

“This House believes that the people of the Isle of Man would be better served by a party political system.”

Firstly, thank you to the Junior Chamber of Commerce for arranging this event and thank you to Chris Eaton for inviting me.

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Before I start on why I believe that Party politics is the only sensible way forward I would like to clear up a couple of myths.

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The first myth is that our political system has been around for a long time and is part of our long-standing traditions. I have to admit that I do have a soft spot for our old traditions, such as Hop tu naa, but the ministerial system only came into being in the late 80s so can hardly be classed as a tradition.

The second myth is that we are too small for party politics. I have a list with me of 29 Islands from around the world with a population of less than 100,000 people and 20 of these Islands – that is two thirds - have political parties.

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The third myth is that we don't have Party politics. The definition of a political party is an organisation of people which seeks to achieve the same goals by political means. We most definitely do have that - but the current ruling party is not open or honest - as its members still claim to be independent. I am – of course – referring to the Council of Ministers.

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If I may go back to 2011 to show how this works. In September of that year 24 MHKs were elected. They then sat in Tynwald along with the 8 unelected members of the Legislative Council and voted for the Chief Minister. He then selected his Ministers and formed the Council of Ministers. The Chief Minister and his Ministers had all been elected on different manifestos and different policies and promises. One of the prerequisites of becoming a Minister is that you have to be prepared to sign the Government Code which is where collective responsibility comes in. I will read a small extract to show you what I mean.

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L.26 Collective responsibility implies that the policy of individual Ministers must be consistent with the policy of the Council of Ministers as a whole. Once Council's policy on any particular matter is decided, each Minister is expected to support it and share responsibility for it. If a Minister cannot agree with his colleagues on a matter of general policy or on a single major issue, he should consider whether he should remain a member of Council.

L.27 Collective responsibility has the following features:

- (1) A Minister may speak against any proposal in the Council of Ministers, but he must subsequently either support the policy decided upon or resign.
- (2) Where the policy of a particular Minister is being challenged, it is the Council of Ministers as a whole which is being challenged. Thus, the defeat of a Minister on a major issue represents a defeat for Council.

Every Minister must be prepared to support all Council of Ministers' decisions both inside and outside Tynwald, the House of Keys and Legislative Council.

- (4) Collective Responsibility does not apply to a Minister's responsibility for his personal mistakes, Any major shift of policy proposed by a Minister must be cleared by the Council of Ministers before it is announced.

I find it ~~it is~~ ~~What I do find quite~~ remarkable ~~is that the~~ Ministers still claim to be independent after signing ~~the~~ document agreeing ~~to this that~~ “every Minister must be prepared to support all Council of Ministers decisions”

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I maintain that the Council of Ministers is a political party. But one that is formed after the election and has no public mandate for any of its policies.

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If I may, I would like to give you a couple of examples ~~in from~~ this parliament to show how it works and – I believe – how this works to the detriment of the people.

My first example is ~~the with~~ tuition fees. This was debated in Tynwald less than 18 months after the general election. There were three Ministers who had pledged to retain the tuition grant system ~~fees~~ and the Chief Minister and the six other Ministers said that

it should be retained – if possible. Well, we all know that you can do anything if you really want to. All [of the Ministers of them](#) went against their manifestos.

The second example I am going to use is the Sefton bail out. I am not going to go into the details of this as I am sure that you are all aware of them, and I am sure that you will remember the Treasury Minister Teare, vigorously supporting it in Tynwald and the media. What I am sure will surprise you is that he was not in favour of the deal until after the Council of Ministers meeting. We know that the proposal was taken to the Council of Ministers meeting without Treasury's agreement and we only know this from evidence taken by a committee looking into it after the event. We did not know that at the time. We cannot know how he voted in the meeting as their votes are secret and are, because of collective responsibility, always classed as unanimous.

What most people don't realise is that collective responsibility can apply – depending on the Minister – to departmental members as well. The other little known fact is that, once something has been passed by Treasury, it ties Treasury members as well.

All of this means that a Minister can take a Motion to Tynwald and is virtually guaranteed of success. A department, such as economic development has five members and treasury has two. When the economic development minister brings a Motion to Tynwald he is pretty sure of 16 votes. The 9 Council votes – 5 departmental member votes – and two treasury votes. Because there are only 32 votes in total, he only needs to get one extra vote to win. Hardly democratic.

This would not happen with open, honest Party politics. Party members stand for election with the same national policies in their manifestos. When they are elected it is because the people have voted for those policies and they have a public mandate to implement them from day one.

When a Party gets sufficient numbers to form a government there are many advantages over the current system. One major advantage is that its aims have already been stated

and have a public mandate to be implemented - so from one and it can hit the ground running. It has the support of the people for its policies and already has a plan for implementation of those policies. It does not have to take years trying to formulate a plan that everyone will agree to. The Chief Minister himself has said is like trying to herd cats.

A party political system must, by default, be a more efficient way to run a government. At the moment every time an MHK is appointed as a Minister to a department they bring their own agendas and views to that department. I know of one department that has suffered five different ministers in less than four years. Each one changing the direction that the department had been instructed to follow by the previous Minister. How time consuming and wasteful of public funds is that? How demoralising for the staff is that? This would not happen in a Party system as the direction would be decided at the time of the election and all Minister would already be in agreement so a change of Minister would not mean a change of policy.

So all in all, Party politics brings openness and transparency and encourages voting based on policy rather than personality. It improves efficiency and saves time and wasteful use of public funds – but most of all – it improves democracy.