

## Party Politics Debate

Thank you for coming this evening – you are here because you are interested and care about the good government of the Isle of Man

So are your speakers this evening but we have come to quite different conclusions so it is good to have this debate.

What I want to emphasise right from the start though is that voting against the resolution is not a vote for the status quo.

I am not here to defend where we are now but where I firmly believe we should be going. There is a growing and wholly understandable unease with the way our system is working at the moment but the solutions lie elsewhere – not in party politics.

I have eight minutes.

In the first four I will be explaining why I don't believe party politics is the answer

In the second four minutes I will be arguing that we can find a much better way forward.

So in the first half here are four good reasons why party politics is not the way forward.

First. It's no good having just one party – there absolutely must be two as a minimum. This would be very hard to achieve in our tiny parliament with only 24 members. With so few to choose from on both sides - would it be possible to pull together two competent teams capable of exercising power on behalf of the people? In my experience the answer would be a resounding no. If we are only able to form one competent

party we would be slipping towards a form of dictatorship. If we had two it would lead to oscillating policies and thus political instability.

This brings me to my second point. Parties can be taken over by small pressure groups. This has happened twice to one of the UK's great political parties - Labour. Once through 'entryism' by the militant tendency a few decades ago and again very recently through £3 memberships by neo Marxists. If you doubt me then please read books like '**The Establishment**' by *Owen Jones* and '**Post Capitalism – A Guide To The Future**' by *Paul Mason*. If great political parties can be taken over by militant or extreme groups in a large country then it would take very little for a political party in our small country to be controlled by a tiny group of activists of whatever type or intent.

Three - however thoroughly well meaning a political party might be at the outset it is inevitable that loyalty and duty to country and electorate get confused with duty and loyalty to the party served. The result? regaining power for the party comes before everything else. If an example is needed then simply look at the Conservative and Labour parties who have fallen over each other since the second world war to offer ever more elaborate bribes to the electorate in an effort to regain power. This leads to growing national debt. Never mind the truth – just get re-elected and time all your actions to coincide with the next general election – not the long term good. Thus the interests of the nation become subordinated to the interests of the party.

Fourth – actually the concept of party politics is falling apart in the UK and elsewhere. The current ruling party got to power with just 37% of the popular vote. Party memberships have fallen dramatically in the last thirty years whilst single

issue pressure groups progressively replace them. UKIP with regard to Europe. The SNP concerning Scottish independence, the Greens concerning environmental issues and in recent weeks The Woman's Equality Party whose purpose is self evident. In losing faith in generally political parties they resort to single issue crusades. This growth in the granulation of political opinion will undoubtedly continue.

In summary then – we are too small for party politics, they can be unduly influenced in ways unseen by the electorate, loyalties and duties get confused over time and finally the concept of party politics is in intensive care if not in terminal decline because they are yesterdays solutions for yesterdays problems.

So let's put the past behind us and in my second four minutes face the future and seek out solutions to the problems that have created the dissatisfaction and unease we are all so well aware of.

This dissatisfaction exists because there is still no such thing as the Isle of Man Government – rather there are 7 independent silos - 7 mini governments each with their own legal identity which inherently put their own departmental interests first and therefore have no capacity to build a coherent programme that can be communicated to the electorate. I am on record as describing the emergence of policy round the council of ministers table as being comparable to witnessing the announcement of unexpected pregnancies.

Our system is dysfunctional. It is top heavy, poorly coordinated, bureaucratic, clunky and therefore expensive.

Don't think what I am saying is new. A report very recently came to light during a government office move. This report

had been submitted to the then Lieutenant Governor stating that there were far too many small independent elements to government to make it a single effective organisation and also that having (then) 26 local authorities needed to be reviewed to bring it down to a limited number of much more effective bodies.

Quite incredibly this report was dated 1959 when I was still in primary school.

**For goodness sake isn't it rather past time to sort this out once and for all! Let's stop talking and act.**

Allowing ourselves to be consumed by party politics at this stage is a total distraction and a dangerous one at that. What really needs reform is the government itself. It needs to start serving the people instead of itself. That's the real issue.

The formation of the council of ministers a generation ago was a step forward but then everyone went back to sleep because money just flooded in. Now we face a stark reality.

What we need is a modern single efficient government capable of focusing accurately on the concept of holistic personalised service to the citizen. This is a challenge all governments in the democratic west are having to face up to and if I had more time I would gladly outline a whole range of examples from other jurisdictions and local authorities where action is being taken and results delivered.

Whilst our government has stood still the world has moved on dramatically in the past generation in so many areas - retail, finance and personal transactions, mobile devices TV- you name it - the list is endless but it is all about creating platforms that enable technology to personalise service delivery.

What we have to do is simple. Government needs the tools and the structure to look after its people in a different way - making government human again.

We have the tools at our disposal to do that.

Sir John Elvidge laid the concept of a single legal entity government before us – a concept fully capable (when his proposals are combined with a concentrated drive towards digital inclusion) of progressively moving towards the delivery of efficient cost effective personalised services to the individual citizen.

One of the most exciting things about this opportunity is that the Isle of Man is in an ideal position to do extraordinarily well due to its geographic size, small population and degree of self government. It must first though fully set its mind to the task ahead – something that has not yet happened.

So I would put it to you that in recognising the challenge before us you can either choose to fall back on out dated thinking and yesterday's solutions or you can look forward to what we could be and should be doing and press hard for real reform and a fit for future purpose government

Please do not be distracted by those who, however well intentioned, wish to apply thoroughly outdated thinking.

Chris Robertshaw

29<sup>th</sup> October 2015