



United Future and Peter Dunne still have a lot to offer the country

More than at any time since the introduction of MMP, the future of third parties in New Zealand politics is in the melting pot.

The MMP electoral system will itself be subject to a referendum in conjunction with next year's general election.

But the public mood between now and then may determine the very viability of the "littlies"; whether they are destined to be squeezed out by Labour and National, or if there is scope to flourish — either on the fringes or in the middle-of-the-road.

Biggest of the fringe parties are ACT and the Greens; the biggest of the middle-roaders are United Future and New Zealand First.

While the first three are currently represented in Parliament, New Zealand First is out of the House though not necessarily out of contention.

True to form, leader Winston Peters is keeping the party ticking over, keeping the political pot boiling and also keeping his opponents guessing about his personal comeback.

More positively committed is United Future leader Peter Dunne

who sees both bad and good signs for smaller parties.

On one hand, he says the media's concentration on Labour and National tends to exclude the smaller parties; but on the other, a measure of disillusionment with the two major players.

Labour had been perceived as too prescriptive, he told The Gisborne Herald, but people did not like everything they saw about National.

This view was held by people who were not extreme in their outlook. They had a view of where New Zealand should be going but they considered ACT and the Greens to be too radical.

Voters invariably like certain aspects of society but don't feel comfortable with others and often they don't want to turn the whole thing on its head.

Mr Dunne can be heartened by an influx of new supporters in United Future; largely in the 30-40 age group.

It is still hard for small parties to make headway but experienced politicians like Peter Dunne still have a lot to offer.