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EDITORIAL

Now that at long last we have the beginning of a democratic form of government in New Zealand, a strange phenomenon has taken place over the past few months which illustrates how fickle the attitude of the general public can be.

Let us analyse the developments stage by stage.

Stage I: For years the people of New Zealand complained about their successive governments because the system of "First Past the Post" always resulted in a series of glaring inconsistencies.:

a) It made it impossible for smaller parties ever to be represented in Parliament.

b) The minority party which automatically became the "opposition" had next to no effect whatsoever on the decisions of the ruling party.

c) The ruling party thus was virtually free to run the country at will with total disregard not only to the wishes of the public, but also to its own election promises which more often than not were totally overturned as soon as the party came into power.

In fact New Zealand's government was closer to a total dictatorship than to a democracy.

Stage II: Under constant and ever increasing pressure from all directions, the Members of Parliament eventually and, very reluctantly, agreed to submit to the country some proposals for a more democratic form of government.

Their initial reluctance to act was quite understandable because the system of "First Past the Post" gave them the only thing that most MP's wanted and dreamed of when they entered politics: Power. For those MP's who formed the government, it meant, for a period of three years at least, an euphoric state of unbridled power which neither the opposition, nor the news medias, not the public opinion could touch in any way. To all intents and purposes, "First Past the Post" was the ideal form of government for our MP's, but certainly not for the country.

So it was understandable that our MP's held onto it as long as they could and it must be put to their credit that they eventually agreed to let go and accept the idea of a form of proportional representation.

A variety of forms of proportional representations were submitted to the country from which MMP was eventually chosen. Although MMP does not come anywhere near the true proportional representation as we have it in Switzerland, at least it is a step in the right direction and a marked improvement over the unfair and undemocratic "First Past the Post" system.

Stage III: Last October New Zealand had its first try at truly democratic elections where, for the first time, every vote counted. That the result did not meet everyone's expectations did not come as a surprise. After all, you cannot change overnight from dictatorship to democracy

without some hitches on the way. After all, Rome was not built in one day either.

Political observers predicted it would take a second election in three years time for the new democratic system to settle down. It was of course illogical that a small party with only 17 MP's could hold up the formation of a government for almost two months. But, like most politicians, Winston Peters is an opportunist. Like Rob Muldoon who took advantage of the weakness of the opposition and of his own Cabinet to become a virtual dictator, Winston Peters too took advantage of an election result which put him into a unique bargaining position, a situation which he may never find himself in again at the next elections.

Stage IV: Now here comes the amazing switch in New Zealand's politics. People who hated the dictatorial system under "First Past the Post" suddenly decided that MMP was not going to work and opted for a return to the old system. On the other hand, our MP's who originally did not want the MMP system, decided to stick it out and try to make it work against all the odds being stacked against them. Our MP's could easily have thrown in the towel and claimed that MMP was unworkable which would have placed New Zealand in a very serious political crisis.

Once again, we must give credit to our MP's who were determined to come to a compromise so that a proper democratic government could be formed.

Those New Zealanders who, at the first hitch under MMP, immediately declared that MMP was a failure and that it would have been better to stick with the old system, will never know how close they have come to see democracy fly out the window. If their wish had been fulfilled, they would have

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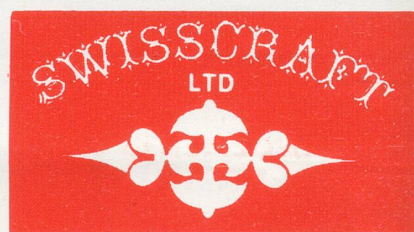
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