

PERSONAL STATEMENTS

Senator S. Syvret:

I am in the hands of the Assembly, but I would have thought given the length of business we have on the Order Paper for this meeting it may have been as well just to dispose of the statements prior to lunch and then get straight into Public Business.

5. The Deputy Bailiff:

Does the Assembly agree with that? Very well. In relation to the statement I do just want to say this, that yesterday Senator Syvret applied under Standing Order 16(1) for leave to make a personal statement concerning the events at the time of the Christmas greetings in the final meeting of the States before Christmas. I have considered very carefully whether the draft statement which was supplied by the Senator complies with Standing Orders. It is debatable whether the content of the statement is entirely personal in nature. The statement contains criticisms of the Chair in inappropriate terms and it is also critical of others in a way that is not normally appropriate for a personal statement because no debate may ensue upon such statement. Accordingly, it is arguable that the statement does not comply with Standing Orders but nevertheless in the hope that a line may be drawn under this incident, and not without some hesitation, I have decided to grant the Senator leave to make his statement and I accordingly invite him to make it.

5.1 Senator S. Syvret:

At the end of the final meeting of this Assembly before Christmas I was prevented from completing the seasonal speech which is customarily delivered by the Father of the House. I was interrupted and barracked by some Members, including the Chief Minister, Senator Frank Walker; Senator Mike Vibert, Senator Terry Le Main and Deputy Peter Troy. These Members did not like, and did not agree with the content of my speech, an opinion they are entitled to hold. However, not one sentence of the speech I was giving conflicted with Standing Orders, or the States Members' code of conduct. Instead in what was merely a personal value judgment, these Members decided that, in their opinion, the speech was inappropriate, or not relevant. It was sad, but in truth predictable that the Bailiff should have chosen to side with these Members and stop my speech. In doing so he became probably the only Chairman of a Commonwealth parliamentary jurisdiction legislature who would fail to protect the right of minority opinions to be heard; the only Presiding Officer who supports tyranny by the majority; the only speaker who is content to use his powers to enable and support a majority grouping to silence the mere expression of a minority opinion simply because the majority grouping did not like what was being said. Let us be clear. Not one single Member of this Assembly had to agree with as much as one word of my speech. Indeed, Members are entitled to strongly disagree with every sentence but procedures of this Assembly provide ample opportunity for them to have expressed such disagreement, for example, making a personal statement, as I am doing now, or during a debate upon a substantive proposition. What Members such as Senator Walker and Senator Le Main cannot do is drag this Assembly into mob rule and anarchy, as they did on 5th December. What took place then was yet another telling, disgraceful episode in the modern history of the States of Jersey. A compounding of the gross failure of the public administration of the Island which has enabled child abuse to go frequently unreported and unpunished for decade, after decade, after decade. It was the nauseating and tragically unembarrassed displaying of the very self-same culture of cover-up, concealment of the truth, denial of the obfuscation and oppression and silencing of anyone who attempts to speak out; the very culture which has led to the betrayal of people over the decades. In co-operation with some of the victims I am going to help establish an abuse survivor support group. It is plain that many people of all ages have suffered over a period of decades, often without the empathy and support which can come from speaking with those who have had similar experiences. Some victims have led tragically isolated lives with the understandable feeling that society offers them no support. Indeed in the last 3 days a

number of victims have spoken with me and expressed utter disbelief and bitter anger at B.B.C. Jersey for its obvious and wilful editorial decision to give the absolutely minimum possible promotion for Sunday's B.B.C. T.V. programme and indeed make zero mention of the film during a 2-hour Monday morning news broadcast, 75 per cent of which was consumed with utterly irrelevant trivia. When faced with such deliberate hostility and proactive support for the establishment line from the local B.B.C. station, especially with regard to the full maiden broadcast by the B.B.C., there is little I can do but agree with those victims who have said to me that society has betrayed them yet again. The speech I was prevented from delivering on 5th December would have been the first time ever that an elected Member had risen to speak in the Assembly to express acknowledgement and recognition of what many people have endured over the decades; the first time a States Member had ever spoken in the Chamber to honestly admit the culpability of the States of Jersey. This was the very first time an elected Member had accepted the truth of what happened to so many children and to attempt to reach out to them with some empathy and compassion. In not being willing to hear those words at a time when we approach the celebration of the birth of Christ the States of Jersey utterly disgraced itself again. The *Jersey Evening Post* endorsed this assault upon free speech in a frankly deranged editorial comment which had the effect of provoking many communications of support to me from members of the public, a significant proportion of whom you would not imagine to form my natural constituency. However, in fairness to the *Jersey Evening Post* it printed the speech in full and it is with the consequence of this publication that I wish to conclude, and this may give Members some insight into why I take the subject so seriously. In the speech I mentioned a child who committed suicide in 1966. The death of this boy was movingly still of deep concern to a man who had been his close friend when they were in Haut de la Garenne together as children. During the evening of the day on which the speech was published I received 2 messages on my answer phone from a man who was clearly emotional. He had read in the speech the name of the young boy who had died in 1966 and it was this that prompted him to call me, for he was the brother of the deceased. I called him back and spoke with him for some time. I met him a couple of days later and had a long conversation with him. There was a time recently when I would have found his life experiences shocking. Sadly, these days I no longer find any great surprise with betrayals and failures of the system and the way so many people harmed by their childhood experiences had their lives cast on the scrap heap by the rest of our society. In some small way, as an elected Member of the States, as someone in authority, as someone who listened and took his experiences seriously, I hope I was able to offer him some comfort, some recognition, and some understanding of the difficulties he has faced in his life. Speaking to this man and many other people with similar experiences, as I have done during the last year, places the trivia of political manoeuvrings in its proper context; that is utter irrelevancy. So, I want Members to understand this. No matter if there be 1,000 barracking States Members confronting me, wishing me to the furthest pit of hell, and no matter that the Jersey establishment in its shame still attempts to silence those who speak the truth, I will not be deflected. I, at least, am going to do everything in my power to assist these victims in gaining recognition, support and justice.

The Deputy Bailiff:

The adjournment is now moved.