

AN INDEPENDENT FUTURE FOR THE ISLE OF MAN?

Dr. John Orme announces his candidacy for the Rushen constituency.

Is there a sustainable future for an independent Isle of Man? I believe that there is, but that unless the next Tynwald takes the tough decisions necessary to secure our financial independence we risk losing our political independence too and becoming no more than a vassal state of the UK.

The new Tynwald must balance its income and expenditure in very difficult circumstances. There are no magical solutions and the only realistic options are: lower expenditure, higher taxes or a combination of the two.

Clearly, there are risks inherent in each of the options. Cutting government expenditure may lead to lower levels of employment in the public sector and the withdrawal or reduction of some government services. Raising tax rates would decrease the attractiveness of the IOM to business and individuals.

In my opinion the second option, raising taxes, is simply too dangerous. It could lead to a reduction in the levels of economic activity on the IOM and thus a decline in government revenue even at increased tax levels. Don't forget that we have had to absorb a tax hike already, with VAT going up to 20%.

Therefore, if we are to secure our independence in the future, we must focus now on reducing government expenditure. The current Treasury has made a start but more cuts will be needed. I will support them.

Of course, given that the IOM Government has grown to become a significant part of the island's economy, these measures will be neither painless nor popular. But if we care about our long-term future, we must elect a HOK with the courage to risk short-term unpopularity.

The days of electing representatives who will pretend that the good times will never end and that the IOM government can continue to spend your taxes accordingly are over. It's time to say goodbye to those Teflon-coated local heroes who cannot think in the long-term interests of the whole community. Harping on about "Our unique Manxness" will not help us. Ours is a universal predicament and calls for a fundamental solution. Unless our government's income exceeds its expenditure misery will result.

If elected, I propose to serve only one term so that I will be free to take decisions which I believe to be in the long term interests of the IOM without having an eye upon my future political prospects. If these decisions make me unpopular, so be it.

The people of the IOM will have learned, having seen the last election in the UK- where the avoidance of the mention of cuts by both parties lead to a completely dishonest election process- that such matters should be faced squarely and that an election is the right time to face them.

My financial proposals are:

- The burden of present pensions policy upon future taxpayers will prove too great and a more realistic approach to pensions policy should be lead by government.

- Government should reduce subsidies to areas of economic activity generally.
- Government should identify and enact a step by step reduction in manning levels overall.
- Government should identify an agreed level for its own economic activity as a % of GNP which does not deter the private sector, does not overburden the taxpayer and is sustainable in the long term.
- Government must accept that it cannot duplicate the services and activities available in a country of approximately one thousand times the IOM's population when the economies of scale work against the IOM.

My general policies are:

- I will assist in the protection of those services which I believe to be the core activities of government and to maintain, where possible, the provision of those services without charges to those unable to pay for those services.
- I will not support policies which erode the individuality of the IOM and I do not wish to see the IOM become a replica UK, USA or anywhere else.
- I will support policies which protect the liberty of individuals and offer the best prospects for their future happiness and prosperity.
- I will support policies which enhance the attractiveness of the IOM to those talented young people whom the IOM so generously supports during their education.
- I will encourage and support the creation of new businesses in the IOM by a policy of replying yes rather than no to new ideas when entrepreneurs are prepared to risk their own money and effort.

I know that these proposals will not be universally welcomed. I am standing, however, because unless we face these issues now, we will lose our independence in the future.

ABOUT ME

Born 1948, UK

BSc Mechanical Engineering, University of London,

PhD Thermodynamics and Pollution Control, Cambridge University

Moved to the IOM in 1974

Married Annie Lowey 1985. One daughter, Wanda, born 1988

Served as MHK for Rushen 1985-91 - promoted IRIS sewage and drainage project

Barrister at law since 1995 - I have prosecuted for the Crown and defended in criminal courts, have appeared before the High Court and Court of Appeal in UK in various matters and practised in the IOM. Mainly commercial practice now.

Dr John R Orme

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