

2.10 Deputy G.P. Southern of the Deputy Chief Minister regarding the breakdown of mediation talks with teachers' representatives:

Will the Minister inform Members of the reasons for the breakdown of mediation talks with teachers' representatives over their dispute with the States Employment Board?

Deputy A.E. Jeune of St. Brelade:

May I just ask for a point of clarity, I think it is? In relation to this question, would the Deputy need to express an interest?

Deputy G.P. Southern:

No, I have no interest in the pay negotiations taking place, nor has my wife; she is a representative, she is a retired teacher.

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

I have provided an answer on a written question to the Deputy on this subject. I am advised that the reasons for the breakdown in mediation talks with the teachers representatives on the pay dispute was that the teachers representatives were only prepared to discuss a pay award from 1st June 2009 and were not prepared to discuss the employer's current offer for the next 2 years. The S.E.B. (States Employment Board) negotiators were not authorised to negotiate an award which would have increased last year's pay bill in 2009 which is in accordance, of course, with States decisions on this matter.

2.10.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Does the Minister accept that since the mediation team were given no scope to change any terms whatsoever, that this was, and certainly was seen by teachers' representatives, to be merely a time-wasting effort in which 5 national representatives were brought over to the Island to waste their time for 8 hours around a table?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

Mediation is designed for both parties to explain what their position is on both sides of the argument and indeed it is an opportunity for the employer to explain the pressures on budgets, on States finances, to explain the offer and also to look forward to the future offers. I would have thought that the mediation would have been a very beneficial experience and a worthwhile opportunity for both sides and I regret to hear that simply the teachers' side - of which the Deputy will know well - was not simply prepared to engage in discussions but simply go back to the 1st June 2009 offer which must be regarded as a matter which has closed.

2.10.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Is the Minister aware of a subsequent letter from the Director of Education to teachers which says of the offer for 2010 and 2011: "This offer is dependent upon public sector workers agreeing to co-operate in a comprehensive review of terms and conditions of service. By agreeing to co-operate the unions would not be committing themselves to agree any eventual outcome." Firstly, is he aware that that assurance on non-agreement was never given to teachers representatives or to public sector representatives prior to this appearing in the letter and, secondly, does he not further accept that this comprehensive review of terms and conditions is, in fact, the one that he will conduct and bring to this House? So whether agreement is reached or not, it

will be this House and this Minister who is imposing a change in terms and conditions on public sector workers?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I was not at the mediation so I cannot say exactly what has been said and I am sure that the Deputy will understand that some Members are uncomfortable with him asking some questions in this manner. **[Approbation]** I am sorry if that is an uncomfortable position but it is something ...

Deputy G.P. Southern:

Can we clarify once and for all that there is no conflict of interest involved in my asking questions about public sector workers, teachers, or otherwise? Because this is where it keeps on being repeated and it is totally unfair.

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

It is a matter for the Deputy, clearly. But I believe that all ...

Deputy G.P. Southern:

Will he withdraw the implication that I am doing something wrong? Please do so. **[Approbation]**

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

Sir, it is a matter for the Deputy, I do not want to have a public debate about the membership of the negotiating team. It is really a matter for the Deputy, and other Members have raised it, it is not for me to comment. All I will say is that I believe I am aware of the letter that was sent by the Director of Education, in fact I have a copy of it here.

[11:15]

I believe also that teachers are understanding of the economic situation that the Island and other places face and I am sure that teachers will want to engage in the process of the comprehensive spending review in a manner which is designed to secure the long-term best interests of our young people and skills-raising in the Island, and that they will voluntarily come forward and be part of that review and come up with constructive helpful suggestions so that we can design an education service for the future.

2.10.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Is the Minister aware that previous improvements in terms and conditions in teaching, such as reduction of hours, cover, improvements in supplies, resources for teachers, a reduction in hours spent on administration, have not been universally across the board applied in all schools and that teachers representatives are in fact extremely sceptical of any offer on any table because previous agreements have not been upheld.

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I do not believe that it is appropriate that we have negotiations on individual pay groups across the floor of this Assembly where there is bargaining processes and negotiations with recognised bodies and unions which happen to deal with that. What I will say in relation to teachers' pay is that I do know that pay rates for teachers in Jersey compare well to those of comparable jurisdictions and particularly the U.K.

(United Kingdom). There are pressures in public finances in Jersey and I know that teachers know of those pressures and will want to work with the employer going forward in order to find solutions to our public finances difficulties.

2.10.4 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Is the Minister further aware that in fact terms and conditions in the U.K., especially with respect to pensions in particular, are in fact a great improvement upon terms and conditions in Jersey, and that as a consequence there is a danger that recruitment from the U.K. into the Jersey education system is under threat?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I am advised that salaries compare well in Jersey with the U.K., especially at the lower and middle ranges and that we currently do not have a recruitment problem apart from particular disciplines, of which there is a national shortage. We also do not, I am pleased to say and advise, do not have a retention problem. We will continue to treat teachers appropriately and certainly the confidence which we can have in this Assembly towards our public financial management should be more reassuring to teachers than perhaps in the United Kingdom when one hears dramatic budget cuts of up to 20 per cent in departments, particularly in higher education which I would have thought it would be a concern to teachers in the United Kingdom but certainly not in Jersey.