



'Multi-party government' not a 'hung parliament'

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Immediately before the last election, in the hurly-burly of the election campaign, I, together with many other Tasmanians, was astonished when four former premiers delivered a paternalistic warning that if we were to vote in a 'hung parliament' there was a grave risk that the sky over Tasmania would fall in. The line that these former premiers were running was that government would be unworkable without a single party in charge, the logical extension presumably being that the ideal system would be a one party system.

Substitute the pejorative term hung parliament for multi-party democracy and then look around the world and you will find that we are actually moving in a mainstream political direction. Canada has had a multi-party federal government since 2004 (see Opinion, this Issue). Britain has now joined this club, as have a number of European democracies. It is clear, even peering through volcanic ash, that the skies over Europe remain at their correct altitude.

How often as a voter have you looked at the platforms of the parties and thought that it would be ideal if you could select planks from each. In political terms, it is very hard to imagine, when faced with the complexity of modern society, that any political system could function with only two dimensions – 'left' and 'right' or Labor and Liberal. It's time to move on. Surely in

Australia we can do better than this simplistic 'us and them' approach.

The evolution in the West to multi-party government is a reflection of the changes in society. Our Hare-Clark system, whatever you may think of it, does provide representation for a wide range of opinion. It probably does this better than any other.

The current make-up of our too small parliament should tell us that the time has come for far more co-operation. The electorate is weary of the ritualistic and demeaning confrontation between members of parliament that has been the political fashion for far too long. Surely there are more important matters than merely scoring points against each other.

Our new multi-party government is an opportunity to take our democracy to a higher level. The voters have exercised their democratic right under Hare-Clark whether our pollies like it or not. We the voters have not, in spite of what the former premiers might believe, failed to get it right.

Maybe it's tough for our pollies to learn co-operation as well as confrontation but as a former prime minister famously declared, 'life wasn't meant to be easy'. I'm sure he meant this for our pollies together with everyone else.