

2019.02.12

3 Deputy G.P. Southern of St. Helier of the Chief Minister regarding his policy position in respect of the ongoing dispute over public sector pay awards: [OQ.42/2019]

Will the Chief Minister inform Members of his policy position in respect of the ongoing dispute over public sector pay awards and, in particular, will he summarise the content of the meeting he had with the regional organiser of Unite the Union on 4th February 2019?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré (The Chief Minister):

The States Employment Board have directed officials to hold discussions with those unions that have not accepted the employer's pay offers for 2018-2019. Those talks are continuing. The S.E.B. (States Employment Board) will be meeting on 14th February - that is Thursday - to receive feedback on how those discussions are progressing and obviously given the confidentiality of those discussions it would not be right to comment on that point any further at this stage. In relation to my meeting with the organisers from Unite, I could be very cheeky and say I have no comments to make on the meeting of 4th February because it took place on the 5th. But anyway, on the Tuesday we did meet with the officials of Unite; they genuinely welcomed the opportunity to meet face-to-face. As a rule, I do not comment on private meetings but it was a broad-ranging discussion, it covered things like pay, government finances and Brexit. It was made very clear it was not a negotiation in any way, shape or form and basically it is inappropriate for me to comment any further given that we are in the middle of a mediation process.

3.3.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

At any stage in that meeting on the 5th, did the Chief Minister revert to his statement that there is no more money?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

It would be fair to say that we commented on the government finances and the pressures that we will be facing going forward. There is also the point that needed to be made generally, that all parties can and should be working very hard for a settlement for the good of the Island and its public services but in order to achieve that it is important that both parties try to resolve the matter jointly, which will mean that both sides are having to change their public position. Obviously, there are mediation and negotiations going on at the moment. We will have a further update on Thursday.

3.3.2 Deputy M. Tadier:

Given the fact that the mantra more for less does not seem to be being accepted generally by the work force, understandably, and is seen as derisory and treated with the contempt it deserves, would the Chief Minister try a new approach, which is less for less? That is, we expect you to do less work for less money.

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

Is the Deputy advocating a pay cut?

Deputy M. Tadier:

What I am saying is that the Chief Minister knows that there is a pay cut because that is exactly what happens when the pay increases that are offered do not meet with the rate of inflation. That is effectively what our public servants have been having for the last 10 years. So given the fact that

public servants have had a pay cut for the last 10 years and that they are not willing to do more for less, should a different negotiating strategy be put forward, i.e. less for less?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

The point I make is that all parties are genuinely committed to make not too many public comments while in the middle of negotiations. We will get an update on the state of those negotiations through the mediation process later this week and at this point in time I am reserving my comments until I know the outcome of those discussions.

3.3.3 Deputy R.J. Ward:

May I ask the Chief Minister to just consider that given that we are facing public sector strikes by teachers, nurses, civil servants and beyond, is this becoming an emergency for the Island?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

We are all aware that there are certain groups that are unsettled with the general position. Part of that would be with the various organisational changes that are happening, some of them are very longstanding grievances that are not just to do with pay. We are committed in certain areas to try and sort some of these matters out going forward. However, as I said, given that we are in the middle of mediation and negotiations and we will have an update a little later this week, I am not prepared to go too much further in commenting at this stage because that is what we generally agreed to do.

3.3.4 Deputy G.P. Southern:

For the sake of the widest possible communication around the position that we now have, will the Chief Minister accept an invitation from the activist group of Unite the Union locally to address their meeting in the near future?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

What is probably quite clear is it depends on the circumstances, it depends on the timing. I have agreed occasionally to meet and we will try and make it a bit more regular with the representatives of the relevant unions that I have met so far. We will try and do that more often. I shall consider the detail if it comes through. It must always be clear it is not a negotiation process and also that at the moment we are trying to maintain that balance of not commenting or not adding to matters while negotiation and mediation are taking place.