

.6 Deputy R.J. Renouf of St. Ouen of the Chief Minister regarding the prospect of bringing forward the next Jersey Income Distribution Survey: [1(230)]

What steps, if any, does the Chief Minister intend to bring forward the next Jersey Income Distribution Survey?

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

I have asked officers to examine this issue and they are doing so with the Chief Statistician. Once those discussions are concluded I will report back to Members with any changed timetable.

3.6.1 The Deputy of St. Ouen:

Does the Chief Minister accept that a new Income Distribution Survey will provide valuable evidence of the impact of measures introduced in the current M.T.F.P. (Medium Term Financial Plan) and planning should take place now because a new Assembly should not second-guess that impact before embarking on significant policy changes next year in a new M.T.F.P. So as this matter needs to be planned soon and funding put in place, and the survey undertaken, and the results obtained, can the Chief Minister give the Assembly an assurance that he is working to that end?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

The Deputy is right. If the Income Distribution Survey is to change from its current cycle extra money will need to be provided. But as he knows in his very helpful email response to Deputy Southern, there are a number of matters that will affect the outcome of such a survey. Not only policy matters that might have been taken by this Assembly in the distribution of income support but, let us remember, there have been some really positive effects there. How we have dealt with unemployment, the reduced number of people unemployed, the improvement in the economy over 2014 and 2015, the improvement in earnings over income over the last 4 years, all of these matters roll into what effect that survey result might show.

3.6.2 Deputy M. Tadier:

Does the Chief Minister think that it is important that we have an Income Distribution Survey that reports back before the next election so that the public of the Island can scrutinise the current government when it made promises about reducing relative poverty in Jersey and reducing income inequality to see how and whether this current government has lived up to its promises?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I know that the Members opposite like to parry across the Assembly but let us remember that individuals living in households in relative low income before housing costs in 2002 were 16 per cent, in 2009/2010 were 13 per cent, and in 2014/2015 were 13 per cent. That position worsens considerably after housing costs because we know that during the recession the effects on housing costs, as the last Income Distribution Survey showed, because of the low interest rate environment worsened those after housing costs. But we are interested not only in relative low income but also in absolute income in getting people into work, in putting money into education, because that is ultimately what will take people out of relative low income; getting them into a job, putting money into education. Let us not forget that the number of working age households in receipt of income support with no other income has reduced from 60 per cent in 2011 to 49 per cent in 2015. The number of children living in working age households in which no parent works has reduced from 60 per cent to 49 per cent over that same period. All of these are important statistics and will feed into what a future Income Distribution Survey might say. This Government's policies are working as much as ...

The Bailiff:

Ninety seconds, Chief Minister.

Senator I.J. Gorst:

... some Members would like to say they are not.

3.6.3 Deputy M. Tadier:

The Chief Minister can try and blind people with statistics if he wishes to but my constituents who know that they are worse off compared to what they were last year, 2 years ago, or 3 years ago, do not need his statistics to tell him that they are in a worse-off position. Can the Minister reiterate that, as with previous comments of his fellow Ministers, he is committed to reducing income inequality so that the gap between the lowest earners and highest earners in our society should be reduced?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

It is an important measurement but it is an important measurement among many other measurements. As I have just said, it is not just about relative low income. It is about absolute income. It is about getting people into work. It is about them earning so that they can support themselves. It is about putting money into education, the Jersey Pupil Premium, so that those people from low income households have got the greatest support financially in our schools to improve themselves into the future. It is not one-dimensional.

[10:30]

It seems to me at the start of his question that he seemed to be suggesting that he himself did not want an Income Distribution Survey because whatever the statistics said he was telling us something differently. There are a broad number of measures which are really ...

Deputy G.P. Southern:

Can you control that man?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

... important and ...

The Bailiff:

I thought you had finished, Chief Minister, I must say.

Senator I.J. Gorst:

Sir, I could keep going on this.

The Bailiff:

I am slightly worried about that. It should be 90 seconds, as you well know.

3.6.4 Deputy G.P. Southern:

The Chief Minister can play footloose and fancy free with the stats all he likes but will he refrain ... will he commit to refraining from making comments about the progress on relative low income or otherwise until he has - whatever the timescale - a fresh set of data on which to back up any claims that he has made about relative low income?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I wonder if that was the offer of a political truce. I would be prepared to not make political statements about relative low income despite the fact that earnings have been greater than

inflation, despite the fact that more people with income support ... reducing the number of people with income support are now having other incomes, despite the fact that there are fewer children in lower income households than there were at the start of this government, if he will refrain from suggesting that other policies that have taken place are reducing or are increasing relative low income. This is a political legislative debating chamber. He would like to narrow these issues. I am saying quite simply that there are a broad number of issues that would be dealt with in an Income Distribution Survey into the future which was the basis of the Deputy's initial question.

3.6.5 Deputy G.P. Southern:

I will try again. Will the Chief Minister refrain from making comments about relative low income until he has some facts to back up his statements? Yes or no.

Senator I.J. Gorst:

If you look at the Income Distribution Survey between 2002 and 2009 and you look at the underlying economic conditions you see there that that situation improved because the economy improved, because earnings were greater than inflation. We have had 4 years where earnings are greater than inflation. We have had 4 years where we have now started to see unemployment reduced. The makeup of households on income support changed. That is a result of good government policy. We are putting millions of pounds into the Jersey Pupil Premium. It is those underlying economic issues which give rise to the results of the Income Distribution Survey. So I will keep talking about those improved economic conditions, as I think Members of this Assembly and members of the public would expect.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

So that is a no.

The Bailiff:

It was a no, I think, Deputy. It took some time getting there but it was a no.

3.6.6 The Deputy of St. Ouen:

Would the Chief Minister agree that despite his protestations one of the features of today's society is that a group of people living at the lower end of the income distribution may be in work but in fact are suffering in-work poverty. In-work poverty is something that has grown, not just in Jersey but certainly exists in Jersey, and is a feature of today's society and we are creating a society of low wages where people at the bottom end are not able to support themselves. When will the Minister be able to give us an answer as to exactly when this new survey will be forthcoming?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I accept that communicating statistics is quite difficult. We are just getting to the argument of discussion that we have had. But these are real people who are feeling the effects of the economic recession, as the Deputy is just suggesting, our policies are working into getting people into work. That is absolutely right because from a job then you can move up the ladder, you can become more self-sufficient. That has got to be the right policy. I do not apologise for a policy that gets people into work. Then we move on to another whole area of questions about the type of work that people are in, the remuneration of that work, and we have to face up to the fact that there are some sectors in our community that are not paying what we in this Assembly would like those employers to be paying because their margins are squeezed. We need to work with those employers to ensure that they can pay greater wages to this group of people that he is suggesting. I refer right back to my opening answer and say that I do not yet

have a revised timescale for that survey. We would need to find the money, as he correctly pointed out, but I will refer back when we do have a revised timescale.

The Bailiff:

We come to question 7 which Deputy Mézec will ask of the Minister for Infrastructure.

Connétable A.S. Crowcroft of St. Helier:

May I raise a matter of order over this question? Simply to ask you why it is not considered *sub judice*?

The Bailiff:

I do not regard it as *sub judice*, Connétable because the question is not about the case directly, it is about whether or not the Minister will delay the implementation of the waste disposal charge.

The Connétable of St. Helier:

Thank you, Sir. Can I raise a second question on a matter of order? It comes in 3 parts. Were you not Her Majesty's Attorney General when a previous Her Majesty's Solicitor General gave advice to the States on the matter of the Bellozanne Covenant and declared that it was intact? Secondly, are you not, Sir, the President of the Royal Court that has recently ruled in favour of the Minister for D.f.I. (Department for Infrastructure) who is currently answering questions? Thirdly, the present Her Majesty's Solicitor General recently described the Parish of St. Helier in open court as disgraceful for seeking to uphold promises made by the States to the Parish in 1952 and reinforced in subsequent legal advice? So based on those 3 matters my question, Sir, is how can Crown Officers fairly advise on points of law or indeed preside over this matter in the States today?

The Bailiff:

I see no difficulty in it at all, but if it causes such sensitivity, Connétable, I will withdraw and ask the Greffier to look after this particular question.