

2020.06.16

9 Connétable K. Shenton-Stone of St. Martin of the Chief Minister regarding the establishment of a public working group dedicated to improving public knowledge and understanding of Jersey's history (OQ.153/2020):

Will the Chief Minister advise what consideration, if any, has been given to establishing a public working group dedicated to improving the public's knowledge and understanding of Jersey's history in general, including Jersey's historical links to slavery and colonialism?

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

My Assistant Minister, the Deputy of Grouville, is taking this question.

Deputy C.F. Labey of Grouville (Assistant Chief Minister - rapporteur):

Jersey has much to be proud of in its past but, like every country, we also have darker passages in our Island's story. Members will have heard the old aphorism: "Those who do not remember their history are condemned to repeat it." It is this Government's firm view that the public should indeed have a better understanding of the events and characters which shaped us, warts and all.

Furthermore, long before the current protest began, we have been doing something about it. Last October the Chief Minister established an Island Identity Policy Development Board, which I chair. This has tasked a group of citizens and politicians with investigating what makes us Jersey and what we can do to preserve and nurture a strong and inclusive sense of community. We will publish an interim report later in the summer but one of the key recommendations of this report is not only that our children are giving greater opportunity to learn more about their Island but so too are newcomers, civil servants, hospitality workers and other members of our diverse community. Yes, in common with almost all nations, this history will include elements of slavery and colonialism.

The Connétable of St. Martin:

I did have some supplementaries but I thank the Deputy of Grouville for her very reassuring answer, so I do not have a supplementary.

3.9.1 Deputy M. Tadier:

Does the Minister agree that in order to teach Jersey's colonial history first of all it is necessary to teach the nature of the colonialist projects, and that includes the manufacturing of difference between the races by the European colonialists versus the rest of the world, which allowed the Europeans to portray the rest of the world as savages? Does she agree that it is necessary to teach youngsters, in particular, that that synthetic racism which was produced hundreds of years ago still has a legacy effect everywhere, including Jersey, to this day?

The Deputy of Grouville:

When history is taught, history is about facts and I would like to think - I am not a teacher - a factual subject is taught in a factual manner. As I alluded to in my initial answer that it is taught all elements of it, warts and all.

3.9.2 Deputy M. Tadier:

I would ask the Minister whether she agrees that history is not just about facts, it is also about narrative, it is also about plural narratives existing alongside each other and it is about who gets to tell and make up the initial narrative versus the story which is now told in the 21st century. Does

she agree that it is more than fact and that power play, when it comes history and narratives, is an important aspect as well?

The Bailiff:

I am afraid that is asking the Assistant Minister for an opinion as to the nature of history, Deputy. It is not asking for information within her remit, nor is it asking for action to be taken, so that is not technically an allowable question.

3.9.3 Deputy K.F. Morel of St. Lawrence:

Following on from the Assistant Chief Minister's assertion about history being about facts. Would the Assistant Chief Minister please advise the Assembly as to which people will be deciding upon these facts? Who will be the people teaching this history that she has referred to?

The Deputy of Grouville:

In schools teachers, but one of the recommendations of the report is that we open up the opportunities for newcomers to the Island to learn and people who make Jersey their permanent home to learn about the Island. All elements of it; the good and the bad. There is quite a lot that can be celebrated here as well. I would like to think that there is a whole range of people, not only in the schools but in the community that are able to impart and give opportunities to people moving to the Island, to workers, customer-facing, it gives them the opportunity to learn about the place they have chosen to make their home.

[10:30]

3.9.4 Deputy K.F. Morel:

As well as there being some basic facts in any history that need to be agreed upon, given that there is a need for basic facts to be agreed upon, will the Assistant Chief Minister confirm to the Assembly that any history that is being taught will in fact, rather than being taught as a list of facts, be taught as a subject for debate; Jersey's history with the different narratives alluded to by Deputy Tadier being discussed and argued upon in the appropriate manner?

The Deputy of Grouville:

Yes. I do not really know what ... different teachers have different styles of teaching. You have to have the facts, you have to put them in context and build the narrative.

3.9.5 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Would consultation be taken with other areas who have dealt with their slave and colonial past? For example, the Museum of Slavery in Liverpool is an incredibly poignant visit and they do an enormous amount of outreach work in the ways to deal with the past in the most informed way.

The Deputy of Grouville:

I really do not know what form these lessons are going to take in the school classroom or to, as I have said, civil servants, hospitality workers and other members of the public who choose to make Jersey their home or choose to work here. The Deputy is talking about one particular element like teaching children in schools. I would like to hope that they are taught in the most diverse, interesting way possible.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Sorry, I was asking what consultation would be taken with those areas in the world that have addressed these issues significantly well and whether we could take advice from them, for us as an Island, for us all to understand where we are; our past and our place in the world.

The Deputy of Grouville:

The question then for the Deputy of Grouville is: will there be any consultation process with people with relevant knowledge and experience from outside of the Island who have dealt with slavery issues?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Yes, Sir, because there are some incredible places ...

The Bailiff:

Yes, I am sorry, I was rephrasing your question to the Deputy of Grouville.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Thank you, that absolutely sums it up.

The Deputy of Grouville:

I would like to think that when a subject is taught we can rely on or we can source the materials from all manner of sources.

3.9.6 The Connétable of St. Martin:

I thank the Deputy of Grouville for her answers. I have a large amount to say about history and interpreting it.

The Bailiff:

This does have to be a question, Connétable.

The Connétable of St. Martin:

Yes, how important it is not to erase the past, but to face up to it and learn by it. Unfortunately I cannot frame this into a question, so I will contact the Deputy of Grouville, thank you.