

STATEMENTS ON A MATTER OF OFFICIAL RESPONSIBILITY

6. The Bailiff:

There are no matters under J, so we come then to K, Statements on a Matter of Official Responsibility, and first of all the Chairman of the Privileges and Procedures Committee will make a statement regarding electoral reform.

6.1 The Chairman of the Privileges and Procedures Committee regarding electoral reform

The Connétable of St. Clement:

At its last meeting the P.P.C. considered the outcome of the debates on 1st and 2nd May concerning the composition and election of the States and discussed the way forward. P.P.C. considers that the debates that took place at the last meeting were very disappointing, particularly as the media coverage that followed suggested that the States had now abandoned all attempts at reform. Although a few Members made it clear during the debates that they were not in favour of any reform at all at this stage, P.P.C. noted that many Members were still keen for work on reform proposals to continue. The Committee considers that the negative outcome at the last meeting arose possibly as a result of the somewhat confusing nature of the debate together with a feeling by some Members that such a significant issue should not be decided on the basis of a private member's proposition with a large number of amendments. As explained in the report accompanying our amendments to Senator Shenton's proposal, P.P.C. only brought those amendments as a safeguard to ensure that P.145 of 2006 was meaningful and workable if adopted. The lodging of the amendments was not, therefore, intended to be the final outcome of P.P.C.'s work on this important issue. Members are aware that P.P.C. has been consulting on reform proposals for many months and the Committee agreed at its last meeting that the rejection or the proposals at the last meeting should not signal an end to this work. We are, therefore, now working on a report that will summarise the outcome of the process followed by P.P.C. to date and that will set out what P.P.C. sees as the only workable way forward. It will, of course, be a matter for the Assembly to decide in due course whether or not to support any of the proposals put forward.

6.1.1 The Deputy of St. Martin:

The Chairman has said in his last paragraph: "We therefore are now working on a report and will summarise the outcome." Have we got a timing for when this report is going to come to the States?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

It will be discussed at the next meeting of the Committee which, I think, is on 23rd May and it will come forward to the States shortly afterwards.

6.1.2 Deputy A. Breckon:

On the same lines, I wonder if the Chairman can give an assurance that Members would have access to the draft report and also some idea of the timescale the Deputy of St. Martin has mentioned. But I think the answer was a little bit vague when it might be debated by the States again, for example.

The Connétable of St. Clement:

Yes, it is intended to put it in the public domain as soon as possible so that Members can see it and it will be lodged in time for it to be debated before the summer recess.

6.1.3 Senator P.F. Routier:

Would the President welcome Deputy Le Claire's proposition to be withdrawn at this stage in anticipation of the report and your recommendations to be put forward to the House so that we can have an orderly debate on the matter?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

Yes, we were rather disappointed, as a Committee, that Deputy Le Claire had put forward yet another proposition before the Committee had a chance to put their proposal forward and we would hope, at least, that Deputy Le Claire would at least defer debate from, I think, 5th June. We would hope that he would at least defer it from that.

6.1.4 Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

Would the Chairman be good enough to explain and elucidate a little further what he means when he says in the penultimate paragraph sentence of his statement: "As the only workable way forward." Could he elucidate what workable way forward he is thinking about?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

I hope the Senator will patiently wait until he sees our proposals.

6.1.5 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Given the concern that the next set of proposals may be amended out of existence, at the same time it has to be acknowledged that Back-Benchers have a very vital role to play and it also has to be acknowledged that Deputy Le Claire's proposal brings some new and interesting variance to what is being proposed. Rather than the Chairman suggesting he may have - and which he will need - the wisdom of Solomon in this instance, is there going to be an attempt to bring people on board and to try and work out a common way forward so we do not end up going off in all sorts of directions?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

I think over the many months that we have been consulting, we have done just that. We have asked people to come forward with their ideas to share with us and some people have.

6.1.6 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

I find it rather amazing that the Privileges and Procedures Committee can be rather disappointed that I have lodged a proposition this morning, given that it was only approved yesterday afternoon by the Bailiff. I wondered when the Privileges and Procedures Committee met to discuss the Chairman making that statement, that it was disappointed and that it would be happy for me to withdraw that proposition so that it could become a later date or at least defer it? It would appear that the Chairman of the Privileges and Procedures Committee has made a statement on behalf of that Committee and given a Committee position that has not been achieved. In respect of that comment in relation to his proposals that are coming forwards, once he has answered that question, would he be able to indicate to me and other Members whether or not my proposals - which were predominantly set out as the key proposal in option 1 of their own consultation to the people of Jersey, only Senators and Deputies in the States of Jersey - whether or not the proposals that are coming forward will give the facility for independent Members like me that have waited patiently for years to go about debating these issues, and whether or not that will be part of the options that are available? Otherwise I certainly will not be seeking to defer for more years these debates on whether or not we should have Constables and Senators in the States of Jersey.

The Connétable of St. Clement:

The Committee have not met as a Committee but I have...

Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

Then I ask him to withdraw the remark because I think that is rather unfortunate.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Just let the Chairman finish what he was going to say.

The Connétable of St. Clement:

As I said, the Committee has not met formally but I have had indications from all members of the Committee that they do not support Deputy Le Claire's proposition.

Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

Could he answer the second part of the question as to the fact that I have been waiting for years to debate something along the same proposals as they outlined in option 1 as set out in my proposition? Are his proposals that are coming forward before summer to be debated going to allow for the facility of an amendment to debate those kinds of reforms?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

I am not certain that I have any authority about who amends propositions.

Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

What I am asking is, is the proposition going to be amendable in the form that will allow such? That is what has been the problem. For years I have been unable to bring an amended proposition because the basis for that proposition has not included, for example, the States will decide to reform the States of Jersey and A, B, C, D, E. Will the Committee be bringing forward proposals that allow individual Members such as myself to bring forward these types of proposals? Certainly, it is just a matter of drafting it correctly.

The Connétable of St. Clement:

I still do not think the Committee has any remit about suitable amendments to its proposals, so that is a matter for the Chair.

The Deputy Bailiff:

You have already asked questions, Senator. Senator Perchard?

6.1.7 Senator J.L. Perchard:

I wonder if the President could clarify the position of the Privileges and Procedures Committee with regards to the questions he has been answering this morning. I believe the P.P.C. will have to lodge on or before 5th June if a proposition is to be debated this side of the summer recess. That is one month away. I thought I heard him say that there would be a measure of consultation with the P.P.C. proposals with States Members. That means, to use an agricultural term, he will have to pull his finger out, and I am not sure whether the P.P.C. are able to act at such speed.

The Connétable of St. Clement:

I think we are quite capable of achieving our objectives.

6.1.8 Deputy G.W.J. de Faye of St. Helier:

I think I welcome the Chairman's indication that the Privileges and Procedures Committee will be pursuing what they see as the only workable way forward. Does the Chairman agree with me that it might be a helpful principle to establish what the basic areas for reform should be and why before we decide what the reforms are?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

That is what we have been endeavouring to do since November.

6.1.9 The Deputy of St. John:

Does the Chairman agree that trying to get consensus amongst all groups of Members is extremely difficult and would his Committee seriously consider establishing an independent electoral commission?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

That would be debated at the next Committee meeting.

6.1.10 Deputy P.N. Troy of St. Brelade:

The Chairman was appointed as Chairman 18 months ago now. I really would like to tie him down on this question of when he will be bringing his proposals forward and can he confirm a date that he anticipates when he will have proposals before this Assembly?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

I think I can do that but it will depend on the Committee's meeting, I think on 23rd May, approving the draft projet.

Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

On a point of information, may I just let the Assembly and the Chairman know that I would be happy to meet with the Privileges and Procedures Committee? Should their proposals that are coming forward be blocked in some way by my current opposition, or be stymied in some way or be replaced in some way by my proposition, I will happily consider withdrawing my proposition to enable the House to consider that but I would need to be invited to hear that.

The Deputy Bailiff:

I am sure that is very helpful, Deputy. That brings questions to an end.