

Rise and rise of Jonathan Young

The announcement Jonathan Young will be National's spokesperson on the arts is significant for more than the obvious reason.

It signals Young's rising star within the party, which eventually must return to power again in New Zealand's perpetual swing between the slightly left and the slightly right.

The real question is whether his steady, almost gentle, certainly dignified progress to prominence in the madhouse of Parliament will do us any good.

Given the propensity all politicians have to make sure their home territory is well provided for, there no reason to believe Young is any different.

However, in the short term I doubt his promotion will be any help whatsoever. In fact, he should resign. Here's why.

Despite Andrew Little's semi-presence, Taranaki has no apparently effective voice at the seat of power, which is one reason the Labour-led contraption has been able so easily to decimate one of the province's key sources of income and is lining up the other.

The newly announced Labour candidate for this year's general election, Glen Bennett, is as fine a prospect as you could find to give Young a run for his money, but I doubt he can unseat someone who is respected by those of either political colour and thus is entrenched.

Young's position reminds me of when Ron Barclay was the New Plymouth Labour MP from 1966 to 1975. You couldn't have got anyone more Nats-inclined than my father, but he was happy with Barclay.

"Ron's a good joker," he'd say. "I can talk to him any time about something that needs fixing and he always listens and tries to do something about it."

Those were the days when New Plymouth was a more marginal seat. It was also an indicator seat.

Its efficient returning officer took pride in getting election night results filed ahead of any other electorate and when posted they gave an accurate steer to which way the election was headed.

Jonathan Young is another in the Barclay mould, my Dad would have said. So, what will we face with him after October's vote?

Another term like this, I'm afraid. He'll likely see off young Mr Bennett - who will do his own reputation no harm running a good campaign - but Jacinda Ardern will probably be in charge again (although leading what exactly defeats my imagination), and we'll be back to what we have now.

That doesn't augur well. With dairy farmers in the Greens' sights, our other great economic pillar faces the same stress as that inflicted on oil and gas.

I've always been an advocate of cleaning up our waterways, but I favour Taranaki Regional Council's gradual squeeze over revolutionary decimation.

However, if revolution is in the air, as seems to be the case with the current government, let me suggest an out-there solution to Taranaki's political slough.

It springs from something that happened in Auckland when I was working there in the 90s.

Phil Goff, the man who would later go on to lead the Labour Party, briefly, and become the city's current mayor, lost his supposedly safe Roskill seat in the 1990 election, but Labour found a useful way to ensure his single spell away from the House was not wasted.

They organised a job for him in the communications department of the Auckland Institute of Technology where I was teaching journalism, but more importantly laid on an extensive study sojourn in Britain.

He was well prepared to serve in politics again when the next election rolled around and he retook Roskill.

My crazy idea is that Young should take a similar (but unforced) break next term and be sent by National to spend extensive time overseas finding out more than he knows now about his energy, innovation, economic development and arts specialities.

He would return for the 2023 election a more viable choice for smart New Plymouth voters, who would see the benefit of having a National MP again when there would be a good prospect of regime change.

Ridiculous, of course, but practical...to a point. If Bennett got in, his use as a newbie would be limited but his presence might remind Labour (and Little) to tread more carefully.

Bennett wrote a recent letter listing all the spending that's been going on here, but as mayor Neil Holdom keeps pointing out, it's not enough to cover the damage done and the challenges we face.

We need the revolution to go our way for a change. Sorry, evolution.