

31st March, 2010

Review of the role of the Crown Officers in Jersey

1. This document incorporates the responses of Stéphanie Nicolle Q. C., H.M. Solicitor General January 1994 to March 2008, and Terence Cubitt Sowden Q. C., H. M. Solicitor General, January 1986 to December 1993, both of whom have been asked for their views.

S. C. Nicolle, Q. C.

2. I have spent my entire professional life in the public service. In September 1971 I joined the Judicial Greffe where I first worked principally in the Police Court (now the Magistrate's Court) and then principally in the Royal Court and the Court of Appeal. I was called to the Bar of England and Wales in November 1976 and to the Jersey Bar in August 1978. In September 1982 I joined the Law Officers' Department. In 1985 I became a Crown Advocate, and in January 1994 Solicitor General. I retired in March 2008. The Royal Court, the Police Court, the States, and the Law Officers' Department have all undergone radical changes in the time I have known them.
3. When I started working in the Law Officers' Department, and when I became Solicitor General, the States operated by a committee system which appears to have started on an *ad hoc* basis in the eighteenth, and which became firmly established for all States

business during the nineteenth, centuries. I was Solicitor General at the time of the implementation of the change to Ministerial government, and for some time thereafter.

The role of the Bailiff

4. The proposition of the Deputy of St. Martin refers to the Report of the Review Panel on the Machinery of Government in Jersey, 2000 ("the Clothier Report" and its three reasons of principle for saying that the Bailiff should not have a rôle both in the States and as Chief Judge in the Royal Court. My own view is that unless a better alternative can be found, or there is some binding legal principle which prohibits it, the Bailiff should remain President of the States, and Chief Judge of the Royal Court. For my part I am unable to think of any better alternative. There are other options, but they all appear to me to be inferior, rather than superior, to the present position. Nor do I think that there is any legal principle which prohibits it.

5. The Clothier Report states that the Bailiff "is" the Speaker of the States, and goes on to argue from that that as the Speaker of the House of Commons is the servant of the House of Commons, so the "Speaker" of the States should be the servant of the States; and that as it is unbecoming that the Bailiff should be the servant of the States, it must follow that the Bailiff should cease to preside in the States. In fact the Bailiff is not the Speaker of the States, and I do not think that it is helpful to say that he is something which he is not, far less to build an argument on the assertion. The Bailiff is the President of the States, and the President of the States is the person

who carries out the duties and exercises the powers conferred on him by the States of Jersey Law 2005.

6. It may be that the Speaker of the House of Commons and the President of the States exercise similar functions, but that is not the same as saying that the one "is" the other. To what extent the comparison can be drawn is in any case a moot point. I have never witnessed a sitting of the House of Commons, but if the sittings are accurately reported in the national press the standard of behaviour permitted to members falls far below what would be tolerated in the States Assembly or, I believe, liked by the Jersey electorate. The President of the States is thus responsible for maintaining standards of behaviour in a way which the Speaker of the House of Commons may not be.

7. As regards the view that the President of the States should be the servant of the States, my own view is that it is better that he should not. If the President is the servant of the States, the States should be able to appoint, control and remove him. I think that this sits awkwardly with the duties of the President, who may be called on to tell a member that his proposition, his question, his speech or his behaviour does not comply with Standing Orders, or in a number of ways to make some ruling or decision adverse to this or that member. A President who is constantly aware that he can be removed at any time by those whose proceedings he is regulating operates under a disability in a way that an independent President does not. On the one hand the President may feel consciously or subconsciously inhibited, on the other a President who exercises a proper control may find himself removed by aggrieved members.

8. I do not think that the appointment by the members of the States of one of their number is a satisfactory solution, and I think that it would be even less workable under the Ministerial system than it might have been under the Committee system. Under the Committee system there were a number of major committees (the former standing committees), three trading committees, and an even greater number of committees which were neither major nor trading committees. Every member of the States had the prospect, which was generally realised, of being a member of one or more committees, and possibly a President or Vice-President. Under the Ministerial system a member of the States is a Minister or an Assistant Minister, or he is not. Since its introduction some members who are not Ministers refer to themselves as "backbenchers". The Ministers, and those members who vote in support of the Ministers, are sometimes referred to as "the Establishment".

9. From my observations of the States pre- and post- the change to Ministerial government, it appears to me that there is now among many, though not all, members more of a sense of division, and of adherence to one side or the other, in the Assembly than there was under the Committee system. It seems to me to follow from this that whoever is appointed there is a possibility that he will be subject to accusations of bias one way or the other: of bias in favour of the Ministers when he rules in their support, or rules against a member who is attacking Ministerial policy etc., or of bias against them when his rulings go the other way.

10. The office of President is a key one, and if the States were to elect a President from among their number, it should be from among

the most able, but that is precisely the group from which Ministers, Scrutiny panels, and members of the Privileges and Procedures Committee and the Public Accounts Committee should be drawn. If however a member of the States is appointed as President he will hardly be able to participate in the debates or fill any important out-of-States offices such as Minister, member of Scrutiny, member of Policy and Procedures or Public Accounts, etc.: indeed, when an elected member of the States deputises for the Bailiff in accordance with the States of Jersey Law 2005 the Law rightly provides that that member cannot vote on any matter under debate. The Speaker of the House of Commons is elected from a much larger Assembly, and from one which is moreover dominated by political parties, so that the importance of the individual member appears, to me at any rate, to be less than in the States.

11. The President is regularly called on to make decisions which require him to interpret and apply the Standing Orders of the States of Jersey. One need only look at the list of Standing Orders which appears at the head of the Standing Orders (incorporated in this document as an appendix) to appreciate the extent of the matters covered which may call for a Presidential interpretation. This is a matter of statutory interpretation, and I cannot see how it can be carried out other than by a lawyer, and preferably one with some experience of the States.

12. I am aware of the treatment of the legal issues in the submissions of the Attorney General, and I will be as brief as possible in what I say on this aspect. I do not think that there is any legal bar to the Bailiff's role as President. I am supported in that view by the judgments of the Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court of

England and Wales in the case of Regina (Barclay and others) v Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice and others [2009] 2 WLR 1205 and [2009] 3 WLR 1207 respectively, and in particular on paragraphs 42 to 46 of the judgment of the Court of Appeal. In Jersey, as in Sark, the voting members of States are elected. They have the voting power which determines what laws are passed and what procedures are followed and they can be expected to assert their democratic will as they see fit. There is no more reason to believe that they will be intimidated from doing so by the presence of the Bailiff than the Court of Appeal found to suppose that the voting members of the Chief Pleas of Sark would be by the presence of the Seigneur and Seneschal. That does not, of course, mean that the States cannot alter the position should they wish to do so, but it does mean that if they do not wish to do so there is no legal reason why they should.

13. The only legal issue which might arise stems not from having an unelected President of the States but from having a judge who also sits in the legislature (the second Clothier reason, which is expressed as *"no one who is involved in making the laws should also be involved judicially in a dispute based upon them"*). The Court of Appeal in the Barclay case, in which the Seneschal held a dual role as judge and as member of the chief Pleas, held that on the facts of that case there was a breach of Article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights. That case was, however, described by the Court as *"exceptional"*. The inference to be drawn from the decision of the European Court of Human Rights in McGonnell v United Kingdom (2000) 30 EHRR 289 is that there will be a breach of Article 6 only if the judge was actually present when the matter which is the subject of the litigation or prosecution was debated in the legislature, with a possible qualification from the Barclay case that there must be

some system which will ensure that all those who appear before the Bailiff (or of course the Deputy Bailiff) will know whether he presided or not. I would add that Jersey is a customary law jurisdiction, and much of what comes before the judges of the Royal Court has never been debated in the States.

14. The third reason given in the Clothier Report for not having the Bailiff as what is there referred to as Speaker of the States is that the legality of decisions which he makes in that capacity may be challenged before him in his capacity of judge of the Royal Court. I think that the importance of this point is significantly limited by the ruling of Beloff, Commissioner, in Syvret v Bailhache and Hamon 1998 JLR 128, which put a very comprehensive boundary to the extent to which the Royal Court or any other court can enquire into the legality of what is done in the States.

The role of the Law Officers

15. The starting point of any consideration of the role of the Law Officers is the premise, which I regard as beyond contradiction, that the States require legal advice from someone. Whatever the origin of the Law Officers' role as members of the States, the present day justification is that they are the legal advisers to the States. There was a watershed in their relationship with the States, the importance of which cannot be over-emphasised, which came with the appointment as Solicitor General of Alexander Moncrieff, later Lord, Coutanche. Prior to Solicitor General Coutanche's appointment the Law Officers were the legal advisers to the Crown, but acted for the States only when and if the States briefed them in the same way as

they (the States) would brief a private sector lawyer. Solicitor General Coutanche was the moving force behind the passing of the *Loi (1930) constituant le Département des Officiers de la Couronne*, which set up for the first time a Law Officers' Department. Since that time the Law Officers have been *ex officio* advisers to the States in the fullest possible sense.

16. Advice to the States may be given during the genesis of a law or policy; while it is being debated in the States; and after debate when it is being implemented. I do not think that it can be sought on an *ad hoc* basis from private sector firms. There was a time when little needed to be considered in the matter of legislation and policy other than the law of the Island and in some cases the constitutional relationship with the United Kingdom. Now all legislation and all policy must be compliant with a multiplicity of conventions, directives, and the like, for example the European Convention on Human Rights, the law of the European Union insofar as it applies to the Island, etc. These are specialist areas of law, but not areas in which most private sector firms necessarily feel a need to specialise. To this should be added the consideration that as the Law Officers are advisers to the States, so they build up a knowledge of the workings of the various States Departments which cannot be replicated on an *ad hoc* basis by someone who has been instructed in a particular matter.

17. When the matters on the agenda for a States sitting do not appear likely to give rise to any legal issues, e.g. a debate on whether to have an extra public holiday, the Law Officer who is in States may be given leave of absence by the President to work in his/her office and remain on call in case a legal question arises. I think however

that it is essential that the provider of legal advice should be entitled to be present in the States when matters which have previously been advised on, or matters which are clearly like to raise legal issues, are under consideration. There are times when questions can only be dealt with satisfactorily by someone who has been present for the entire debate. There are also occasions when it is necessary to intervene with legal advice even though it has not been requested.

18. I have difficulty in envisaging exactly how a system would operate under which advice was given only when asked for. In my experience of attending States sittings, legal issues can arise entirely unexpectedly, and members can ask legal questions on any matter before them, not solely on provisions in draft legislation. I certainly do not think that the proposal, mooted some years back, of having the Law Officers on call, but not permitted to enter the States save when called in to answer a question, after which they would be sent away, is remotely workable. There are moreover times when it becomes clear that legal advice, although not asked for, is needed, see the example given below of my advice given during the Planning and Building Law.

19. Although the Law Officers have a right to speak in the States, that right is exercised in accordance with well-established convention. That convention is possibly best described in the words of the then Attorney General, C. W. Duret Aubin, C. B. E., giving evidence before the Privy Council Committee on Channel Islands Reform, 1946 (page 62 of the evidence) –

“The tradition which I have inherited from my predecessors is that, whilst the right of speech is general, it should not be exercised in the House excepting in matters of legal import

or matters which touch the interest of His Majesty or except in respect of which the Law Officers propose at a later stage to report adversely, ...”

[“report adversely” refers to the fact that when an enactment passed by the States is submitted for Royal Assent, it is accompanied by a report from the Law Officers advising whether it is one of which Her Majesty may properly be advised to approve.]

20. A convention is not a law, but a convention, scrupulously observed, gives the same safeguard as a law. It can happen that an intervention from one of the Law Officers on a legal issue is interpreted as a political intervention, simply because it is an intervention and not a response. I was present in the States for the debate on the Planning and Building (Jersey) Law 2002, during which I was asked, and answered, a number of legal questions in relation to the draft Law. The debate then reached Part 10 of the Law, in which Article 126 provides that except as otherwise provided the Law applies to the Crown and to Crown land. The article then makes a number of exclusions, including a provision that the compulsory purchase powers under the Law could not be exercised to acquire a Crown interest in land.

21. When the debate reached Part 10, one member made a speech in which he said that it should be possible to acquire Crown land by compulsory purchase, and that therefore he would vote against the article. It was perfectly obvious that he thought that if Article 126 was not passed, the entire Law would apply to the Crown. I therefore intervened, although I had not been asked a question, to explain that if the article were passed, the Law would apply to the Crown with the specified exceptions, but that if the article were not

passed no part of the Law would apply to the Crown. My participation in the debate was afterwards described in the local press in terms which suggested that I had adopted a political stance in support of the draft Law.

22. I have recounted this incident, not because it is particularly interesting in itself, but because I think that it shows firstly, the need for the Law Officers to have a right to intervene, and secondly, that while the interventions of the Law Officers may appear as political meddling to those who think that legal advice is only needed if it is asked for, such is not necessarily the case.
23. It will be obvious from the foregoing that I think that the Law Officers should have a right to attend and to speak in the States Assembly. Whether they are called members of the States or something else seems to me a matter of comparatively little moment.
24. As regards other issues relating to the functions of the Law Officers, I am to some extent handicapped by the fact that there has been a restructuring of the Law Officers' Department since I left. It is now divided into three sections. One is administrative, and the other two, one civil, one criminal, divide the legal work of the Department between them, and each of the civil and the criminal sections has its own Director. There are thus now two lawyers in senior positions exercising a much greater degree of autonomy, and thus discharging a greater amount of Law Officer work, than in my time, or that of my predecessors. This may to some extent deal with suggestions that there should be a Director of Public Prosecutions, as there is now a Director of the Criminal Division.

25. The Attorney General is sometimes referred to as the titular head of the Honorary Police. Where this title came from I do not know. I suspect that it reflects the power which the Attorney General historically had to direct the Honorary Police (who were then the only police force in the Island, and upon whose reports the Attorney General based prosecutions) to investigate and/or to refer matters to him so that he might prosecute them in the Royal Court. That power is reviewed in Att. Gen. v. Devonshire Hotels Ltd., (Royal Ct.), 1987-88 JLR 577. I am aware that that case has been included in the Attorney General's bundle and so do not attach a copy.

26. Prior to the passing of the *Loi (1853) sur la cour pour la repression des moindres délits* only the Attorney General (and in certain cases the Solicitor General) had a power to prosecute, so that no wider power was needed. The Attorney General's status as sole prosecutor was eroded with the passing of the 1853 Law, which gave Constables the power to prosecute in what is now the Magistrate's Court, see Devonshire Hotels cited above. The Law Officers now also exercise a power to direct a Constable to discontinue a prosecution in the Magistrate's Court. The source of this power does not seem to me to be other than usage which has passed into custom and thence into law, in accordance with the maxim usage makes custom and custom makes the law (for a consideration of which see Constable of St. Helier v. Gray and Attorney General 2004 JLR 360 at paragraphs 37 – 39).

27. I believe that these powers should continue to exist. Though they are exercised very sparingly, it would be unfortunate if they could not be exercised at all.
28. Other than these powers to direct the bringing or the discontinuation of a Magistrate's Court prosecution I believe the Attorney General's functions as titular head of the Honorary Police to be formal. I also think that these functions have a greater importance than may at first be apparent, and that they should continue. I do not think that they should be transferred to a senior member of the civil service. That is not because I doubt the ability of senior members of the civil service, which at the highest level equals, in my experience, the best of the private sector: it is because I doubt that it would be viewed by the Honorary Police themselves in the same light. The Honorary Police is an entirely voluntary organisation of inestimable value to the Island. I believe from my own *ex officio* attendance at Honorary Police functions that the members of the Honorary Police value having a Crown appointee at their head, and that having a titular head gives the Honorary Police an Island-wide cohesion. I simply do not think that the same effect would be achieved by the appointment of a civil servant, no matter how competent.
29. I think that the appointment of the Law Officers as it is described in the Attorney General's submissions is as satisfactory a procedure as can be envisaged, given the need for confidentiality, consultation with those most affected by the choice, and an informed assessment of professional ability. That said, I do think that the general public should know what that procedure is, and that those who do not know should be able to find out.

Schorrille

T. C. Sowden, Q. C.

30. I became Solicitor General in January 1986 and remained in that office until 31st December 1993, when I left to take up the post of Magistrate. I have read the above response of my successor Solicitor General, and subject to the qualification that the change from committee to Ministerial government, and the re-organisation of the Law Officers' Department, both took place after I had left office, so that I have no personal knowledge of either and cannot comment on their effect, I agree with what is there said.

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