

2016.04.12

4.6 Deputy S.Y. Mézec of the Minister for Infrastructure regarding ongoing negotiations with employee representatives:

Following the announcement that Infrastructure workers have voted in favour of strike action in response to the way that the negotiations to outsource their jobs have been carried out, will the Minister agree to hold urgent face-to-face meetings with employee representatives?

Deputy E.J. Noel (The Minister for Infrastructure):

First, it is helpful to remind the Deputy of what the specific outcome of the Unite ballot was, as advised to the employer. Unite advised the employer of the following ballot results. Of the 316 employees that were balloted 170 voted. Of the 170 who voted 89 voted in favour of taking strike action, 77 voted against taking strike action and 144 voted for taking action short of strike, which is approximately 45 per cent of those eligible to vote.

[10:15]

The position as the employer, which is the States Employment Board, is, and I quote: "We will continue to work closely with representatives of Unite concerning changes to the Department for Infrastructure given the above results. It is our hope that the dialogue we have worked hard to establish will remain the preferred channel for negotiation." The full-time Unite union official has contacted the States Employment Board and has agreed that this matter should be dealt with in line with the agreed States collective disputes procedure. This meeting will be held shortly. This matter is one for my officers and not appropriate that I get involved at this time given the agreed process with Unite and indeed with any union.

4.6.1 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

If we are talking about vote results, let us just remind ourselves that the results of this ballot is a much greater margin than his own election to the States of Jersey and also the Council of Ministers as a whole, but I think that is irrelevant as was probably the point made before. My question now is what contingency plan does he have in the event of strike action occurring and the disruption it will cause?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

My department has a number of contingency plans depending on the type of industrial action taken, if indeed any industrial action is taken. But let us be assured that we will try and avoid industrial action where at all possible, which is why the process is going through the agreed States collective disputes procedure.

4.6.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

A 3-parter, if I may. Will the Minister publish his possible contingencies and can he clarify to Members what numbers and what timescale he is now talking about for the outsourcing of the services concerned with this particular strike?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

Firstly, no, I will not publish those contingency measures for obvious reasons. The numbers, as Deputy Southern knows, are changing on a daily basis as we work with our staff to find alternatives to them having to undergo compulsory redundancy.

4.6.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Can the Minister clarify what he means by “the usual reasons”? Why is he keeping these secret?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

Because if you are going to have to put in contingency measures to counteract industrial action you do not let the unions know what those measures are because they could change their industrial action and scupper your contingencies, which are there to ensure that we continue to provide services to Islanders on a daily basis as required.

4.6.4 Deputy M. Tadier:

Is it because the contingencies may involve recruiting members from the private sector on a temporary basis or otherwise during strike action? Is that the risk? Is that the usual practice?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

I have already said I am not going to disclose what our contingency measures are.

4.6.5 Deputy M. Tadier:

I am sorry, I thought under the code for Ministers that Ministers were required to be open and transparent in their dealings, especially with the States. So could the Minister perhaps give an answer to that?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

I am quite willing to give an answer to that. I am being open and transparent but I am also ensuring that the services that I am tasked to provide Islanders continue to be provisioned.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Final supplementary, Deputy Mézec?

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

No, Sir.