

3.2 Deputy S.Y. Mézec of St. Helier of the Chief Minister regarding a Royal Commission on electoral reform:

Would the Chief Minister advise whether he is supportive of holding a Royal Commission into electoral reform in Jersey and if so does he intend to lodge a proposition for consideration by the Assembly in relation to this issue before the general election in October?
[Approbation]

Senator I.J. Gorst (The Chief Minister):

Firstly, may I congratulate the Member on his recent election? Some Members in recent debates said they wanted an opportunity to consider improvements to the Machinery of Government in order to inform their views on electoral reform. I therefore hope that Members will support the proposed legislative changes arising from the recommendations of the Machinery of Government review when these are debated later in this session. This, I then believe, will pave the way for further consideration of electoral reform.

3.2.1 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Does the Chief Minister remember the decision that was made in this Assembly on 5th November last year to hold a referendum in October on the Clothier recommendations, and will he accept that a yes vote in that referendum will negate any further need for considering electoral reform or a Royal Commission?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I accept part of that question but not the other. Yes, if the public decide that they wish to implement Clothier then I see no need to call for a Royal Commission. Of course, if the public decide that they do wish to enact Clothier that means that this Assembly will then have to debate those proposals and understand what it was that Clothier meant. I have had some conversations with the chairman of P.P.C. (Privileges and Procedures Committee). It is okay to say we are asking the public to implement Clothier but it is far from clear in the Clothier proposals what exactly that means.

3.2.2 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Would the Chief Minister acknowledge whether the 82 per cent vote in the recent Crimea referendum holds some lessons for Jersey, and secondly, would he be in favour of compulsory voting?

The Bailiff:

I am not sure the Minister is responsible for the Crimea. [Laughter]

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I think it is some way off Guernsey, is it? I do not think that the lessons learned from the Crimea referendum are anything that we can learn from here. If one listens and looks at the international response to that referendum then I think we can quite clearly see there is nothing for us to learn from that referendum. I believe in working in partnership in building consensus and finding a united way forward, not in bullying, not in division but accepting that there has to be some compromise. I have forgotten what the second part of the Deputy's question was.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Compulsory voting.

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I personally am not in favour of that.

3.2.3 Deputy M. Tadier:

Will the Minister confirm that a Royal Commission is not the preferred or even ideal way forward for Jersey to resolve its issues on electoral reform, but rather what is needed, and I think he has maybe alluded to it already, is for Members across the board and indeed the public to try and get behind the referendum and indeed get behind the yes vote for Clothier because that seems like the only model which has been left standing on the table which has not been tried after some 10 or 12 years.

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I agree with the sentiment of the Deputy's question. The problem is of course that Clothier, I understand from speaking to some of those involved on that panel, purposefully left open quite how representation under its proposed electoral changes would work. It is said that there should be parochial representation and the Parish boundaries should be respected. The problem that this Assembly has had time and time again is being able to agree exactly the electoral mandate that it wished to propose going forward. Potentially we would be in exactly the same position as we are now if we take, for example, St. Mary. We would have one representative for those few hundred voters and then we would have multi parochial seats in the others. That has not dealt with the issue of fairness. That is the fundamental issue that we need to deal with and this Assembly once and for all has to get to grips with.

3.2.4 Deputy M. Tadier:

Supplementary. Would the Chief Minister formally ask P.P.C. to make sure that any model coming forward for the referendum will include single seat constituencies so that all Islanders, no matter where they live, can be expected to have one man, one woman - excuse the sexism - one vote?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

The Deputy knows that I have informally spoken, as I have said, to the chairman of P.P.C. and I believe that work needs to be done on what exactly it is that P.P.C. were proposing before the question is put in a referendum. One person, one vote is the basis of democracy and that person then being elected has an equal voice in an Assembly. It becomes apparent to me that the decision to move to a general election day, which in effect sounded the death knell for Senators, many members in our community are now dissatisfied with and perhaps they are calling for us to consider a model that increases the number of Senators. Of course if we did that we would have to move away from a single election day.

3.2.5 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

The Chief Minister in one of his answers spoke about fairness. Does he accept, like I do, that the failing of the previous Electoral Commission was that it came up with one option that was completely unfair and in many people's views was a total gerrymander, and will he also agree that if there must be another Commission into electoral reform in Jersey it must be bound in its terms of reference to come up with a system that is compliant with the Venice Commission's criteria?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I do not like arguing over the past but the Members of this Assembly were not able to agree and implement the result of the referendum. They found many reasons why they felt that the referendum result was not clear. It did not have a majority support and so on. The reasons that Members voted against that referendum result are well rehearsed. I do not feel that there

were any reasonable grounds for voting against but we are where we are, as other Members have said, and we need to move forward.

[10:00]

We need to find a solution to the problem of unfairness and the democratic deficit in our current system. This Assembly should be able to find a solution to that and that is what I will support.