

2015.02.24

3.8 The Connétable of St. Mary of the Chief Minister regarding actions taken to ensure that the U.K. Opposition was fully aware of Jersey's position on the transparency agenda:

Could the Chief Minister confirm what actions have been taken by the Jersey Government to ensure that the U.K. Opposition are fully aware of Jersey's position on the transparency agenda and specifically the provision of beneficial ownership information?

Senator I.J. Gorst (The Chief Minister):

Could I ask Senator Ozouf to answer again? Thank you.

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf (Assistant Chief Minister - rapporteur):

The Leader of the Opposition has been made fully aware of Jersey's position on the transparency agenda and specifically the provision of beneficial ownership information on which Jersey holds a leading position internationally as one of the few territories to have a central registry. Of course the U.K. does not have one yet either.

[10:30]

The Chief Minister has written to the Leader of the Opposition telling him of the Island's continued commitment to the global transparency agenda, has extended a further invitation to him to visit the Island to learn of the high standards that Jersey applies, and the way that those standards have been recognised so well internationally. I believe the letter has been circulated to Members for information.

3.8.1 The Connétable of St. Mary:

I confirm that I have seen the letter now. It does not take much forensic analysis of the press release that Mr. Miliband issued to ascertain that it was drafted by the Labour Party's economic adviser and I do know because I have made some inquiries, that the Island has had direct communication with this gentleman in the past at Labour Party conferences followed up with letters. Does the Chief Minister or his delegate agree with me that we seem to be having difficulty in getting our message to be understood by the people who are representing the Labour Party? Does he believe that direct personal contact is the only way forward? The letter that was circulated to Members yesterday extends a personal invitation to Mr. Miliband. Will the Chief Minister assure me that he will not be accepting any delegates or Deputies to attend because it seems that we have spoken to them in the past and have not had any answer?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

As the Connétable will know, one of my jobs is to spend time in London and of course Senator Bailhache leads many of the direct engagements with the Chief Minister, but we do work really hard, and I was perhaps fortunate or not to attend all the political party conferences last year. I met Mr. Wolfman at the Labour Party conference. I had a joint meeting with Guernsey. I have a note of the meeting that we had. We explained all the issues and I wrote back to him on 21st October in my capacity as Minister for Treasury and Resources explaining all of these standards. It is very difficult. I think we are in an election and it was most unfortunate that clearly Mr. Miliband made certain comments which could not have been achieved - were unfair. I do not think it was fair to effectively group all of the Crown Dependencies and overseas territories together in such a way. Jersey has led on this agenda. We were outside No. 10 last May saying: "Jersey is not a tax haven. We are not the problem. We are part of the solution." That is our continued line. We have high standards and we are going to maintain them.

3.8.2 The Connétable of St. Helier:

It is a minor point and the Senator may accuse me of nit-picking but does he not think it is a shame in an otherwise good letter designed to create a favourable impression of Jersey that is marred by

errors of punctuation and a glaring elementary spelling mistake in the third paragraph that even a year 8 student would not have made? **[Laughter]**

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

That is obviously perhaps the Chief Minister's Department. It has had so many cutbacks that we cannot do it. **[Laughter]** When the *Leader* and the *J.E.P. (Jersey Evening Post)* also makes the argument about facts right and then says: "David Miliband should get his facts right", we are not the only ones to have made difficulties, but the point is understood. I am sure the Chief Minister and I will ensure that the letter is re-done. I am sure the Constable would agree with me that it is a brilliantly crafted letter in terms of the substance of it and sets out very brilliantly and clearly what the Island's position is without being rude, obnoxious in any way and is in fact a very polite but determined letter.

3.8.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Can the Minister assure Members that he has had nothing to do with the seeding of these 2 obvious planted questions that we have seen today, and if not will he start calling himself a political party if he wants to behave as a political party? Could he tell us what appointments he has in his diary this week?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

It is very important that there is a wide appreciation of Members on these important issues and question time is a way of getting out of them. We have questions which are relevant and important. Perhaps the Deputy does not want to hear the answers of the communication that has happened with the Labour Party. Perhaps the Deputy does not want to hear about the questions about the O.E.C.D. Perhaps the Deputy does not want to hear me also saying he did have an opportunity of asking a supplementary earlier. Perhaps he does not want to hear me say that I had a letter only yesterday by the Secretary General of the O.E.C.D. congratulating the Island's leadership in relation to global and transparency issues. Perhaps he does not want to hear those things. Perhaps he only wants to hear what his side of the argument is. Jersey has high standards and it is a great shame that the Labour leader made such comments which could have cast Jersey in an inappropriate light. Our job in this Assembly - and my job certainly together with ministerial colleagues - is to defend Jersey, to promote Jersey and to set the record straight where necessary and if it takes all of Questions to do it then so be it.

3.8.4 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Supplementary for me: would the Minister circulate the letter he has received so we can see exactly what the words were; the words of praise from the chair of the O.E.C.D?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

Providing the Chief Minister is happy for it to be done then I will do so. It is not an inter-governmental letter. It is a letter following the signing of the Berlin Agreement on tax transparency where, again, Jersey was one of the leaders which basically signed up to the multilateral convention and was one of the early adopters.

3.8.5 Connétable C.H. Taylor of St. John:

Not being too picky, but once the grammatical errors have been corrected could the Chief Minister's letter perhaps be published through the media in the U.K. because it is not just the Leader of the Opposition who needs to know, it is the members of the country who have heard our Island being pilloried and we need to put that record straight not just with one man but with every voter in the country?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

The Connétable makes an important point and this Assembly has - and I thank Members probably from the previous Assembly - given (and allocated) resources in order that we are better able to communicate across the political Westminster bubble, decision-makers, think tanks, policy-formers and we really do more than that. Compared to where we were 2 or 3 years ago, there is a much better appreciation of Jersey than there was before. That Value of Jersey to Britain report which had widespread coverage, Radio 4 *Today* programme, *F.T. (Financial Times)* and all the main journals, the message of Jersey of being one of the leading jurisdictions, having extremely high standards and being part of the solution to economic growth in the world and that was the work I was doing in Africa last week. We are not the problem. We are part of the solution but there is always more work to be done which is why it is a constant ongoing communication, but certainly after the election we have more work to do with the new M.P.s (Members of Parliament).

3.8.6 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

I am delighted to hear that the Assistant Minister is so keen for Jersey to help assist with economic growth around the world. It would be good if we could have some economic growth here in Jersey. Alluding to one point that the Assistant Minister made before, does he agree with me that the local media coverage of this whole debacle was absolutely appalling and, in particular, certain media outlets were publishing articles with headlines that made no correspondence whatsoever to what was in the article below and what was in the letter from the Leader of the Opposition? Would the Assistant Minister agree that that is not conducive to having good relations with the person and the party which may well end up forming the next U.K. Government with whom we need to have excellent relations for the benefit of the Island and for the benefit of the U.K.?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I was not here; I did not see any of the media coverage of that because I was away in South Africa so I did not see any of the comments about it. What I was involved with was immediately explaining to the media what the facts were in relation to Jersey's position. Mr. Miliband's letter was unfortunate. No communication with the insular authorities in any of the territories have been contacted. No information had been said. I explained that I met with the gentleman who appears to have written the letter to explain what Jersey's position is. There is a whole load more information in this issue to the media. What is clear is that Jersey has enjoyed good relations with governments from all parties. We have had good relations with the Labour Party before. I was fortunate enough to be able to meet Mr. Blair in South Africa and I thanked him for a specific assistance that he gave the Island in relation to the E.U.S.D. (European Union Savings Directive) which former Senator Horsfall said: "The Jersey Government will enjoy relations with whoever the U.K. elects." When politicians are elected somehow their officials tell them what they can and cannot do. I am sure that when they are elected if they are elected, whatever coalition it will be, we will enjoy good constructive relationships based upon facts. At the moment we are in a short-term political election and sometimes people say things that perhaps might not fully be cognisant. It is more difficult to govern when you are in Government than outside. It is easy to make comments.

3.8.7 The Connétable of St. Mary:

Further to the Senator's answer to my last question I have understood that we have invited Mr. Miliband to come to the Island and see for himself. I also understood that we have spoken directly to the economic adviser. It seems to me that evidence shows the message is either not being passed back up the chain or it is not being properly understood. Again I ask: will we press for a direct meeting with Mr. Miliband, especially if the Labour Party of course wins the next election, to explain face-to-face, person-to-person exactly what the situation is?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

That is obviously a matter for the Chief Minister who has Questions Without Notice. I think the Chief Minister did meet Mr. Miliband as I understand it at the Commonwealth Games, and I have seen correspondence with Mr. Miliband between the Chief Minister, so he has obviously met him.

Certainly Senator Bailhache and I in the work that we do in London try often to meet with people that are informing these individual Ministers or potential M.P.s, *et cetera*, but it is difficult. What I think I would say to the Assembly in the next 82 days, or however long the election is, there are things that are going to be said. We should not get too excited about things that are said in the heat of an election moment. When the new Government is put in place we will engage in good relations and thank goodness we have that London office now doing such great work which is communicating and able to explain straight away, 3 minutes away from Parliament, able to receive people, explain to people and to provide briefings, circulate events and raise the profile of Jersey. We have good work to do. The previous question about economic growth, we are not a tax haven. We are part of the solution. We are a capital warehouse and we should be benefiting the U.K. economy and the international community. That is what we do and we should be proud of it.