

Green Politics in Future New Zealand

Keith Rankin, 26 September 2015

I sense a renewed commitment by the Green Party to contribute to the governance of New Zealand, and not simply snipe from the sidelines. Getting the 'Red Peak' flag on the menu for this year's flag referendum was a masterstroke of political pragmatism that allows for a process in which people can more easily make reflective rather than reactive decisions about an alternative flag; a flag that might replace the defaced blue ensign that tells the world we are both a state of Australia and a British overseas territory. (In the end it was New Zealand First – alias Winston's Imperial Army – that showed its true colours during Wednesday evening's debate. Who else really wants the United Kingdom flag to be part of our flag?)

But I'm not really writing about the flag here. I'm sensing that James Shaw is acting to position the Green Party as a genuine power broker, and in part by emphasising Green's primary purpose, to advocate (and legislate) for the natural environment.

The issue is particularly pertinent at present because the signs are that, given past precedents, Winston Peters will be in a position in 2017 to insist on becoming Prime Minister as a condition of his party's support in forming either a Labour-led or National-led Government.

The message the Greens need to give is that their first preference is to participate meaningfully in a Labour-Green or Labour-Green-Māori government. Of equal importance, they must give the clear message that their second preference is meaningful participation in a National-Green or National-Green-Māori government. Both of these options render New Zealand First superfluous.

While it is possible that there will be enough votes for the first (with Labour) preference, it's much more likely that there will be enough votes for a National-Green-Māori supply-confidence combo. Further, I am sure that Mr Key would much prefer a National-Green-Māori line-up to a National-Winston administration.

(While making predictions may be brash, I did get this year's British election right; [United Kingdom General Election on 7 May](#), *Scoop*, 23 April 2015. I think that the effective vote percentages in New Zealand in 2017 could be Green 12%, Labour 30%, NZ First 10%, Māori 3%, National 40%, Act 5%.)

While Winston would probably negotiate principally on the basis of leadership, the Greens would negotiate on the basis of environmental policy. Further, once in the governing tent, the Greens would be in a position to advocate for a more publically-oriented form of capitalism in economic policy.

My position is that I want good policies, and if Mr Key presiding over good policies makes his legacy look better than most people on the left would rate it, then so be it. I look forward to a National-Green-Māori government closing out this decade. I would also be more than happy to have a Labour-Green-Māori government. Indeed, I can see no reason why both Green and Māori should not be a part of all future MMP governments.

One final note, on progressing the matter of climate change that is dear to James Shaw's heart. From my point of view, the science (while important) is incidental to how we should behave. We should reduce our pollutant carbon (and other harmful) emissions because such emissions represent a fouling of our home. We don't need proof of anthropogenic global warming to reach this ethical conclusion about how we should behave towards our planet.

And for those climate-change deniers, who for the most part think that large-scale pollution is OK; they should be asked what they would do (and what policies they would recommend) if ever there was incontrovertible proof (ie proof that even they would have to accept) that human-induced pollution was creating long-term adverse consequences for the global environment.

An ideologue is a person whose opinions are influenced by neither facts nor ethics. Opposition and minority-party politicians (and journalists) need to probe our key decision-makers, to ensure that their opinions are influenced by both facts (including newly discovered facts) and ethics. The Greens, if they

choose, can 'punch' above their weight in the governance of Aotearoa New Zealand. In democratic politics, ethics and facts trump ideology. People, for the most part, are principled pragmatists.