

Party-hopping law set to expire

by Emma Moore

The so-called party-hopping law designed to stop MPs switching allegiance is unlikely to be revived after it expires on polling day.

Andrew Geddis from the Legislation Advisory Committee, established by the Minister of Justice in 1986, says the law served its purpose during the settling period of MMP and will die unlamented.

Introduced in 2001, the Electoral Integrity Amendment Act sought to dispel public disaffection for the fledgling MMP electoral system following the messy spate of party-hopping after the first MMP election in 1996.

Under the law, list members who quit their party are replaced by the next candidate on the party list. Seats vacated by constituent MPs are filled in a by-election.

Co-leader of the Green Party Rod Donald says: "The legislation is too blunt an instrument to distinguish between somebody who has left a party for the right reason, like Jim Anderton back in the eighties, and someone who left for the wrong reasons, like Alamein Kopu."

Geddis notes that none of the MPs who defected after the 1996 election were re-elected in 1999 because the public did

not support their reasons for abandoning their parties.

"Unless you leave the party with a very good reason, which the public respects, and there's a constituency for your views, you're going to disappear," he says.

It is unlikely that MPs will defect to stand as independents, says Geddis, noting that Winston Peters is the only person to have done so since the 1950s. Peters formed New Zealand First soon after leaving National in 1993.

Without a party behind them, New Zealand MPs have traditionally had very little political success.

"Independent MPs have realised that leaving their parties is tantamount to committing suicide," says Geddis.

Professor Jack Vowles, of Auckland University's politics department, says the act was intended as a temporary measure to help ease the transition to MMP and doubts there will be a call to have it re-enacted.

"The act fell into some disrepute because it failed to deal with the break-up of the Alliance Party, and arguably, the use of it to get rid of Donna Awatere was not what it was intended to do."

He says the act was intended to require the resignation of people who left their parties of their own free will, rather than being pushed out by the party.



ILLUSTRATION: SARAH RESTALL

"I don't think members of Parliament should be forced to resign if they leave their parties, unless they do so on a very trivial basis or they are betraying the people who voted for them," he says.

The Green Party calls the law anti-democratic and opposed it from the outset.

"We're more than happy to see it go - we're delighted," says Donald.

"It's not the sort of thing that a country as sophisticated as New Zealand should have. There's no country in Europe with proportional representation that has such draconian

legislation."

Donald says party leaders should not have the legal power to evict an MP from Parliament simply because they stand up for what they believe in.

He believes that only the voters should have the authority to decide who leaves an elected party.

"The public are the only people who elect us and the public are the only people who should be able to unelect us," he says.

However, Alliance Party president Jill Owens says her party (currently without a parliamentary seat) would try to

have the law reinstated if they get into Parliament.

She says the provisions of the law are fundamental to MMP and as such the law should be retained.

"MPs are elected on the basis of the party they represent, not because of their own personal mana," she says.

The Electoral Integrity Amendment Act is designed to "enhance public confidence in the integrity of the electoral system; and enhance the maintenance of the proportionality of political party representation in Parliament as determined by electors".



The gentleman in these photos is wanted in connection with the disappearance of FIVE iMac G5s from WE404 on the evening of Friday 12th August. He entered the building at 6:15pm and left at about 8:30pm.

CAUGHT ON CAMERA: Images of the suspected thief appear on posters around AUT's school of art and design.

AUT computer thefts

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"We're fighting the building as much as anything, because it's easy to get into. When it was built, art and design was all pencils and paper - there was nothing to steal - but now it's full of expensive technology."

He says the loss of computers is very disruptive for classes, made worse by the closure of an open access lab as its equipment was used to make up the shortfall in other classes.

For Bachelor of Design student Lydia Willcocks, the open access lab's closure is making work difficult.

"That was the one we relied on. We'd use it in our spare time," she says. "Some have computers at home, but those without rely on the labs."

She says the other labs are usually full with classes and they close at 6pm.

"We have an assignment that's all meant to be done on computer and we only have six

hours' class time to do it in."

Security measures since the last theft include stoppers on windows and temporary suspension of 24-hour access to labs.

The school of art and design is setting up a system of lab monitors after hours to keep an eye on things. But students say this will take a while to be organised.

Acting AUT security manager Pramod Apte says while cameras and more security guards are an option, the solution is for people to be security conscious.

"More security guards are not really the answer. Ultimately, security is everybody's responsibility, and everybody must play their role."

He says most of the thefts have taken place when the buildings are empty and thinks as student workload increases through the semester more students about will deter thieves.

He says discussions are being held with management to improve security measures.

Greens bid for Maori vote

by Britton Broun

The Greens are urging Maori to split their vote, but Maori gaining more representation in Parliament doesn't mean their issues will be advanced more easily.

Green MP Metiria Turei says Maori voters should give the party vote to the Greens and save their electorate vote for the Maori Party.

"It's the only way we'll get into Parliament," she says. "The Maori Party will definitely get there because Tariana will win her seat so they have a guaranteed representation."

Turei says Maori are a diverse group and the Greens' more liberal attitude on issues like civil unions, their clear anti-nuclear stance and their opposition to free trade agreements offer a real choice to Maori voters.

"We bring both a treaty perspective and commitment but also quite a different social and economic agenda. We offer a real alternative, so if Maori voters split their vote they can get the best of both worlds - double the bang for their buck."

Experience has taught her that a sole voice gets drowned out in Parliament.

"You need to have friends there. That's why it's important to have the Greens and Maori in there at the next election so we can help to strengthen advocacy for Maori issues and get some real things done."

Maori Party candidate for Manawatu's Ikaroa-Rawhiti seat, Atareta Poananga, says

she sees the Greens as a natural ally with their emphasis on kotahitanga (unification), treaty and environmental issues.

But Turei says the Maori Party only needs the electoral votes, as it won't get enough party votes to make the five per cent threshold.

Maori Party co-leader Pita Sharples has heard this kind of talk before.

"A lot of people have been appealing to Maori to give them their party vote," he says.

"The worst is Labour saying that a vote for the Maori Party is a vote for National and Brash. That's scaring the hell out of Maori."

Sharples says the Maori

"If Maori split their vote, they can get the best of both worlds."

Party is putting a major effort into winning the seven general seats and the party list vote.

Although he sees some links with the Greens he knows the Maori Party will be distinct in Parliament.

"The point is we're there to keep them honest - whether they're Greens or National."

Both Sharples and Poananga say they will refer any coalition deals to their electorates before decisions are made.

University of Auckland political scientist Dr Raymond Miller says that since Don Brash's Orewa speech 18 months ago, the major parties have become a lot more mainstream.

This means that even if the Greens and the Maori Party both get into Parliament it will be a lot more difficult to push Maori issues.

"Both major parties will be conscious of attitudes among their own voters."

"National and Labour have both tried to steer clear of anything that might smack of being the slightest bit radical on treaty issues and I can't see that changing," he says.

One possibility would be to establish a Maori caucus, similar to the Afro-American caucus in the US.

Sharples says he intends to set up a caucus that all Maori MPs across the party spectrum can participate in and work out which Maori issues should be advanced.

He expects the idea to be rejected at first but feels after a few months all the Maori MPs will be involved.

Miller says that with strong leadership and cooperation from all sides a caucus like this could work, but party loyalties will cause major problems.

"The problem will be that a lot of people will be pretty bruised and resentful after the election campaign. There's already some bad blood between Labour and the Maori Party anyway," he says.

"There's also a gulf between the likes of John Tamihere and some of the Maori Party candidates. They're all Maori, sure, but they come from quite different ideological backgrounds and have a different view of Maori development."