

QUESTIONS ASKED AT THE MEETING OF THE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY HELD ON TUESDAY THE 18TH DECEMBER 1973, BY THE HON MEMBERS INDICATED.

No.161 of 1973

ORAL

The Hon J Bossano

In order to encourage home ownership will Government make the appropriate amendments to the Income Tax Ordinance to allow owner occupiers a deduction for tax purposes on interest payments on their mortgages?

Answer:

The Financial and Development Secretary

Sir, there are already certain provisions in the Income Tax Ordinance concerning tax relief on mortgage interest for home owners. Sections 6(1) (f) and 6(5) of the Ordinance provide that the income of any person from the occupation of premises for residential purposes shall be assessable to tax. Where the premises are occupied by the owner, income is deemed to be the net annual value of the property. However, section 15 of the Ordinance provides that all outgoings and expenses incurred in production of the income may be deducted before arriving at assessable income. These deductions would include ground rent where paid, maintenance and repairs, and, specifically under Section 15(f), any sums payable by way of interest on borrowed capital.

Having said that, however, the Government is considering what further measures might be taken to encourage home ownership and in this connection the present provisions in respect of tax and tax relief in the case of owner-occupation are being examined.

SUPPLEMENTARY TO NO.161 of 1973

HON J BOSSANO:

Mr Speaker, does the Financial Secretary not agree that the limitation of the amount that can be deducted in relation to the income arising from the property, based on net annual value, is unlikely, at present rates of interest and present property values, to allow individuals to offset the entire amount of their mortgage interest in their returns against their income tax?

HON FINANCIAL AND DEVELOPMENT SECRETARY:

Mr Speaker, Sir, that may well be so in present time; it may well be so.

HON J BOSSANO:

Will the Financial and Development Secretary then say, Mr Speaker, whether he is of the view that it is desirable that the whole of the interest on mortgage repayments should be deductible from tax, on similar lines to the position in UK, regardless of the net annual value of the property?

HON FINANCIAL AND DEVELOPMENT SECRETARY:

Mr Speaker, Sir, I think the Hon Questioner will have seen the implication of the last sentence of my original reply. If I am not taking too long to explain this, Mr Speaker, Sir, I might recall to the House that it was only after the old Schedule A in the UK had been there abolished that the Government of Gibraltar decided, nevertheless, to assess tax on owner-occupied dwellings. The arrangement is, as I say, the assessment is made, allowances to tax are granted. The implication of the last part of my answer was that perhaps now, in Gibraltar, it might be for consideration whether we might scrap existing provisions and follow the example in the UK where the owner occupier of a dwelling is not assessed to income tax at all, but nevertheless he is given allowance to income tax in the assessment of his other income. This, Sir, however is questioned now.

HON J BOSSANO:

Mr Speaker, this is precisely the commitment that I would like to get from the Government. If the Government is willing to state that it considers that it is necessary to take a step in this direction, that is, to bring an amendment to the Income Tax Ordinance that will produce a situation by which the cost of mortgage interest repayments are deductible from other income for the purposes of income tax. I want the Government to tell the House Mr Speaker, whether they are committed to doing this or not.

HON FINANCIAL AND DEVELOPMENT SECRETARY:

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Government are not committed to do it. I have said that we will examine this prospect but I am quite sure that Hon Members opposite as well as on this side of this House are aware that there is another view taken in this matter which is that the tenant also must be given consideration. Because it can be argued that to allow the owner occupier of a dwelling relief to income tax on his mortgage payment is an advantage to him. Now the pertinent question is we want to encourage home ownership, but that is just that question Sir.

HON J BOSSANO:

Yes, Mr Speaker, but can the Government say whether they honestly think that there is any hope of encouraging home ownership unless they do this. One is aware that there are two sides to it, but will the Government say whether it is willing to commit itself, in view of its supposed commitment to extending home ownership, will it commit itself to making the necessary changes in the law which will enable people of a modest income to afford to buy their own home.

The Hon M Xiberras

Will Government say what effects the European Common Market Levies on imports on certain foodstuffs from Common Market countries has on the cost of living as measured by the Food Group of the Index of Retail Prices and what representations have been made to Her Majesty's Government by the Gibraltar Government?

Answer:

The Financial and Development Secretary

We estimate that the recently introduced export levies on sugar, flour and rice would have the combined effect of raising the Index of Food Prices by 0.88 points and the general Index of Retail Prices by 0.34 points. In fact these increases have not yet taken place in full because the levies were not introduced until October and have not yet had time to work through the price system.

The Government has represented to HM Government that in certain cases the community levies system can be an additional burden on the cost of living in Gibraltar. In particular we have argued that the Monetary Compensation Amount should not be applied on UK exports to Gibraltar. The EEC regulations require that when sterling depreciates this Monetary Compensation Amount must be added to the price of UK exports whether to the Community or to third countries. The purpose is to ensure that a member country whose currency is depreciated does not gain a trading advantage over its community partners. Gibraltar however is tied directly to sterling so that the HCA in this case means an actual increase in the price we must pay for imports from the UK. We consider this to be an anomaly and are urging HMG to seek its removal.

SUPPLEMENTARY TO NO.162 of 1973

HON M XIBERRAS:

Sir, if I may. Following up on the first part of the question, does the Hon Member consider 0.88 in the Food Group of the Index of Retail Prices to be a considerably, a heavy amount?

HON FINANCIAL AND DEVELOPMENT SECRETARY:

Mr Speaker, Sir, Hon Members are aware that the Index of Food Prices has been rising by two points in a month for one or two past months, one can see the relationship of 0.88 to that. It is certainly a significant amount.

HON M XIBERRAS:

Sir, the Hon Member spoke about "anomaly" in the situation as it affected Gibraltar. Will the Hon Member say whether he means by this that the application of these levies to Gibraltar is unfair?

MR SPEAKER:

The Member is being asked to express an opinion; if you want to do so, you are free to do so, but there is no reason.

HON FINANCIAL AND DEVELOPMENT SECRETARY:

Mr Speaker, the EEC regulations has a perfectly fair purpose in its application generally. I have maintained that its application in the peculiar situation of Gibraltar is an "anomaly". "Anomaly" is a truer word than "unfair".

HON J BOSSANO:

Mr Speaker, in respect of the impact of these levies, is it not the case that unless there is a dramatic upward revision in the levy constantly taking place, this will be a once and for all thing. That is the 0.88 jump in the Food Index will come because it will be the effect of a situation of post-levy prices as compared with pre-levy prices, but then it will stay at that level. Is this not the case Mr Speaker?

HON FINANCIAL AND DEVELOPMENT SECRETARY:

Mr Speaker, no, it is much more complex than that. For example I have learned only this morning that with effect from yesterday the monetary compensation amount in the case of exports of flour has slightly fallen because of the recent appreciation of sterling. On the other hand, the straight export levy, which the community agrees to apply to all its exports outside of the community, that levy on flour has risen substantially; significantly. Now, these export levies Sir, vary continuously as between one agricultural product and another and they vary in relation to the scarcity or abundance of these commodities in the world. Therefore, whether the world market price is higher or lower I couldn't say that the levies which were introduced in October are once and for all.

HON J BOSSANO:

Mr Speaker, what I would like to get clear is, is it not a fact that although the rate of the levy may vary up or down from time to time, the fact that we now have an impact of this magnitude is due to the fact that we have a levy now where there was before no levy and consequently this change is a once and for all change.

HON FINANCIAL AND DEVELOPMENT SECRETARY:

Mr Speaker, Sir, yes. I think we could take this comfort from this situation, that cereals prices in the world are now high and when they are high the levies will tend to be high.

HON J BOSSANO:

Could the Financial and Development Secretary say what is the position with regard to re-exports that we get from UK of commodities that bear a levy but are not of EEC origin?

HON FINANCIAL AND DEVELOPMENT SECRETARY:

Mr Speaker, Sir, traders manage to look after these things. For example there was an example of rice from another country.....

MR SPEAKER:

We are departing from the question.

HON M XIBERRAS:

Sir, since the Hon Member has said that representations have been made to Her Majesty's Government, will he undertake to inform the House of the result of these representations in due course.

HON FINANCIAL AND DEVELOPMENT SECRETARY:

Certainly, Sir.

The Hon M Xiberras

Will Government do away with the Colonial Regulation which reduces the period of leave of the Civil Servant who cannot afford or who does not wish to take his leave abroad?

Answer:

The Attorney General

Before answering the question, there is one point which I should like to clarify. The question of leave is governed, not by Colonial Regulations, but by the Leave and Passage Regulations which form part of the Gibraltar Government's General Orders.

A formal claim for the removal of the limitation on the amount of leave that may be taken locally was tabled by the Staff Association Coordinating Committee in August this year. This claim is being investigated and will be dealt with in accordance with the normal procedures of negotiations.

SUPPLEMENTARY TO NO.163 of 1973

HON M XIBERRAS:

Sir, no doubt the General Orders have been tinged by the Colonial Regulations. Does not the Learned Attorney General agree that the situation which gave rise to this particular provision in General Orders has now changed quite radically?

HON ATTORNEY GENERAL:

I would start by saying that it has not been possible to discover from a perusal of files what in fact gave rise to this particular Order.

HON M XIBERRAS:

Might I suggest Sir, that the word is in the epithet which qualifies regulations, it is probably, may I advance this one, probably an attempt to tell people where they should spend their leave, I would imagine. But would the Hon Member undertake also to bring to the House the results of the negotiations, and would he bear in mind that this is an anomaly in the conditions of service of the civil servant.

HON ATTORNEY GENERAL:

Mindful of the requirements of negotiating principles and practice I would hope that Hon Members would agree that this House should leave the matter in the hands of the Staff Side negotiators rather than prejudice the negotiations in any way by premature discussion in the House. I am unable to say more on this matter, firstly, because the Government's investigations of the implications of the claim is not yet completed, and secondly, because in any event as a matter of principle, the Government believes that claims by the Staff Side should be left to be dealt with under the normal process of negotiation.

HON M XIBERRAS:

Sir, the purpose of having the words "Colonial " before Regulations Sir.....

MR SPEAKER:

No, we are not going to have that.

HON M XIBERRAS:

Sir, would the Hon Member not agree that such a limitation, the reason for which he himself is unable to trace despite perusal of the files, is a matter which affects not only staff Associations and the Government, but also this House.

MR SPEAKER:

That is completely out of the orbit of the question.

HON M XIBERRAS:

Sir, the Hon Member has said that we might prejudice negotiations. What I am maintaining is that such a principle as to where civil servants spend their leave is important to this House. And by the way, Sir, I hardly think that this question is aimed at prejudicing nor would it prejudice the negotiations.

HON P J ISOLA:

Mr Speaker, can I just ask. I can appreciate that the Government has not had much time since August to investigate this particular application. But can the Hon and Learned Attorney General give some indication to this House whether the Government views it with some sympathy or not?

HON ATTORNEY GENERAL:

I don't think I can properly say at this stage what Government's attitude is. As I said, this is under discussion and for me to indicate in this House, one way or the other, as to Government's feelings would, I think, be entirely improper.

No.164 of 1973

ORAL

The Hon L Devincenzi

Hearing in mind the special circumstances in which we are living, will Government review its policy on the curtailment of sporting activities in the evenings?

Answer:

The Minister for Information and Sport

Sir, bearing in mind the special circumstances in which we are living, Government considered the matter very carefully before it decided to stop floodlit games temporarily until such time as there was an improvement in the present fuel crisis.

Floodlighting has, however, been allowed in very special events.

SUPPLEMENTARY TO NO.164 of 1973

HON L DEVINCENZI:

Mr Speaker, I thank the Minister for that answer, and in fact the Opposition agrees with the sentiments behind the action taken by Government, but would the Government agree, perhaps that the amount of fuel that will be saved would be minimal, and would not be sufficient to justify, because of the special circumstances, the curtailment of sporting activities.

HON H J ZAMMITT:

Sir, the consumption of floodlit games, only at Victoria Stadium, is 288 units per game of 90 minutes. There are two allocations per evening, a total consumption of 4,040 units per week. It is quite considerable.

HON L DEVINCENZI:

Mr Speaker, will Government say whether they have in fact taken any action to save any other fuel other than with sporting activities?

MR SPEAKER:

Out of order.

HON P J ISOLA:

Mr Speaker, does the Minister not agree that sporting activity under flood light in Gibraltar is a necessity as opposed to a luxury because of the very small amount of playing fields available to the general public, and has that consideration been taken into account?

HON H J ZAMMITT:

Mr Speaker, Sir, very much so. Of course, we give floodlit games great importance, but there is a fuel crisis on and we have to save and show our concern in this matter.

HON P J ISOLA:

Can the Minister inform the House if he has made any calculation about the cut in percentage terms that there has been in total sport in Gibraltar as a result of this ban, and incidentally in his portfolio?

HON H J ZAMMITT:

Certainly Sir, there has been no curtailment because floodlights have only been installed over the last month or two months, so we are only back to where we were two months ago without the fuel crisis.

HON P J ISOLA:

Does this mean that the floodlighting will continue in the Naval Grounds, where sport was carried under floodlight?

HON H J ZAMMITT:

No, Sir. Equally the Naval Grounds have limited their floodlit games.

HON P J ISOLA:

Well, in that case how can the Minister say that there has been no effect. Has not the effect in fact, as far as Gibraltar as a whole is concerned, been very substantial in sport and can he indicate to the House by what percentage sporting activity has been cut in Gibraltar as a result of the Government imposed ban.

HON H J ZAMMITT:

Sir, of course I can only answer for and on behalf of the Victoria Stadium, I cannot answer for MOD or the Naval Grounds, but most competitive games within our own leagues and cups were played at the Victoria Stadium.

HON PJ ISOLA:

Mr Speaker, that is indeed a surprising answer. Has the Minister not investigated the effect of the ban on sport as a whole and not just in the Victoria stadium? This affects his whole portfolio which has almost disappeared has it not?

MR SPEAKER:

You will withdraw your last remark.

HON H J ZAMMITT:

Well, may I thank the Hon Member opposite for his concern. I am very grateful for his concern. No, Sir, there hasn't been a drastic effect, I haven't received direct representation from any Association because we did give an undertaking that in very special circumstances we would allow things to go through, and in fact we have.

Even after the Chief Minister announced the reductions, we allowed the Community Centre to hold a floodlit tournament which was postponed a few weeks earlier because of the weather. We had the Wildston Football Team out here from UK, we stuck to that and we allowed floodlighting. We allowed one basketball game to be played under floodlighting. So, of course, if something special comes along, certainly we will, but otherwise the Associations themselves are prepared to pull the rope with us and the community at large.

HON P J ISOLA:

Will Government indicate the principles on which it will act in making exceptions to this ban, and will the Minister assure the House that this dispensation of favour will be done equitably?

HON H J ZAMMITT:

Sir, I think we are doing it as far as possible. After all Members opposite can only refer to the Victoria Stadium, I think. There has been nothing wrong and the sporting organisations are not suffering, as I said earlier on, from what they were suffering only two months ago.

HON M XIBERRAS:

Sir, in trying to establish what importance these sporting facilities have in the Government's mind, bearing in mind the special circumstances of Gibraltar, could I ask the Minister, who no doubt is keen to have as much sport as possible, could I ask the Minister what alternatives were put to him before he agreed to imposing an almost total ban on sporting activities in the evenings?

HON H J ZAMMITT:

No, there hasn't been a total curtailment of sporting activity in the evenings. As we said, if there are special circumstances we will certainly consider them.

HON M XIBERRAS:

Sir, it is almost total, but the brunt of the question was before he agreed to this, did any other suggestion come from his colleagues as to what other way fuel might be saved.

HON H J ZAMMITT:

Sir, again I must remind Members opposite that it was us who installed the floodlighting, of which there was no provision, and therefore if anything the floodlighting was an improvement to the sporting facilities. What we have done is that we have had to re-allocate the games that were played in the evenings to be played earlier during the afternoons. However, on Saturdays and Sundays it was decided to give the grounds a certain amount of rest and again we have gone back in allowing games to start from 10 a.m. in the morning right through until the hours of darkness. So there hasn't been a great effect, Sir.

HON M XIBERRAS:

Sir, I am sorry, might I ask the question again for a third time; and that is what alternatives - you see we are trying to establish Sir, what importance the Government gives to these sporting facilities in the evenings. I am asking the Minister what alternatives, after all in the UK all sorts of things have been tried to save electricity. Now, what alternatives has the Government considered, alternatives to an almost, I said, total curtailment of sporting facilities, in the evenings?

MR SPEAKER:

We are not going to go into the general fuel crisis.

HON M XIBERRAS:

No, Sir, I am just trying to establish, Sir, what importance the Government gives to these sporting facilities in the evenings.

HON H J ZAMMITT:

Sir, I think Members opposite must accept that we have given an awful amount of importance to the sporting facilities. If not we would not have spent nearly £25,000 on floodlighting.

HON M XIBERRAS:

Is there any hope at all that the ban will be eased and that the Minister will consider other ways of saving electricity?

HON H J ZAMMITT:

Sir, if the Hon Members opposite can influence the Arab States to allow us more fuel I am sure we will go back to square one.

HON M XIBERRAS:

Sir, I am quite certain that the Hon Member would be able to do it, not in twenty minutes as they got the floodlights up in twentyfive, it would take twentyfive rather than twenty. He could convince the whole Arab front. However will the Minister, joking apart, seriously give thought to what the Hon Members on this side of the House have said and investigate alternatives to saving fuel by the almost total curtailment of sporting facilities in the evenings.

HON H J ZAMMITT:

I would be delighted to offer more sporting facilities in the evenings. Circumstances at the moment just don't permit it. Of course I would be delighted.

HON M XIBERRAS:

Sir, perhaps I am not getting my point across. I am asking him....

MR SPEAKER:

Perhaps you are not getting the answer you want.

HON M XIBERRAS:

Sir, I am certainly not getting the answer I want but I think it is the answer Gibraltar requires. The question is a very simple one and if the Hon and Learned the Chief Minister will allow me, I am asking what alternatives, or is he even willing to look at alternatives.

HON H J ZAMMITT:

Sir, we looked at alternatives. This wasn't a question of just saying: "flood lights off, cut down here, cut down there, of course we considered we discussed this and it was obvious that floodlighting was rather a heavy burden on the fuel crisis. And therefore we decided to cut down on it.

HON M XIBERRAS:

Sir, what we want to know now is what alternatives were considered?

HON H J ZAMMITT:

I am not going to tell the Members opposite what alternatives the Government considered. We are the Government, Sir, and we are governing.

MR SPEAKER:

Order. Next question.

The Hon W M Isola

Has Government any plans to increase the number of telephone lines between Gibraltar and London?

Answer:

The Minister for Public Works and Municipal Services

Yes Sir. An additional circuit was requested early in the year. We have also asked for the extension of the operational hours of an existing circuit. Negotiations are still in progress as to the best method of achieving both these objectives through Cable and Wireless.

SUPPLEMENTARY TO NO.165 OF 1973

HON W M ISOLA:

Mr Speaker, I am very grateful for that answer in view of the fact that under the revenue we expect to get something like 30% more in trunk calls. Is the Minister aware, however, that whilst he is trying to negotiate for a further line the radio link between Gibraltar and London is cut off at 6 p.m.?

HON LT COL J L HOARE:

This is in fact the extention that we are seeking.

HON W M ISOLA:

Is the Minister also aware that there is another radio link which is at present closed down.

HON LT COL J L HOARE:

I don't know what particular link the Hon Questioner is referring to, but one of the reasons why we are getting a little difficulty in extending the hours is because of the difficulty by the Post Office in the United Kingdom to get adequate staff to man their telephonic services.

HON W M ISOLA:

Mr Speaker, is the Minister aware that when one rings Gibraltar from London there is invariably a delay of up to one hour, and that is blamed on Gibraltar and not on the London Post Office?

HON LT COL J L HOARE:

I am sorry I can't accept the responsibility for what people say outside Gibraltar. I am only responsible for the service from Gibraltar. But I can assure the Hon Questioner that the delays are caused not from this end generally but from the other end and we hope that as soon as we can persuade the powers that be to let us have semi-automatic working, a lot of those delays will be eradicated. We have been trying to work along these lines for some time now.

HON W M ISOLA:

On the question of delays - and I am very grateful for the interest that the Minister is taking on this rather important utility - but is the Minister aware that having only four lines from Gibraltar to London there is obviously also from Gibraltar to London a very big delay during peak hours because we only have four lines at the maximum. There must be delays from Gibraltar to London as there is from London to Gibraltar, will he not agree?

HON LT COL J L HOARE:

There are about four questions there, but first of all, may I say Mr Speaker, that with all the will in the world if ~~we~~ want to put in another six lines it has to be agreed by the other partners. We can't take unilateral action on this sort of thing and we are trying our best to get the additional lines. No more pressure will produce any more lines at all. One has to agree with one's colleague at the other end, and this is what we are trying to do.

HON W ISOLA:

I very much appreciate that it is not unilateral, thing it is a bilateral thing, but obviously the powers - that - be on the other side, in the United Kingdom, must appreciate that since in our estimates for next year we are estimating something like 30% increase in revenue just on trunk calls there must be a need for more lines between Gibraltar and London.

HON LT COL J L HOARE:

I would like to know where he got the Estimates for next year, because I have not seen them.

HON W ISOLA:

If I might remind the Minister, if he looks at his estimates, he will see that in trunk calls, he has estimated for 1973/74, £13,500. The actual revenue for 1972/73 was £10,658, and the Government has stated that it has budgetted for an increase of £4,500 which is something like 30%.

MR SPEAKER:

That is in respect of March 1974, is that not right? For this year, not next year.

HON W ISOLA:

In the estimates for 1973/74, they have budgetted for £13,500....

MR SPEAKER:

You were referring to the current year.

HON W ISOLA:

When we did the budget Mr Speaker, in March, you estimated from the 1st April 1973 to the 31 March 1974, £13,500 which is an increase of £4,500 and which is about 30% in revenue to Gibraltar on trunk calls, and therefore, Mr Speaker, I say that there is a great need for more lines as quickly as possible for the benefit of.....

MR SPEAKER:

Order, order. We must not make statements at question time. You were asking a question.

HON W M ISOLA:

It was rather a long question, yes. Well, I am very glad Mr Speaker, that the Minister is looking into this matter, and I hope he looks at it with the urgency which it deserves.

NO.166 of 1973

ORAL

The Hon W M Isola

Can Government state the reasons for the lengthy delays there are in the installation of new telephones?

Answer:

The Minister for Public Works and Municipal Services

No lengthy delays occur except in those isolated cases where it is difficult to provide additional circuits within existing distribution cable availability. Up to the end of October the average time between application and connection was two months.

SUPPLEMENTARY TO NO.166 of 1973

HON W M ISOLA:

Does not the Minister consider two months to be somewhat lengthy?

HON LT COL J L HOARE:

Compared to the time it took when the Hon Questioner was in office, no.

HON W M ISOLA:

Mr Speaker, that is rather a ridiculous question because the Minister must appreciate that whilst I was in office those new lines had not yet come into being. But is not the Minister aware that this delay is losing the Government precious revenue in rentals.

HON LT COL J L HOARE:

The only part of that question that I agree with was his first statement, that it was a ridiculous question.

HON J CARUANA:

Mr Speaker, is the Minister aware of the reasons for the delay or has he not investigated the reasons for these delays in his department?

HON LT COL J L HOARE:

I have investigated the delays because I am constantly aware of them. Now, the reasons for any delays that do occur are a shortage of line plant personnel, coupled to heavy demands, not only for new installations but for other works such as removals to new addresses and miscellaneous services. The amount of delay depends on the location of the new line and the work involved. Some new housing estates, being prewired, are generally dealt with quicker. The diversion of personnel to attend line fault, due to the recent heavy rains, and continuing losses in the skilled labour force, has slowed down the rate of new circuit provision during November and December. Since the new exchange was commissioned in April this year where there was already a waiting list of 800, of which 500 were ready for connection, applications

for new lines have been received at an average rate of 56 per month, and up to the end of October the average rate of connection was 65 per month. The number of applicants awaiting new lines now stands at 240. During the same period there have been 600 requests for other work, 488 of which have been completed. These include 127 removals to new addresses, some 270 internal changes, and a major hotel installation. In addition to all this, the normal maintenance and fault correcting has been carried out.

HON J CARUANA:

Mr Speaker, the Minister has given a resumé of what is in fact a day to day operation of the Telephone Department, repairing faults in all the telephones. My question was, has not the Minister investigated the delays and the reasons for the delays. And I was hoping the Minister would say in his reply which he hasn't. Is it a fact Mr Speaker that there are a lot of people....

MR SPEAKER:

No, no, no, you must not make statements at question time.

HON J CARUANA:

Mr Speaker, will the Minister not say is it not a fact that there has been a lot of accumulated holidays, and by accumulated I don't mean by one person but by a large number of people at the same time taking holidays in a department which is overworked?

HON LT COL J L HOARE:

I don't think this is the prime cause because the major effect of this accumulated leave- and I ~~don't~~ know what he is driving at - won't be felt until next year. There has been a constant drain of trained personnel, not matched by incoming skilled personnel. ~~You don't~~ ^{ONE CANNOT} make a telecom mechanic overnight, it takes years and years. They are getting more and more difficult to find. And this is ~~what it is,~~ ^{the reason -} there is too much work for the labour force which is available in that line in Gibraltar.

~~Not~~ ^{is} there in any other part of the world sufficient skilled staff to do the work on the dot the moment any subscriber wants initial work done. ~~As I say,~~ ^{IN ABOUT} In England at the moment, it is taking between 9 and 10 months, very often a year, to get a new telephone. Here people are getting it ~~at~~ ^{IN ABOUT} two months during a very rushed period.

HON J CARUANA:

Isn't the Minister aware, and I accept part of the reasons he has given about trained personnel, but is not the Minister aware that for several weeks now up to four and five trained persons have been taking holidays on the same week, and that this is just not on in view of the reasons the Minister has given?

HON LT COL J L HOARE:

I am not sure this is ^a fact; but, is he suggesting that I should curtail the leave to these ^{WORKERS} people, so that other people can have telephones? When are ^{EMPLOYEES} these people going to get their leave?

HON J CARUANA:

Mr Speaker, nobody is going to deny anybody having the leave.

Is not the Minister aware that the responsibility is his to make sure the holidays are staggered reasonably and intelligently so that the community doesn't suffer. Why should people, Mr Speaker, will the Minister say, why should people be allowed to accumulate....

MR SPEAKER:

Order, order. You have asked a question, give the Minister an opportunity to reply.

HON P J ISOLA:

Mr Speaker, can the Minister state whether the real reason for the delay in telephone operations is not that there is substantial dispute between management and staff in the Telephone Department and has he...we are asking Mr Speaker, for the reasons for the delay, I am asking...is it not....

MR SPEAKER:

Order, order. I have been liberal to the extent that I have allowed the members to investigate the reasons for the delay, but we are not going to debate the reasons themselves.

HON P J ISOLA:

No, Mr Speaker, I am asking, as a question of fact, is it not a fact that one of the principal reasons for the delay is in fact substantial dispute between management and staff, and a sense of grievance among staff, technical staff, mechanics and so forth, in the Telephone Department?

MR SPEAKER:

You can answer yes, or not, but no more, otherwise it will be a debate.

HON LT COL J L HOARE:

I am aware of this, but the question implies that because of this disagreement, that the workers are not doing their job. This I cannot accept, the workers are working just as hard as they ever were.

The Hon W M Isola

In view of the substantial increase in the number of telephones in Gibraltar, does Government not consider there is a need for more switchboards at the telephone exchange in the interests of a better service to the public?

Answer:

The Minister for Public Works and Municipal Services

No Sir. The exchange auto-manual switchboard has four fully equipped positions and there is also an auxiliary switchboard equipped to deal with enquiries and trunk call bookings. These facilities are considered to be adequate at present.

SUPPLEMENTARY TO NO.167 OF 1973

HON W M ISOLA:

Is the Minister aware, to start with, that the auxiliary switch-board can only take incoming calls? It is an old, old switch-board from the days of the City Council.

HON LT COL J L HOARE:

I thought that every exchange only took incoming calls, what is peculiar about this? This is why you ring up the exchange.

HON W ISOLA:

Is the Minister aware that there is only, during peak hours, one telephone operator answering enquiries, and at the same time talking trunk calls, in view of the several hundred new lines that have come into existence?

HON LT COL J L HOARE:

The new lines that have come into existence of course record their own faults, there is an automatic fault finder and recorder, so that does not require any ~~man~~ manning at all.

HON W ISOLA:

Is the Minister aware, that in view of the fact that we have only four switchboards, or points, only one operator can deal with Gibraltar/London calls on the four lines? Is the Minister aware of that state at the Telephone Department?

HON LT COL J L HOARE:

It is the position that has existed always, one point, one man. What is peculiar about this?

HON W ISOLA:

Is the Minister aware that at one point only one person, instead of two, can deal with United Kingdom/Gibraltar lines, and that that causes great delays?

HON LT COL J L HOARE:

If there are delays, I have already explained this in answer to questions on that, it is that when there is high demand, there are not enough lines. It is not because of manning difficulties here, it is because of manning difficulties in the United Kingdom.

HON W ISOLA:

Has the Minister discussed the question of whether there are sufficient switchboards with the actual people who operate the switch-boards?

HON LT COL J L HOARE:

The ^{advice} results given to me by my Superintendent, who is the man primarily responsible for the executive administration of that department, says: "These facilities are considered to be adequate at present", and I am not prepared to argue with him on hypothetical questions. ~~which do not exist~~

HON W ISOLA:

Is the Minister aware that there are sometimes long delays in the 95....

MR SPEAKER:

You are not going to get your "delays" again.

HON W ISOLA:

No, no I am sorry.

Is the Minister aware that there is only one person in the switch-board to answer to enquiries, and that as a result of that, there are many delays?

HON LT COL J L HOARE:

Of course, I do. I know that there is only one person on "enquiries", and of course there is only one line to "enquiries", 95, 96 or 97....I said 95, 96, or 97 because there is "enquiries", "information", ~~and something else~~. There is only one line for "enquiries". But why should the Hon Questioner think that everybody is phoning up constantly for "enquiries". What are telephone directories for.

"facts" and "time"

HON W ISOLA:

May I make the suggestion to the Minister, like he used to suggest to me on other occasions that he pays a little visit to the switch-board and finds out for himself the true facts of what is happening there, instead of taking the views of his Superintendent.

The Hon L Devincenzi

Is Government aware of the general state of disrepair and lack of hygiene in the condition of children's playgrounds?

Answer:

The Minister for Public Works and Municipal Services

Government does not accept that Children's Playgrounds are in a general state of disrepair. Without details of specific cases investigations cannot be undertaken. Any damage discovered during the regular daily inspection is put right as soon as possible. The time taken, of course, depends on the type and extent of the damage. What is meant by "lack of hygiene" is not understood unless the Hon Questioner is more explicit.

SUPPLEMENTARY TO NO.168 OF 1973

HON L DEVINCENZI:

Mr Speaker, I am very surprised at that answer. I am in fact referring more specially to the Alameda Children's playground and the Toddler's playground also at the Alameda.

HON LT COL J L HOARE:

May I have that again please.

HON L DEVINCENZI:

Both palygrounds at the Alameda. Mr Speaker, the see-saw in that playground is out of order, and has been so for some time; the climbing fence has no ropes, and this has been so for some time; the steps leading to the slide are non existent, it has been washed away by the rain, or practically so; the roundabouts have been removed and not been replaced. I would say Mr Speaker that perhaps the Minister might agree that there is not only a general state of disrepair, but a major general state of disrepair.

HON LT COL J L HOARE:

Whilst I have made a note of this, may I say that the question was "in Children's playgrounds" implying that all the children's playgrounds in Gibraltar were in this condition. This is not a fact. No, I am sorry. I have a report from the person concerned but he doesn't mention ~~the~~ Alameda Gardens. He says "Reasonably in good condition, cleaned and swept daily by Alameda Gardens labour. Generally in good condition. Slight disturbance only caused when there is a storm or heavy rain". This is the report from the man on the spot.

Now that you have given me details of the upper level I will go and look at these things specifically and find out why. But let me give as an example the most popular playground in Gibraltar which is that behind the Anglican Cathedral. We had both swings stolen overnight, we managed to get one back within 24 hours but the other one had to be manufactured from scratch. Trying to keep all these playgrounds in ideal conditions, which is what we strive to do, is almost impossible because there is constant damage. It depends on the extent of the damage how long it takes

to ^{REPAIR} ~~repair~~. We are doing our best and the evidence that the playgrounds are acceptable to the majority of the public is that they are all crowded every day. Whatever playground you go to you will find crowded; therefore, they cannot be considered to be unusable, which is the main thing.

HON J BOSSANO:

Mr Speaker, surely the Hon and Gallant Minister realises that in the confined situation that we find ourselves in, somebody with small children has got no choice but to use the playgrounds that exist however unsatisfactory their state. The fact that people go there, surely, Mr Speaker, must be admitted not necessarily to put the seal of approval on their condition. Is the Minister saying that if people have got no other playgrounds to go to they don't need any improvement?

HON LT COL J L HOARE:

Not at all, there is a constant striving for improvement, but one has also to accept that damage occurs almost daily and ~~you~~ ^{it} cannot ^{be} put it right immediately. Some items take much longer than others because they have to be manufactured ~~especially~~. But that children's playgrounds get a great deal of attention there can be no doubt at all.

HON DEVINCENZI:

Mr Speaker, in order to perhaps help the Minister, which he will probably welcome, does the Minister know that the roundabout at the Toddler's playground in particular has been missing for 1 year? Also Mr Speaker, the Minister mentioned that the most popular playground is that situated opposite the tourist office; would the Minister also agree that the sand there is filthy ^{and} in a very shameful state; it has never been cleaned, I think.

HON LT COL J L HOARE:

That is not so. The sand in that place was changed about six months ago and I have given instructions that it is to be changed again immediately. But those playgrounds are in constant use.

HON P J ISOLA:

Mr Speaker, will the Minister agree that it is very unsatisfactory that he should inform the House, in answer to the main question, that he is very satisfied with the situation and then from ~~supplementaries~~ ^{it} appears that there are substantial defects in our playgrounds. I am sure the Minister does not wish to mislead the House, and I am sure this has been due to wrong information coming from his executive officers, but will the Minister give an assurance to this House that he will investigate the position and ask questions as to why he has been misinformed and therefore, inadvertently misled the House on the position of the children's playground in Gibraltar?

HON CHIEF MINISTER:

Mr Speaker, on a point of order, please. The original answer did not say that the state of the playgrounds were satisfactory. It is improper to mislead a Minister by suggesting things that have not been said. This is elementary if members opposite are going to start accusing us of misrepresenting the position. It is the opposition that is misrepresenting the answers originally given. This is a most improper way of conducting a question time.

MR SPEAKER:

Order, order.

HON P J ISOLA:

Mr Speaker, may I....

MR SPEAKER:

I think that there is a difference between a misrepresentation and misleading. I don't think it has been suggested by the Opposition that there has been a misrepresentation. The suggestion has been that there has been misleading and it hasn't been even suggested that it has been done deliberately.

HON P J ISOLA:

Exactly, sir, that is the point.

MR SPEAKER:

We will allow the Minister then to answer the question.

HON LT COL J L HOARE:

May I go back to the original answer, because what I did say, and I will read again from the answer I gave "Government does not accept that children's playgrounds are in a general state of disrepair". I have said nowhere that I am satisfied I will never be satisfied until we reach the ideal, and I am realistic enough to know that one can never reach the ideal. We will do our best and keep on striving to make these as attractive as possible for the children. This is well known and I will give an assurance to this House that we are constantly striving to do this, but one has to face the fact that there is constant damage being caused and one cannot keep pace with this amount of damage. As a result of these specific cases which have been brought to my attention, I will investigate why these items have been missing. It may well be that as a matter of policy, not notified to me, it was decided not to replace them because the amount of damage which was being caused was so constant. Now that I know what it is I will make the necessary enquiries.

HON P J ISOLA:

Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank the Minister for that answer, but I must put it to the Minister that if there had been no supplementary at all, Mr Speaker, the House and the public in Gibraltar would have been left with the impression that all was well with the playgrounds. What I am asking the Minister for is an assurance that he will look into this very carefully and that he will see to it that wrong information is not given to this House about the state of playgrounds?

MR SPEAKER:

No, I am afraid I can't accept that. I think the Minister started his answer by saying "Government does not accept that children's playgrounds are in a general state of disrepair". That is what the Minister said.

HON M XIBERRAS:

Sir, would he consider, in view of the fact that have been brought forward by my Hon Colleague Mr Devincenzi, that the two playgrounds at Alameda are in a fit state?

HON LT COL J L HOARE:

My answer went on to say "without detail of specific cases, for which I would be grateful, investigations cannot be undertaken". I asked for these and now that I have got specific details, I will have a special look into these. Nevertheless, reports made to me indicate that they are up to normal standards.

HON M XIBERRAS:

Mr Speaker, how many thousands of childrens playgrounds do we have in Gibraltar. I haven't worked out the percentage Sir, but would the Minister not agree that these two are popular children's playgrounds, and would he not agree that the question is entirely justified, at least in respect of these two?

MR SPEAKER:

No, no, now we are just trying to justify whether you were entitled to ask the question or not. I think we have ventilated the matter. It has been asked and assurances have been given that something will be done about it.

HON W M ISOLA:

Mr Speaker, the Minister earlier on said that they were always constantly striving for improvement. Can the Minister say what improvements his department has carried outto these playgrounds since he came into office?

HON MAJOR R J PELIZA:

Mr Speaker, I would just like to clear one point. I understood from the Minister that perhaps the roundabout at the Alameda Playground had been removed because it had been damaged so often by vandals that departmentally it had been decided to remove it altogether, or at least not to replace it. Could he give an assurance to this House that he is not going to give way to vandalism and thus deprive the children of their playground?

HON LT COL J L HOARE:

I have said that I will look into this one, now that it has been brought to my notice that this is the case. I have also given an assurance that we will look into this and put them right, if necessary, and if I have not been kept informed I will take the necessary action with the individuals concerned.

HON MAJOR R J PELIZA:

Yes, but my question was: will the Minister give way to vandalism or not? it appears that that roundabout was removed precisely because of vandals doing damage to it and this I think is something that we mustn't give way to.

HON LT COL J L HOARE:

May I answer that, sir, because I didn't say this. I said I would check if this is the reason.

HON MAJOR R J PELIZA:

And if it is I hope you will not tolerate it.

HON LT COL J L HOARE:

Well, until we find out what the reason is I can't give any assurance.

HON MAJOR R J PELIZA:

That is what I want to know, if that is the reason I hope the Minister will not accept it.

HON LT COL J L HOARE:

I give way to nothing which is unreasonable, be it vandalism or anything else.

The Hon J Caruana

For how many days since the beginning of November have the lifts at the Tower Blocks been out of order?

Answer:

The Minister for Public Works and Municipal Services

Since the beginning of November, on only one occasion has any of the four lifts at the Tower Blocks been out of action for a day or longer. This was in one of the two lifts at Referendum House which suffered a burnt motor - an unusual occurrence - on November 13 and it was not possible to replace it until November 22nd.

SUPPLEMENTARY TO NO.169 OF 1973

HON M XIBERRAS:

Sir, I seem to recall receiving a copy of the letter sent to the Government, and a letter was published in the press complaining about the lifts at Tower Blocks. Did the Minister not receive such a copy of the letter?

HON LT COL J L HOARE:

Yes, Sir, and as a result of interviews and other correspondence with the gentleman in question, I got a letter from him, through my director, on the sixth of December, saying this: "I am in receipt of your letter for which I wish...."

MR SPEAKER:

Do you intend to read the letter?

HON LT COL J L HOARE:

No, I am only going to quote the two opening paragraphs. "I am in receipt of your letter dated the 29th November for which I wish to express my most sincere gratitude. I would also like to express my deep appreciation for your having gone to the trouble of being so explicit. I would be the last person to expect the technician from the hospital to leave his urgent job there and proceed to Referendum House to attend to these lifts." That is the result of the subsequent correspondence arising from that letter.

HON M XIBERRAS:

Was the writer complaining about this one occasion which the Minister referred to earlier?

HON LT COL J L HOARE:

This is the one occasion which he specifically quoted by date. As I said in reply to the question, this is the only one occasion where the lift has been out of order for a day or more. And may I state that the question is: "For how many days" and not "on how many occasions".

HON J CARUANA:

Then the Minister quotes that the lift broke down on the 13th and was repaired on the 22nd, so therefore, it was out of order for 9 days.

HON P J ISOLA:

Mr Speaker, I am not quite sure, is the Minister saying that no lift has been out of order for more than one day since the beginning of November, or is he interpreting the question in such a way that precludes him from answering how many days of use of any of the four lifts has been lost since the first of November?

HON LT COL J L HOARE:

To the first question it is only on one occasion that any lift of the four lifts has been out of order for more than a day, and this was on a period from the 13th November to the 22nd because of a burnt motor. ^{ONE} You cannot rewind and get a motor back into service very quickly. It takes time. In the meantime the other three lifts were working. On no other occasion, I repeat, has any lift been out of order for more than a day. Generally, when they do break down they are out for half an hour, an hour or thereabouts. And may I say that very recently one of the causes for the breakdown, and this is what we've asked this gentleman to help us in, was that there were 14 people travelling in the one lift.

The Hon J Bossano

Will the Minister undertake to bring to this House the changes he proposes to make to the Housing Allocation Rules before they are actually put into effect?

Answer:

The Minister for Housing

The amendments to the Housing Allocation Scheme (Revised) 1971 are at present with the Housing Allocation Committee for their consideration. As soon as this Committee's recommendations are received and accepted by the Government, following established practice I shall table them in this House. The effective date of application will be the 1st January 1974.

The Hon J Bossano

Will Government state whether the list showing the allocation of houses in the Glacis Estate is available for inspection by members of the public?

Answer:

The Minister for Housing

The Allocation List for the Glacis Estate will be made available for public inspection at the Housing Unit after the allocation has been completed. This follows the practice established for the allocation of Knights Court and St John's Court.

SUPPLEMENTARY TO NO. 171 OF 1973

HON J BOSSANO:

Mr Speaker, will the Minister state quite clearly, therefore, that in respect of that part of the allocation that has already taken place, the allocation list is not available yet?

HON I ABECASIS:

Not available to the general public.

HON J BOSSANO:

Mr Speaker, does he not think that it is desirable that members of the general public should have access to the general allocation list before the whole of the project is allocated, in view of the very long time the allocation is taking?

HON I ABECASIS:

No, Sir, we are following established practice. This was done when Knights' Court and St John's Court were allocated and we see no reason why Glacis should have any different treatment to the previous allocations.

HON J BOSSANO:

Is it not the case, Mr Speaker, that the allocation of Glacis is taking considerably longer than any other previous allocation of a new housing estate?

HON I ABECASIS:

I agree to that, yes.

HON J BOSSANO:

Well, is this not a good reason, Mr Speaker, for saying that there is something different here and that people are interested in knowing who have been allocated houses within living memory?

HON I ABECASIS:

People find out when a house is allocated almost immediately after the allocation has been made.

HON J BOSSANO:

And is the Minister not aware that the people are also interested in knowing the justification for the allocations.

HON I ABECASIS:

The allocation is made by the Housing Allocation Committee, which is as impartial, as fair and as loyal to this administration as they were to the previous administration.

HON J BOSSANO:

Mr Speaker, the sentiments expressed by the Hon Minister in respect of the impartiality of the Housing Allocation Committee are shared by members of this House, but does he not agree that it is desirable that they should be shared by members of the public and that members of the public should be given the opportunity of seeing that the houses have been allocated by this impartial committee.

HON I ABECASIS:

The public will be given the opportunity in due course, Sir.

HON J BOSSANO:

When does he expect, Mr Speaker, to finish this lengthy and laborious allocation?

HON I ABECASIS:

Without committing myself too much, within the next three or four weeks.

The Hon J Bossano

Can the Minister state how many housing units not of new construction have been allocated at Ministerial discretion since July 1972?

Answer:

The Minister for Housing

60 units, mainly consisting of the 1R x k type.

SUPPLEMENTARY TO NO.172 OF 1973

HON J BOSSANO:

Mr Speaker, can the Minister say whether this also follows the established pattern?

HON I ABECASIS:

Sir, I don't see the need to laugh ; these are pre-war dwellings. When I came into office, Sir, I met the Housing Allocation Committee on the 4th July - we came into office on the 23rd of June 1972 - and it was agreed that for prewar dwellings the Minister for Housing would reserve the right to dispose of such vacancies by administrative action as deemed necessary but this did not mean that it would be adverse to receiving recommendations from the Committee if the occasion of such recommendations arose.

Surely, Mr Speaker, there is no need to bring the Housing Allocation Committee to give one room and a kitchen in Casola's Building or to give additional accommodation to a tenant. There is nothing sinister about it.

HON J BOSSANO:

But, Mr Speaker, does the Minister not realise that the high estimation that people have of the impartiality of the Housing Allocation Committee isn't equally shared by an estimation of impartiality accorded to Ministers and consequently does he not agree that it is desirable to keep Ministerial allocations to the minimum?

HON I ABECASIS:

Sir, the figure 60 may sound a very large figure but this is because there have been 200 allocations lately, and since there have been 200 allocations of new flats obviously the number of re-lets is on the increase. But I can assure the Members opposite that the allocation is done in this manner: Additional accommodation to the people living in the areas; on the recommendation of the Family Care Unit, problems of family quarrels; and so on and so forth. If the Opposition have any name in mind whom they think should not have got the allocation I would ask them to put this forward and I will look into it.

HON J BOSSANO:

No, Mr Speaker, it is the principle that is involved, not how the houses are being given and on whose recommendation. Is the Minister suggesting, since he has given a justification for the number of new units that have been allocated, that all relets left vacant when newly built flats are allocated are going to go to him for allocation and not to the Housing Allocation Committee?

HON I ABECASIS:

When we are talking about "re-lets" we are talking about pre-war dwellings mainly of one-room and kitchen type. We are not going to bring the whole of the Housing Allocation Committee together - seven members, five of whom are independents and not members of the service - to allocate one room and a kitchen to a desperate case recommended by the Family Care Unit.

HON M XIBERRAS:

Has the Minister had 60 desperate cases, Sir?

HON I ABECASIS:

Not necessarily 60 desperate cases. We do it administratively in the best interest of the community. We allocate one room and a kitchen as an extension of the accommodation of a family who.....

HON M XIBERRAS:

Sir, is the Hon Member aware.....

MR SPEAKER:

Order.

HON M XIBERRAS:

Is the Hon Member aware that for a considerable amount of time prior to the start of the allocations before the elections, a number of pre-war dwellings were accumulated and put into the general pool for allocation by the Committee on a points basis?

HON I ABECASIS:

Mr Speaker, I read earlier on the agreement reached between the Housing Allocation Committee and myself on the 4th July 1972. The Housing Allocation Committee thought that it was a sensible thing to allocate dwellings of one room and kitchen of a pre-war nature, at Flat Bastion Road or Prince Edwards Road, and that it did not warrant the whole of the Allocation Committee to consider this.

HON M XIBERRAS:

Does the Minister not recall his giving an assurance that the method of allocation would be the same in his time as it was in our time in office? Did he not send out a letter to people who were on the point of getting a flat giving, quoting my own question and his replies to that question?

HON I ABECASIS:

That referred to the allocation of new flats, Sir.

HON M XIBERRAS:

Sir, is he not aware that it was the policy of the last administration to put all houses into the pool, and is he not aware that he has taken a considerable chunk of all the houses available and dished them out himself rather than allowing the Committee to do this? Does he not regard this as a step back in giving the public the general impression that it is a fair system that the Housing Unit is operating?

MR SPEAKER:

Let the Minister have a chance to answer.

HON I ABECASIS:

I am fully satisfied that the way it is being done is the dorrect and the proper way because the Minister for Housing is taking an interest. Previously the three Ministers, because you had to change three times, were not aware of the problems. They relied very much on the Civil Servant and on information and so on. I take an interest in the subject, visit the houses, and when I am satisfied that this is a deserving case, I consult the Housing Manager and we agree on the allocation. There is nothing sinister about it. If there is one single case of unfairness I challenge the Opposition to bring a name.

HON J CARUANA:

Mr Speaker, far be it for the Opposition to think up names but if the Hon and Learned the Chief Minister will allow me to put a question, before our time there were no Ministers in charge of housing, Mr Speaker, and there were no interviews. Is that not a fact? Mr Speaker, we are not satisfied.....

MR SPEAKER:

No, no, no, let us have a question, please.

HON J CARUANA:

Mr Speaker, the Minister from his answers is I believe satisfied with the way that he is carrying out his functions. Am I correct in saying that the Minister has said and has stressed the allocation of one room houses?

Mr Speaker, may I ask the Minister if there are any other cases of dwellings consisting of more than one room which he has allocated by Ministerial discretion.

Will the Minister say how many dwellings of more than one room, and not pre-war but post war accommodation, perhaps not connected with Glacis? Will the Minister say how many and then we will see the unfairness of the situation?

HON I ABECASIS:

I challenged the Opposition before, and I challenge the Opposition now. If they have one single allocation which they think was unfair then bring it to the House, or write to me, and I shall be delighted to deal with it.

HON M XIBERRAS:

Would the Hon Member be willing to make available to the Opposition, therefore, the list of the people. How can the Opposition know how 60 Government flats have been allocated, then?

HON I ABECASIS:

I object to the word "flat", Sir. 60 dilapidated old rooms and kitchen.

HON P J ISOLA:

Mr Speaker, may I ask the Minister whether he will not agree that the House must be justifiably concerned at the apparent contradiction in the Minister's original statement of faith and belief in the Housing Allocation Committee and his subsequent statement that in the best interest of Gibraltar he has seen fit, by Ministerial discretion, to allocate 60 housing units? Will the Minister, Sir, consider returning to the good old days and doing away with the Housing Allocation Committee and this veneer of impartiality and get on with it in the best interest of Gibraltar, to use his own words, and allocate all houses himself.

HON I ABECASIS:

Sometimes we have had to allocate one room and a kitchen within 24 hours. Not 60 times but many times we have had to allocate one room and a kitchen as a matter of urgency.

The Hon L Devincenzi

What is the situation regarding the provision of teachers of Biology in Government Schools?

Answer:

The Minister for Education

The present position regarding the provision of teachers of Biology in Government Secondary Schools is that in the Boys' Comprehensive, there is a well qualified honours graduate Head of Department who is responsible for all senior work. Junior work is covered by the general science staff.

In the Girls' Comprehensive, the Head of Department is at present on sick leave and the situation is covered by an experienced qualified part time teacher and a younger full time qualified teacher.

The 'A' level work for the Girls' School is dealt with by mutual arrangement by the Boys' Comprehensive staff.

SUPPLEMENTARY TO NO.173 OF 1973

HON L DEVINCENZI:

Mr Speaker, can the Minister say whether anybody who was teaching Biology has left and has not been replaced?

HON M K FEATHERSTONE:

Sir, as the Hon Questioner will know teachers tend to come and go. Two graduate teachers, a man and a wife combination, recently left Government employment at short notice. But as can be seen from the above figures the present position is adequately covered even allowing for this fact.

HON L DEVINCENZI:

Mr Speaker, can the Minister say then whether he is fully satisfied with the present position or is there room for improvement and if so is he looking into it?

HON M K FEATHERSTONE:

Sir, no Government is ever fully satisfied but perhaps the Hon Questioner might like to know that the normal staffing complement for specialist teachers of Biology, in a school of up to 1,000 pupils, is classified as 0.9 members of the staff. Since we are well above this, I think, if not as happy as we would like to be, we are amply covered, Sir.

HON L DEVINCENZI:

Mr Speaker, in spite of that answer and dealing with this question of 0.9. If these two teachers have left and it is not intended to replace them, why were they employed in the first place? If it is a fact that they are needed, will the Minister say whether it is intended to replace them?

HON M K FEATHERSTONE:

Sir, as I have said, at the moment the Head of Department in the Girls' Comprehensive is on sick leave and I believe she should be returning fairly soon, Sir. Another qualified teacher of Biology is due to return, I think, at the end of the present session, and we do have another lady graduate who was at one time employed part-time in the girls school in Gibraltar, and she left, I believe, Sir, for family reasons. If she so desired she could apply and we would be happy to re-engage her.

The Hon L Devincenzi

Will Government make a statement concerning school transport?

Answer:

The Minister for Education

Government is of the opinion that school transport should be provided only in the event of extraordinary conditions or circumstances.

It is felt that in the majority of instances, children live at no extreme distance from their school, and it would be expected that they would find their own way to school.

In the instances where the distance is greater, though by no means extreme, it is considered that the services of normal public transport should provide a reasonable alternative method to any other means of reaching school.

Government intends to discuss with the operators of the public service buses the possibility of introducing a special child's fare - the resultant loss in revenue to the operator being compensated for by a subsidy from Government.

SUPPLEMENTARY TO NO.174 of 1973

HON L DEVINCENZI:

Mr Speaker, can Government say whether they have considered buying buses and operating them on a non-profit basis. By this, Mr Speaker, I mean that perhaps those children^{who} could afford it should pay so as not to burden Government unduly with the cost of this. But at least that Government should make a very great effort to providing transportation facilities.

HON M K FEATHERSTONE:

Sir, Government has considered this. I am sure it was considered even before the present Government and the answer to that is that it would be totally uneconomic to do.

The Hon J Caruana

Is Government satisfied with the general facilities available for the treatment of deaf children?

Answer:

The Minister for Medical and Health Services

No Government is ever satisfied with the services it provides. However, the facilities available for deaf children are as follows:

- 1) Children suffering from deafness are referred to the ENT Department through the School Medical Service or through a General Practitioner.
- 2) Such children are then referred either to the Visiting ENT Consultant and/or the Speech Therapist when required.
- 3) The Hon Member will be happy to know that a few weeks ago Government took a decision to supply hearing aids free of charge to all children under 15 who are in need of this appliance.

SUPPLEMENTARY TO NO.175 OF 1973

HON J CARUANA:

I thank the Hon Minister, especially for the third point which he has mentioned in his answer.

The Hon W M Isola

Has Government any plans to reengage PA International Management Consultants Limited and if so to what purpose?

Answer:

The Minister for Tourism, Trade and Economic Development

Provision was made in the 1973/74 GTO Estimates for Market Research. This matter was discussed with our Advertising Agent and a Research Company and naturally PA Management Consultants were also contacted. PA were eventually briefed to undertake the exercise.

SUPPLEMENTARY TO NO.176 OF 1973

HON W M ISOLA:

Will the Minister state when he expects the exercise to be completed?

HON A W SERFATY:

We hope to have the report at the end of February Sir.

HON J BOSSANO:

Does the Minister intend to make any use of the Government's own Statistics Department in respect of any market research that the Government may need to do?

HON A W SERFATY:

We make considerable use of that Department, but that does not mean that that is enough to undertake to provide all the answers that we really need for future promotions.

HON J BOSSANO:

Is the market research going to be done in UK or in Gibraltar, Mr Speaker.

HON A W SERFATY:

Mainly in United Kingdom. PA Consultants have already sent 3,500 queries to the people who responded to the 1971/72 campaign and we have so far have done very well, 26% response to that. These responses are now being analysed.

HON J BOSSANO:

Is the sending out of questionnaires not something that could have been undertaken by the Government's own Tourist Office.

The Hon P J Isola;

Can Government report any progress on their party electoral promise to set up a Watch Committee for the Police?

Answer:

The Chief Minister

The preliminary discussions to which I referred in my answer to a previous question on this subject have been followed up since then by further discussions and correspondence with the Governor . The present position is that, following this correspondence, I am now formulating specific proposals for consideration.

SUPPLEMENTARY TO NO.177 OF 1973

HON P J ISOLA:

Can the Chief Minister envisage any difficulties in setting up this Watch Committee for the police?

HON CHIEF MINISTER:

It is not an easy matter. Although the money to run the police is voted by this House, they are part of internal security and therefore not classified as a defined domestic matter. There are therefore overlapping areas which I am trying to resolve. But I have made it quite clear that I propose to proceed with having some kind of Committee; whether it is a Watch Committee or some kind of committee of the nature envisaged in our manifesto, in order to look independently into the general welfare of the members of the force for whom we are asked to provide salaries.

HON P J ISOLA:

Will the Watch Committee have as members what would generally be called "establishment" people, or will it be reasonably popularly representative?

HON CHIEF MINISTER:

I cannot go into detail, we haven't reached that stage, but in my own mind I would say that members should be as independent as one can possibly get in a community of this nature, and as removed from any political affiliation as one can find people for work of this nature.

No.178 of 1973

ORAL

The Hon P J Isola

Will the Chief Minister undertake to make public the report that will be submitted by the GBC inquiry team?

Answer:

The Chief Minister

Yes Sir. I must however make a general reservation, which is applicable to all reports submitted to the Government, in respect of any part of the report which it might not be in the public interest to publish. Should this arise I will make any such parts available to the Opposition.

The Hon M Xiberras

What steps is the Government taking to ensure that Gibraltar as a whole receives its fair share of fuel from international sources?

Answer:

The Chief Minister

At the start of the present restrictions the Government reported to HM Government our stocks of each of the oil products, together with our rates of consumption, our supply sources, and replenishments already arranged. Like other countries we must accept a cut-back in supplies as unavoidable; but so far, Gibraltar is receiving at least its fair share of supplies. The Government will maintain close contact with both our importers and HM Government.

SUPPLEMENTARY TO NO.179 of 1973

HON M XIBERRAS:

I take it, sir, that there have been no cuts yet, and that no cuts has been forecast.

HON CHIEF MINISTER:

I cannot follow the question.

HON M XIBERRAS:

Has there been a cut yet?

HON CHIEF MINISTER:

It is not a question of a cut. The supplies that are coming in now will suffer the cutback. The supplies that we had in stock at the time when the restrictions were imposed world-wide are of course there, but if you did not make provision for a reasonable cut-back you would eventually diminish the **advantage you had started with.** We do not know whether the position could get worse or not. The situation is **changing**, not only every day, but every moment, and, therefore, we do not know. But so far it is not anticipated that we will suffer, certainly in the next few months, anything more than the general world-wide cut-back.

The Hon J Bossano

What progress has the Minister for Labour made to implement his party's election promise to do away with the two-job society?

Answer:

Minister for Labour and Social Security

No such promise appears in my Party's electoral manifesto.

SUPPLEMENTARY TO NO.180 OF 1973

HON J BOSSANO:

Mr Speaker, will the Minister then inform the House whether he is committed, as was given to understand to the general public, to a pledge to do away with the two-job society.

MR SPEAKER:

The question is specific and refers to the manifesto. "Is it an election promise?"

HON J BOSSANO:

Mr Speaker, if you will allow me. The election promise was made verbally at various points in the town of Gibraltar.

MR SPEAKER:

Order, order. That is perfectly in order then, if you make yourself responsible for that statement.

HON J BOSSANO:

Yes, Mr Speaker. I myself had the disadvantage of hearing this election promise.

MR SPEAKER:

That is perfectly in order then.

HON A J CANEPA:

I do not accept that that is the case Mr Speaker.

HON J BOSSANO:

Mr Speaker will the Minister state then quite categorically that his party never committed itself to doing away with the two-job society.

HON A J CANEPA:

Sir, what I am saying is that the party did not commit itself in any authoritative statement at election time to do away with the two-job society.

HON P J ISOLA:

Is the Minister saying that statements that were made on television and to the general public were not authoritative statements? It had to be in the manifesto, is that the position?

HON A J CANEPA:

Made by whom? Because I have checked the statements that I made and I certainly did not say anything about it.

MR SPEAKER:

Order. We mustn't question the veracity of statements made by either Members of the Opposition or Ministers.

HON CHIEF MINISTER:

If we did that we would be here all day.

MR SPEAKER:

We will call the next question, then.

HON P J ISOLA:

Will the Minister at least not agree that he was highly critical of the two-job society during the elections?

The Hon J Caruana

Is Government satisfied with the situation prevailing in KGV Hospital in the light of the overcrowded conditions and state of internal disrepair prevailing at present?

Answer:

The Minister for Medical and Health Services

As the Hon Member is aware the KGV Hospital was modernised, re-decorated and extended in October 1971. If he is referring to the cracks that have appeared in the new southern extension this is being looked after by PWD. Although I am assured that there is no danger, I decided that patients should be moved from the affected area, to allay the fears and anxiety expressed by some members of the staff. This has inevitably created some minor overcrowding and inconvenience which may be sorted out in the course of the next few days.

SUPPLEMENTARY TO NO.181 OF 1973

HON P J ISOLA:

Will the Minister not agree that that particular hospital of all, requires close attention in view of its particular object. Will he ensure that the conditions that prevail there are ameliorated at as early a stage as possible?

HON A P MONTEGRIFFO:

Public Works Department and myself go there quite frequently in order to see whether the question of the cracks has worsened or have remained static, and the latest report I have had from the experts on the construction side is that the new section is settling. The cracks are due to the contractors not adhering to the specifications of the original drawing. The report I have goes on to say: "although it is not pleasant to live in a building which is cracked, there is no danger and the new extension can be used in the normal way. As soon as the rainy season, during which the maximum possible movement will have occurred is over, a suitable movement - joint, which is what should have been done originally. between the two sections of the building will be installed". I can assure the Hon Member that I am keeping a very close watch. Following on the expert advice I have received, if the staff want to move, and this assurance is still relevant, I have got no objection to their moving now. In fact if they do we are also in the lucky position of having received new furniture with which the patients will be provided.

The Hon M Xiberras

Since the Cost of Living Index has suffered in the lifetime of this Government the biggest ever increase in any one year will Government prepare legislation to ensure that price increases arising from the fuel crisis are kept to a minimum and that unfair advantage is not taken of the situation?

Answer:The Minister for Labour and Social Security

Sir, the Government recognises and shares the concern expressed in this question that the present fuel restrictions and the inevitable increases in fuel prices should not be used as an opportunity to take unfair advantage of the consumer.

The Government considers however that the provisions of the Price Control Ordinance itself together with those additional and more general powers in the proposed amendment to the Ordinance which is already being brought to the House at this session should provide a sufficient legislative basis to safeguard the interests of the consumer. In addition, it is intended that the Consumer Protection Unit will be in operation early in the new Year and this should further strengthen the price control machinery.

SUPPLEMENTARY TO NO.182 OF 1973

HON M XIBERRAS:

Sir, would the Minister not agree, though, that the legislation and the measures that he has pointed out to the House are not going to be sufficient to deter a general increase in excess of what we have at present, and should not legislation at least be prepared, against the eventuality that there should be advantage taken in a generalised way, which would put the cost of living in Gibraltar very much higher than it is even at present?

HON A J CANEPA:

I note that the main question of the Hon Leader of the Opposition tends to recognise the fact that increases are inevitable. He is pressing for them to be kept to a minimum. I am satisfied Sir, that the strengthening of the powers which the Government ^{already} has under the Price Control Ordinance ^{and} which will come about as a result of this ^{piece} of legislation, will ensure that no unfair advantage will be taken by any would-be unscrupulous trader. It will not, of course, ensure that there will be no general increase, ~~that we cannot do in the sense that~~ ^{It} is inevitable that whatever increases there might be in fuel will tend to be felt throughout the community, but I am satisfied that we will be able to take action against any profiteering, against any attempt to take advantage of ~~the~~ ^{the} situation.

HON M XIBERRAS:

Sir, is the Minister not aware that in other countries general legislation on prices has been introduced, or is being introduced, and would he not say that his experience in Gibraltar would indicate to him that general legislation, of the type I am referring to, is desirable here?

HON A J CANEPA:

It may well be the case that it has been introduced in other countries, but perhaps these other countries - Britain for instance - do not have anything as far reaching as our present Price Control Ordinance and hence the reason why the Government there has got to take these powers. We have the Price Control Ordinance, we are strengthening it further, quite apart from the fuel crisis let me say, and we are quite satisfied that with the existing powers under the Ordinance and that extra strengthening which will come about, we can control the situation to the extent that it won't get out of hand.

HON M XIBERRAS:

Sir, I wish I could share the Hon Members optimism on this. However, Sir, would the Minister not agree that there is a responsibility on the Gibraltar Government to see that increases at source are not multiplied by the time that the retail stage is reached.

HON A J CANEPA:

I accept that, Sir, and we shall do everything in our power to prevent that ~~from~~ happening.

The Hon M Xiberras

In the light of recent statements made by the Chief Minister will he confirm that it is Government policy to advise HM Government that no further talks should take place between Her Majesty's Government and Spain since talks could only give rise to false hopes in Gibraltar in view of the intransigent attitude of Spain on the question of sovereignty?

Answer:The Chief Minister

Before I answer the question there are two points which I should like to clarify. First of all, as I am sure the Hon Questioner will appreciate, advice given from Gibraltar to Her Majesty's Government in this context is really the advice of the elected members on this side of the House given through the Governor, rather than of the Gibraltar Government as such. I am sure the Hon Member agrees that this is the position but I thought I ought to make this clear.

Secondly, I should like to make it clear also that I am in some doubt as to whether in view of the present Constitutional position questions of this nature really relate, in the words of Standing Order 15, to the public affairs with which I am officially connected. While I fully intend to answer this particular question, I want to make this point for the record and I also want to say that I intend to ask the Chair for a formal ruling as to the admissibility of questions of this nature in the future in order that there should be no misunderstanding.

Insofar as the substance of the question is concerned, I expressed my view on the question of talks immediately after the consensus was adopted by the Fourth Committee earlier this month. What I said then was that my view, and that of my party, has consistently been that so long as there were no preconditions for talks we were not against them and that, in the new situation which had arisen, we would expect to be consulted before any new talks take place. This remains my view.

SUPPLEMENTARY TO NO.183 of 1973

HON M XIBERRAS:

Sir, would the Hon and Learned Member not agree that what he had to say shortly before the consensus, and what he had to say now, or had said shortly after the consensus, the two statements to which I refer, are contradictory.

HON CHIEF MINISTER:

No, I don't agree entirely. I said then before the consensus that in my view there would have to be good reason for new talks to be started, if they were to be meaningful. That was my view and that would be the advice I would give Her Majesty's Government. In view of the fact that the talks had been broken off by the Spaniards because of the British stand on Gibraltar, I expressed the view then, and I have not changed that view, that it would not be any use having talks unless they started on a different premise because to do otherwise would be a waste of time. Apart from anything else it would indicate a change. Now a new situation has arisen, as I see it, and that is the consensus. The consensus speaks about talking together about the matter. Well, the British Government.....oh yes, consultations precisely. Anyhow whatever the terms.....

MR SPEAKER:

We cannot go into that particular aspect.

HON CHIEF MINISTER:

No, Mr Speaker, but all I wanted to say was that the new situation to which I have referred in my answer is that there is a new a consensus which in my view, puts a completely different complexion on the matter.

HON M XIBERRAS:

Sir, does the Hon and Learned Member consider the consensus to be a good reason as far as Gibraltar is concerned.....

MR SPEAKER:

No, no, that is not in order. The question has been phrased specifically to ask the Chief Minister, in view of his previous statements, what is the advice that he has given to Her Majesty's Government. The answer has been: "In the new situation which has arisen we would expect to be consulted before any new talks take place".

HON M XIBERRAS:

Sir, can I phrase the question then another way, since this is a matter of the great importance. Sir, since the statement made before the consensus by the Chief Minister gave as a reason for his not advocating further talks the raising of false hopes in Gibraltar in view of the intransigent attitude of Spain on the question of sovereignty, would he explain whether it is now his view that talks should go on, and apparently negotiations as well, because there is no longer a danger that these false hopes will arise in Gibraltar, or because the Spanish Government has changed its mind on sovereignty.

HON CHIEF MINISTER:

I wish I could say yes to the latter part of the question but I don't think that the question is a fair one. I have said that in the new situation which has arisen for the British Government we would expect to be consulted before any talks were started precisely to ensure, as far as advice from myself was concerned, that no false hopes could arise out of any set of new talks having regard to the history of the previous ones.

HON P J ISOLA:

Would the Hon and Learned Chief Minister assure the House that he will in fact advise Her Majesty's Government not to hold talks in view of the clear terms of the consensus which refers to negotiations with a view to the final solution of this problem, taking into account the aforementioned resolutions, one of which was as the Chief Minister is no doubt aware, integration with Spain.....

MR SPEAKER:

Out of order.

HON P J ISOLA:

Out of order, Mr Speaker?

MR SPEAKER:

Yes. You read the original question and the answer and you will realise why. It is the advice that the Chief Minister has given which is being questioned.

HON P J ISOLA:

Will the advice be the same, in view of the fact that the terms of the consensus point to a solution which was the reason for not having further talks with Spain, because of the Spanish intransigent attitude on Gibraltar?

HON CHIEF MINISTER:

Mr Speaker, I am sorry there are constraints on this because I don't want, by refraining from answering any question, to give any false impression about my position which is quite clear and categorical in the answer. A new situation has arisen, I don't want to go into the terms of the consensus, or into the fact that the British representative made reservations precisely on the points that are being made, because I do not think that comes within the question. I do say, now, that in the new situation that has arisen, which is none of our making, I would expect to be consulted before any talks were started, and I think that that would give me the opportunity of giving whatever advice I might then think fit, having regard to the circumstances that have come insofar as the opposite side is concerned.

HON MAJOR R J PELIZA:

Mr Speaker, earlier, the Hon and Learned the Chief Minister stated that he stands on no ~~there~~ being no more talks, and that he was firm on this, unless there were to be any good reasons to the contrary. Is he suggesting that Her Majesty's Government's representative in the United Nations voting in favour of a consensus which suggests that England and Spain should start negotiating on the sovereignty of Gibraltar is a good reason to start new talks?

HON CHIEF MINISTER:

I did not say anything of the kind.

HON MAJOR R J PELIZA:

Well, I would like an answer because I think the Hon Chief Minister said that he would only agree to the resumption of talks if there was a good reason. I want to know if he thinks that that is a good reason. He said a new situation had arisen: is this a good reason?

HON CHIEF MINISTER:

Not in the context of my reply earlier on, of course it is not a good reason. I say a good reason means a reason favourable to us and the members opposite know that I would never contemplate advising talks before the consensus without prior consultation, and let me say that we are not treading completely new ground because we have had talks about this matter and we have come to certain understandings with the Opposition on matters to the effect that there would have to be full consultation before talks, and I stand by that. But the fact that there is a consensus is a new situation even though it may not be a good reason in the sense that I mentioned before.

HON MAJOR R J PELIZA:

So therefore, if it is not a good reason - and I hope it isn't a good reason, because for the first time now we find that Britain and Spain agree to negotiate on sovereignty and agree to that consensus.....

MR SPEAKER:

Order, order.....

HON CHIEF MINISTER:

Mr Speaker, may I say something....

HON MAJOR R J PELIZA:

There is certainly, I would say, an implication there, certainly the situation is no better.....

MR SPEAKER:

This is very delicate and one must be very clear as to what we are discussing now. We are discussing the advice that the Chief Minister and his Government would give to Her Majesty's Government in the light of the consensus and nothing else.

HON MAJOR R J PELIZA:

What I must come back to, Mr Speaker, is that the Chief Minister is now referring to consultations that he has had with the Opposition. I think the consultations between the Government and the Opposition have made it quite clear that there should be no discussion on sovereignty and I think this is well known....

MR SPEAKER:

Well we mustn't make statements, we must ask questions.

HON MAJOR R J PELIZA:

Well, what I am coming to is, I don't think the Chief Minister has given me an answer. This is what I am after. All I want to know is whether he thinks that the new situation, based on Her Majesty's Government agreeing with the consensus....

MR SPEAKER:

No, no, the question is "in the light of recent statements made by the Chief Minister", and that is what the question is based on. What is being asked is whether in the light of the statement made by the Chief Minister, will he confirm that it is Government policy, etc.

HON MAJOR R J PELIZA:

I am referring to a supplementary Mr Speaker, which the Chief Minister answered, that there had to be a good reason for this to happen.

MR SPEAKER:

I think the Chief Minister said that the consensus need not necessarily be a good reason.

HON MAJOR R J PELIZA:

Therefore, if he said earlier, this is what I am coming to, that he would agree to the resumption of talks if there was a good reason, a good reason he said, good and favourable for Gibraltar, I assume, but is he suggesting that this consensus is good and favourable for Gibraltar, and therefore, there should be an **resumption** of talks? This is my question.

HON CHIEF MINISTER:

The answer is categorically no, and it is twisted and it is not even a fair question. What I said was that a new situation had arisen and this might require that we should get assurances before any talks were started.

HON M XIBERRAS:

Sir, the statement made by the Chief Minister: "Since talks would only give rise to false hopes in Gibraltar in view of the intransigent attitude of Spain on the question of sovereignty", was also made, as the Hon Member is aware, in a meeting with the Opposition on this basic matter, and it is the Chief Minister himself who has referred to this meeting, not members from this side. Could I ask the Chief Minister whether he does not think that such a change in attitude as he has given an indication of now, was sufficient reason for the Hon Member at least discussing the so-called good reasons with members on this side. That is the first question...

MR SPEAKER:

No, no that is out of order.

HON M XIBERRAS:

Sir, the Hon Member has referred.....

MR SPEAKER:

No, no, remember we are in question time therefore I am governed by the rules, the Standing Orders on questions and supplementaries, and however much I regret to have to do so, I have to call the House to order.

HON M XIBERRAS:

May I say, Sir, is it also the case that an equivalent statement made to the Opposition on this very subject has also been changed? Does the Chief Minister still hold by that statement or has he changed his mind?

HON CHIEF MINISTER:

I see no reason to change that part of the agreed minute of the meeting which says: "we agreed specifically that the position was, as far as we were concerned, that no further talks would be held without the elected representatives being consulted, and that official confirmation of this should be sought from Her Majesty's Government". That was the agreed Minute, and to that I entirely subscribe because it comes within the terms of my answer that I would expect to be consulted before any new talks were started.

HON M XIBERRAS:

I would remind the Hon Member that it was not an agreed minute. It has not been agreed, yet.

HON CHIEF MINISTER:

Oh, the minutes have been agreed. The separate points may not have been agreed, but the Minutes have been agreed and I have got the....

MR SPEAKER:

Order.

HON M XIBERRAS:

On a point of fact, Mr Speaker, these minutes were not agreed....

MR SPEAKER:

We mustn't go into that. I am not in the least interested if they were or not.

HON M XIBERRAS:

Sir, I am sure the public in Gibraltar is.

MR SPEAKER:

It is not of interest to the House.

HON M XIBERRAS:

If the Chief Minister made such a statement, Sir, I am afraid that I have to correct him on it.

Sir, may I have the answer to the question. Does that mean also that his present statement means that he has changed his mind in respect of what he told the Opposition just before the consensus?

HON CHIEF MINISTER:

I have not changed my mind on the Gibraltar question, ever.

HON M XIBERRAS:

Sir, this is not the point I am making.

HON CHIEF MINISTER:

And whatever Mr Bossano laughs about, when he has been elsewhere in the world whilst we were trying to keep Gibraltar British for him to come back, I will tell him that I have not changed at all on this matter. But I have always accepted the realities of the situation and that is that what we do is advise the British Government. I am not that colonialist to say that by writing to the Secretary of State you clear all your responsibilities and you issue a communique. That is not what I think the functions of my office deserve. I say now that before any talks are started, if this is intended, I expect to be consulted and I expect to have an opportunity of saying what I think about them. And that is really no different to what I said before the consensus. What I do say is that the consensus has brought about a new situation which has not been created by us. It is a fact, and nothing else.

HON M XIBERRAS:

Sir, the Hon Member says that what he is saying now is no different from what he said before the consensus was adopted. May I refer him to the last line, often repeated in the course of questions, of the original question which attributed to him first of all, that he did not favour further talks since talks could only give rise to false hopes in Gibraltar in view of the intransigent attitude of Spain on the question of sovereignty. Would he further not agree that these criteria have not changed one iota, and would he not agree that this bobbing John kind of attitude by the Chief Minister of Gibraltar is going to give rise to suspicion in Gibraltar?

HON CHIEF MINISTER:

I forgot the first part of the question.

HON M XIBERRAS:

Sir, the first part of the question; since the Chief Minister has now stated that he has not changed at all from what he had to say, changed his position from what he had to say, before the consensus was adopted, how does he justify, or does he deny, that he made such a statement as attributed to him in the original question. Question 183. In other words - I don't want to repeat the thing, Sir.

HON CHIEF MINISTER:

I have not changed at all in my attitude towards the matter. I think it would be absolutely useless and unnecessary to start talks on the same premise as the previous ones were broken by the Spanish Government, because they were broken on the basis that the aspirations, or the demands of the Spaniards, were not acceptable to the people of Gibraltar and therefore not acceptable to the British Government. So long as that remains, my attitude doesn't change and that will be my advice to the British Government.

HON M XIBERRAS:

Sir, I like that statement much better Sir. I prefer that statement. May I ask the Chief Minister whether he is still saying now that for as long as the Spaniards are intransigent on the question of sovereignty then he does not favour further talks. Is that what he is saying?

HON CHIEF MINISTER:

I do not favour them, but I realise that if in fact as the result of the consensus the British Government do intend to have talks, I want to be consulted in order to be able to say precisely that.

HON M XIBERRAS:

Ah, Sir, I am grateful for that answer and I am sorry it has taken a considerable amount of time to elicit this from the Chief Minister.

HON CHIEF MINISTER:

No, no, no. If the Hon Questioner will give way, I want to make it clear that he has such an obsession on this question that he has misread, or misheard, what I said. I have been consistent today from the very beginning, except that I am not prepared to have my answers twisted to the advantage of the rather peculiar thinking of the Leader of the Opposition on this matter as to how some other people think about this matter.

HON M XIBERRAS:

I am willing to take any amount of abuse from the Chief Minister. Sir, I am sure Sir, may I.....

MR SPEAKER:

I would not allow anyone to abuse a member in this House.

HON M XIBERRAS:

Sir, may I since his last answer is more favourable, I would say, not to members on this side but to Gibraltar, British Gibraltar's position generally, may I....

HON CHIEF MINISTER:

I speak for Gibraltar too.

HON M XIBERRAS:

Sir, may I ask the Chief Minister whether he is prepared to say now, in clear terms, I think I understood him correctly, but perhaps to get things absolutely straight, that his view now is that since talks could only give rise to false hopes in Gibraltar, in view of the intransigent attitude of Spain on the question of sovereignty, it is his view that no further talks should be held. Is that what he is saying?

HON CHIEF MINISTER:

I am not prepared to subscribe to a statement put on my lips by members opposite. I have made my reply quite clear and Hansard will show it and that I think is about as much as I am prepared to say in order to allay anxiety.

MR SPEAKER:

I think that is enough.