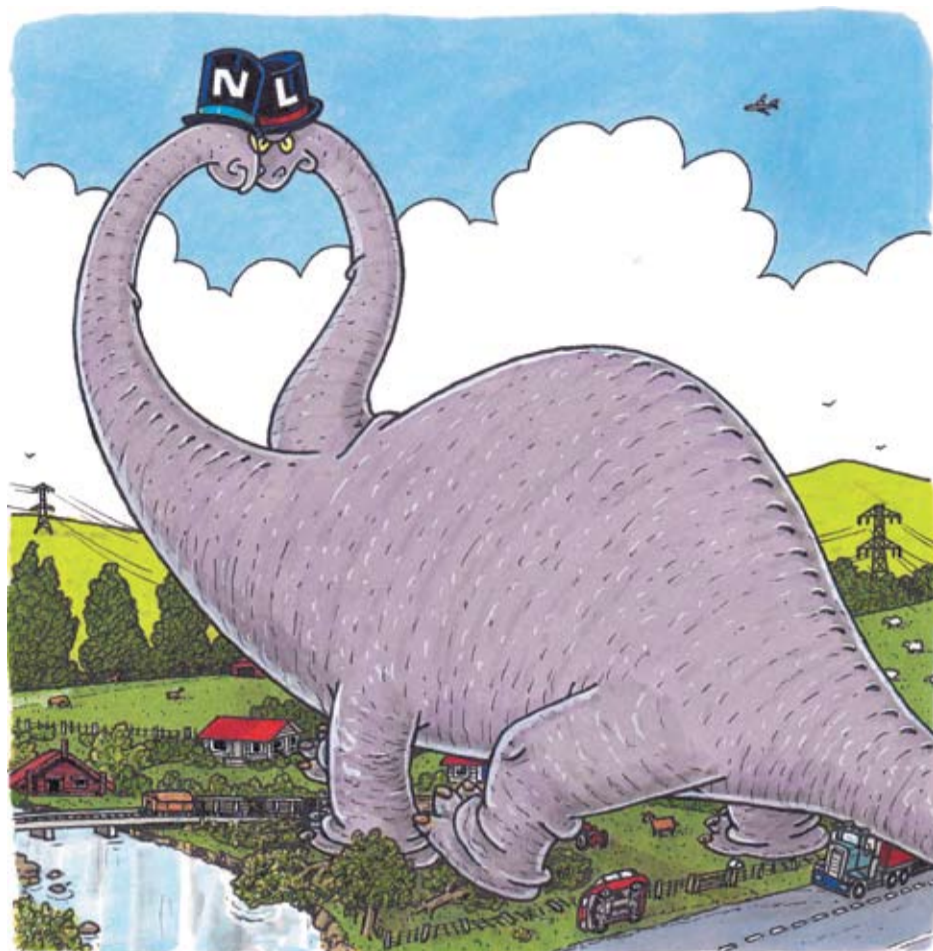


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That ancient relic known and loved as LAURENCE CLARK airs his views on MMP

Who remembers the name VERNON CRACKNELL? The name might not be etched into everybody's mind, but I'll never forget first hearing it. He was the first person from a so-called 'Third Party' to get elected into our Parliament for as long as anyone could remember.

Well, that's from the memory of a teenager in the 1960s who couldn't have been less interested in politics (me). I'd been dimly aware of the two main parties, mostly from adults always saying: "Bloody National!" or "Bloody Labour!" Or bloody both of them. Nobody ever seemed to have a good word to say about our Government.

The level of excitement at home, in town and around the country over the fact that Vernon Cracknell got voted into Parliament, reminded me of Ed Hillary climbing Everest. It hardly matters to me that his party, Social Credit, eventually fizzled out.

It's said the party had some very sound financial ideas, but I think the problem was that if we weren't playing the same game as Britain and America they wouldn't have anything to do with us.

Despite Vernon Cracknell, I still couldn't get interested in politics. Our country seemed to be run by boring old white men with a born-to-rule mentality; and our two-party system somehow worked in a way that meant we'd always have a minority in power.

I grew up watching National and Labour getting voted in and out of Government. In election year, Labour would promise to throw a few coins to the workers and National would do something similar for the employers. For decades, the two parties were like opposing teams in a game of rugby. We were the ball.

After Labour introduced us (in the '80s) to Rogernomics, Labour and National became two branches of the same party – both ruled by the global freemarket juggernaut.

When we voted in MMP (and proportional representation) it was another Vernon Cracknell moment. Not until then did we get the notion we can actually change the way our country is run. Yes, it was a referendum – just like the one we're having this November.

Since MMP, we've experienced quite a few 'Third Parties', and sure, there have been some big disappointments (I won't mention Winston by name). I held a lot of hope for the Labour-Alliance coalition; it seemed a good cross-section of New Zealanders, with lots of fresh ideas; but that too fizzled out. The main problem is we still haven't gotten rid of the two-party mindset.

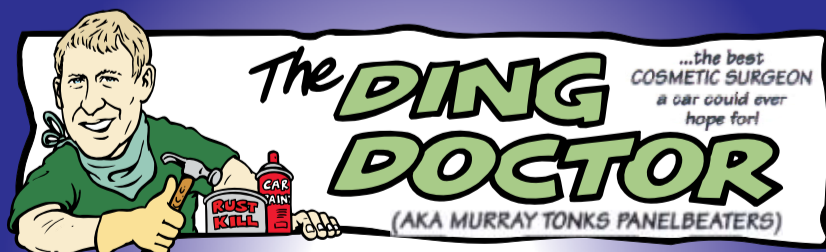
I've got a soft spot for the monarchy but (whether or not we become a republic) we should first learn to live without the Westminster parliamentary system. We could just run the place like a business, and elect the CEO and Heads of Departments.

I had been dimly aware of the two main parties, mostly from adults always saying: "Bloody National!" or "Bloody Labour!" Or bloody both of them. Nobody ever seemed to have a good word to say about our Government ...

But we don't need to think about throwing out MMP yet. We've learnt a lot, and there are some sensible changes we can make to improve it.

We should do something about the Party Lists and the 5% threshold; make better use of binding referenda; and, most importantly, parties should have to let us know who will be their coalition partners **before** we vote.

So we just need to fix it. But, wouldn't you know? That's what we don't get to vote on. ■



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