

THE INTERESTING PART OF THE NEXT ELECTION

The Prime Minister has announced that our next general election will be held in November. It doesn't seem to be almost 3 years since the last election.

As well as the election of a new government voters are being asked to vote on a referendum on MMP, which has been our system of voting since about 1996. So far we don't have full details of what will be included in the referendum on MMP but it is a subject which all voters should consider carefully. There are some issues with MMP and if the voters choose to retain MMP the electoral commission will need to review some of its aspects and make recommendations to improve the system. With a major review of MMP many of its unsatisfactory provisions can be fixed.

First there is the ability of a minority party to delay the formation of a government after an election. This was apparent in the early days of MMP with the NZ First Party taking a long time to decide which party it could work with in coalition. Secondly there is the double dipping by some candidates who are rejected in electorate seats by the voters but who sneak into Parliament on their party's list. The parties should be able to manage satisfactory lists but the recent replacement of a Labour list MP who resigned was an unbecoming fiasco for the Labour Party with 5 list MPs being cast aside to let the party's favoured candidate to take a seat in the House. Thirdly there is the seemingly unfair provision which at the last election saw Rodney Hide win the Epsom seat and 4 other seats while the ACT party received only 3.65% of the party vote, but NZ First achieved over 4% of the party vote but no electoral seat and therefore no seats in the House. These are the major issues which irritate most voters intensely.

All of these objections, and probably many others, could be dealt with by an electoral investigation and review so MMP itself could remain a worthwhile voting system.

It is to be hoped that if the voters are asked to give their views, they will do after giving serious objective consideration to the questions which will be asked. There are a number of other jurisdictions which have a form of MMP and NZ should consider adopting some of the satisfactory features of those systems.

Should the voters reject MMP in the referendum who knows what type of system will be decided on. The virtue of the First Past the Post system was its simplicity but FFP really did not fit our society in the late 20th and 21st centuries. There are a number of other systems which could be considered. Australia has a preferential voting system, which sounds quite complex, and voting in Oz is compulsory. Other jurisdictions have other systems and this time we hope to get a realistic run-down on how each system works in practice and not the poor information the voters received on the introduction of MMP.

Watch this space.

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