

2.15 The Deputy of St. Mary of the Chairman of the Privileges and Procedures Committee regarding the underlying principles of electoral reform:

It is like the buses. Yes, in view of the inevitable arguments over detail which accompany any proposal to change the Island's electoral system, will the Chairman confirm that the Committee has identified clearly the underlying principles of electoral reform and if so, will she advise Members what these principles are?

Connétable J. Gallichan of St. Mary (Chairman of the Privileges and Procedures Committee):

The principles that are underlying electoral reform are set out in P.72 and the process by which the P.P.C. (Privileges and Procedures Committee) arrived at those principles is set out in the accompanying report. In brief, the principles are: provide for a general election, establish more equitable representation between the Parishes, retain link between each Parish as an individual entity and the States, increase voter turnout, increase the term of office, decrease the number of States Members. Although certain clear themes emerge from the consultation work undertaken by the previous P.P.C. and also from past States debates, it was apparent that there was no overall consensus among members of the public or Members of the States about the type of reform that should be introduced. Furthermore, P.P.C. acknowledges that there are often irreconcilable conflicts between different proposals when attempts are made to put together one overall reform package. For example, while there is no denying that the Island-wide mandate is seen by some as important, this has not been included in P.P.C.'s proposals. Currently only 22 per cent of Members have one, only 60 per cent of Ministers have one and only 16 per cent of the Members of the Chairmen's Committee have one. It was clear to P.P.C. that the retention of the Senatorial mandate could frustrate other more meaningful reform. P.72 therefore attempts to find the best workable fit for the principles identified. In addition to the reforms proposed by P.72, P.P.C. is already engaged in other work aimed at increasing voter participation including ways to provide more assistance for sick vote-type procedures and the possibility of increasing access to pre-poll voting while preserving the integrity of the system.

2.15.1 The Deputy of St. Mary:

I am astonished at the notion that P.72 contains underlying principles of electoral reform and if I can just remind Members of 2 of them and then ask a question of the Chairman of P.P.C.; 2 of these underlying principles of electoral reform are that the Parish Constables should remain as Members of the States and that many, presumably many members of the public, felt that there were too many Members in the States. Could the Chairman confirm that P.P.C. did not discuss what underlying principles of electoral reform should be, because these certainly are not underlying principles?

The Connétable of St. Mary:

I am quite astounded by the Deputy's question. When this was originally written to me some 2 weeks ago, I was confused then as to exactly what the Deputy was getting at. He has had 2 weeks since he did not ask me last time to elaborate. He did tell me that he considered this to be a very simple question and why was I wasting my time working on the answer. So, let us look at the issue of the Constables, for example. The Constables are being retained in our proposals because what we need to do is find effective workable reform which has a chance of support. Apart from the M.O.R.I.

(Market and Opinion Research International Limited) poll which showed there was support for ...

The Deputy Bailiff:

I think, for me, Chairman, the question was simply whether you had in fact discussed any underlying principles, so I would have thought either a yes or a no.

The Connétable of St. Mary:

The present P.P.C. committee reviewed all the work undertaken by the previous and did discuss and came forward with this proposition.

The Deputy of St. Mary:

I am sorry, that is not an answer to my question.

The Deputy Bailiff:

I will come back to it, Deputy. Senator Syvret?

2.15.2 Senator S. Syvret:

If I could help the Chairman of P.P.C. For example, one of the rudimentary and obvious underlying principles of electoral reform anybody would look at would be the question of proportionality per the number of elected representatives in the Chamber in respect of the number of seats there are. That is a fundamental underlying principle. On that basis, I find it difficult to imagine that the P.P.C. did consider those type of principles, given that they have come forward with an anti-democratic set of proposals that flies in the face of the principle in that they are seeking to keep the 12 Constables in the States, some of whom represent microscopic constituencies, so there is a great deal of disproportionality there and remove the most democratically accountable Members of the States.

The Deputy Bailiff:

So the question is, Senator?

Senator S. Syvret:

The question is did the Chairman and Committee consider those underlying principles such as the proportionality of representation?

The Connétable of St. Mary:

Yes, I made it clear in my answer, I believe, that one of the things we were looking at was to establish more equitable representation. I also said quite clearly that there were sometimes irreconcilable conflicts between what member of the public and others said they required and how they could be achieved and, as has been stated, P.P.C. did discuss this and attempted to find the best workable fit.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Right, the final question, I am afraid, from Deputy of St. Mary will then bring things to an end. Deputy of St. Mary? Unless you want to defer to Deputy Southern?

2.15.3 The Deputy of St. Mary:

No, thank you. I have got a very good question of my own. No, I would just like to ask a specific question which follows on really from Senator Syvret's. What comment would the Chairman of P.P.C. make when you consider that the Constable

of St. Helier represents, I think, 15,000-odd electors and the Constable of St. Mary, just so happens, represents a very, very... in fact a 10-fold smaller number and how does that square with the principle of proportionality?

The Connétable of St. Mary:

Firstly, currently of course so does the Deputy of St. Mary represent the same number of people. [Laughter]

The Deputy of St. Mary:

St. Helier has 10 Deputies.

The Connétable of St. Mary:

Yes, there are anomalies. One of the ways to address the anomaly is by the creation of constituencies which even out different boundaries for the election of Deputies because, for example ...

The Deputy of St. Mary:

Are we looking forward to the creation of Super Constables?

The Connétable of St. Mary:

I was not aware I was giving way. One of the underlying principles is the retention of the important Parish link. That is an extremely vital thing that came out in the consultation. The link between the Parishes is currently in some Parishes between the Constable and the Deputies and, in some cases, simply between the Constables where the Deputies have different constituencies. There is not necessarily the same clear link although many Deputies do play an active role in Parish life of course. So there are different ways that this imbalance needs to be addressed. Retaining a link with the Parishes, I think, is vital and was shown to be vital in our research in one form or another. I still do not give way, but I think I have said enough.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Very well, I am afraid that brings question time to an end. So then we ...

Deputy G.P. Southern:

May I request that the House considers suspending Standing Orders? We have got one question left, it would seem appropriate.

The Deputy Bailiff:

I fear the Bailiff ruled on the last occasion that that could not be done, Deputy.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

I do not believe I heard the Bailiff saying that could not be done. We are awaiting the institution to our question time in order to finish questions and get proper answers. In principle, I would have thought we could have dealt with one more question.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Yes, I am afraid I am advised by the Greffier that is exactly what the Bailiff ruled. Very well, so we have to move on ...

The Deputy of St. John:

On a point of clarification, as you are Bailiff designate [Laughter] could you not waive the rule?

The Deputy Bailiff:

I think there are 2 answers to that, Deputy. The first one is that under Standing Orders the Bailiff's decision is final, but secondly, even if it were not it would be a rash Bailiff designate who would depart from the decision of the Bailiff. Very well, we will come to C, Questions to Ministers Without Notice, and the first period is to the Minister for Housing.