

2016.02.23

3.5 Deputy C.F. Labey of Grouville of the Chairman of the Comité des Connétables regarding the Code of 1771:

What does the Code of 1771 mean to the Connétables and what impact, if any, does it have on the way they carry out their duties?

Connétable L. Norman of St. Clement (Chairman, Comité des Connétables):

A fascinating question. The Code of 1771 ratified a number of existing laws. The only aspect of the 1771 code which remains today in relation to the Connétables is a requirement to convene a meeting once every month of their police officers. This of course is something which we do.

3.5.1 The Deputy of Grouville:

Is the Constable aware that the lodging periods, that we have 6 weeks for departments, 2 sittings for other propositions, remain in place - and they remain in place, and they remained in place when we went to ministerial government, they were not changed - to give the Constables the opportunity to hold Parish Assemblies to consult with their parishioners on issues?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

No, I am not aware of that. The lodging periods were changed fairly recently. They used to be, when I first came to the States, with 2 weeks for every proposition, they were extended some time ago to allow all States Members to consult with their parishioners and their constituents if they so wished. There is nothing in the 1771 code referring to that.

3.5.2 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Is the chairman aware that the Code of 1771 was adopted as a direct result of a mini-revolution which took place 2 years earlier where hundreds of Islanders gathered in the Royal Square to protest against a series of very poor decisions made against the will of the public by the then out of touch government? Given the context we find ourselves in today, does the Comité believe that it is time to adopt a Code of 2016 and if so, what would he like to see in it?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

I really feel that I should have notice of that question so that I can give it full and proper consideration. This code has served us for some 240 years, perhaps we give it another 8 or 9 years and at its 250th anniversary we can consider a new one.

3.5.3 Deputy S. Y. Mézec:

In order to consider what he may like to see in a future code would he be prepared to be encouraging his colleagues on the Constables to hold Parish Assemblies to consult with their parishioners on the issue?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

Can I assure the Deputy and States Members that the Constables consult with their constituents I am sure equally as well and as much as other Members of the States do and should. We are all representatives of the people who elect us and therefore we should all consult with them. At the end of the day, of course, we are representatives, not delegates, and we make our own minds up based on the quality and the persuasions that we receive in debates. But I can say that at Parish Halls we do have many consultative meetings. While the Deputy was asking these questions I wrote

a few down that I can remember, and I am sure there are others. The Electoral Commission, when that was going on. There were meetings at every Parish Hall. The current major debate on the hospital. There is going to be a presentation in each Parish Hall during the consultation period. I remember meetings regarding changes to bus services. I remember meetings regarding road safety issues. I remember meetings in every Parish Hall about the Island Plan and other planning issues. So there are regular meetings going on at the Parish Hall where parishioners are consulted about the issues which affect them directly, and it is important that that continues.

The Bailiff:

Something has to give in terms of timing in question time.

3.5.4 The Deputy of Grouville:

I find that this is an opportunity that is being missed here, to invigorate grassroots politics and I do not believe having the health roadshow can substitute for a Parish Assembly. Does the parishioner not agree with me that there is an opportunity being missed here whereby Constables can consult with their parishioners, give them the opportunity to have their say, know their feelings on issues, such as ... we have had many in the past such as Plémont, Port Galots and now the hospital site? Does he not believe that this would help reinvigorate Parish Assemblies and also perhaps increase voter turnout?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

I think it is very important that the States recognise, and the Deputy should recognise, that the Parish is probably the most democratic, transparent and open government institution that we have. I have said it in this Assembly before at question time. It is the only institution, the only government institution in this Island where people tax their own rates. That they elect their own officials, including police officers, roads committee, assessors, the ones that assess their properties for the rates that they themselves will vote for. At the end of the day it is the parishioners who decide how their money is going to be spent. They do not have a States Assembly or a Parish ... they are the Parish Assembly. Every single voter in the Parish has the right to come and decide how their rates are going to be spent. There cannot be anything more democratic, open and transparent than that. Really I think the Parish Assembly, the Parish system, should be the envy of so many democracies throughout the world because it is a direct democracy.