayer-funding broadcasting time, the spokesman said.

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It had also been stymied by Mr Anderton having been unable to join because if he did so he would invoke the party-hopping legislation -- legislation which was his baby.

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His spokesman confirmed he would join the new party next week.

"Basically the intention (behind the name change) is just so that it's very clear in a short campaign ... that when people go into the ballot box they don't get confused," he said.

"It's part of mission impossible stuff."

The name change has been greeted with incredulous laughter.

Alliance leader Laila Harre said it was rather amusing and summed up why the Alliance had problems -- "a combination of personal vanity and the sycophancy of those who left the Alliance with him".

"Not since Pauline Hanson and Graham Capill have we seen personal fiefdoms dressed up as political parties."

Ms Harre said she had no plans to change her party's name to Laila Harre's Alliance.

"We want to be branded as a credible party to the left of Labour, not as a personality cult."

Nor did Greens co-leader Rod Donald intend to change his party's name.

"We're not planning to change the Green Party to 'Rod and Jeanette's Dance Party!'"

- NZPA (New Zealand Press Association)

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