

23.06.13

16 Deputy S.Y. Mézec of the Minister for Economic Development, Tourism, Sport and Culture regarding the working conditions of baggage handlers at Jersey Airport (OQ.123/2023)

What discussions, if any, have taken place between the Minister, Ports of Jersey, and Swissport regarding the working conditions of the baggage handlers at the airport, who have reportedly been required to work at severely understaffed levels?

Deputy K.F. Morel (The Minister for Economic Development, Tourism, Sport and Culture):

Swissport's failings on Saturday, 3rd June, were unacceptable, and I have made it clear that they must not be repeated. I have met with both Swissport and Ports of Jersey to discuss the disruption on 3rd June and to understand the steps taken to ensure that Swissport's ground-handling operation at Jersey Airport is fit for purpose and is resilient. I have made it quite clear that working conditions are one of the concerns that I have. I was contacted by a member of the public who raised that directly with me and I passed that on to Swissport. As I have said, I understand that Swissport's primary aim at the moment is to come up with a package, which ensures that they have the staffing levels they need into the future. I asked for assurances on working conditions and received them.

3.16.1 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Can I ask if, in that conversation, the Minister discussed some of the issues which have been raised by the ground staff workers union representatives where they have highlighted issues ranging from shifts being extended at short notice, changes to shift patterns, lack of access even to drinking water during shifts, and whether that has been something he has raised concerns about and would encourage them to improve what is on offer in the hope that they can find people to work in those roles so that we do not face what we faced recently at the airport?

Deputy K.F. Morel:

I talked about the welfare of staff in the generality. I did not specifically refer to length of shifts. But the issue of water and the ability to take breaks was raised. When I speak about welfare, it is all of the factors that the Deputy has mentioned are of importance and it is my understanding that Swissport are seeking to address them and certainly I was assured that matters such as breaks are of the highest importance, and they will ensure that their staff are provided with the breaks they need. The chief operating officer assured me that the circumstances which led to breaks not being taken on Saturday, 3rd June, will not be repeated.

3.16.2 The Connétable of St. Brelade:

The Minister suggested in an earlier answer that Jersey Airport staff have been filling in, very admirably, for the shortfall of the Swissport staff. Will he confirm that, given those local staff will have been paid I would imagine overtime rates, will those costs be claimed back from Swissport?

Deputy K.F. Morel:

Unfortunately, I do not know the answer to that question. But I can ask Ports of Jersey.

3.16.3 Deputy L.V. Feltham:

Within his discussions with Swissport, has the Minister questioned their practices and whether or not they did make some staff redundant recently and then attempted to use a fire-and-rehire mechanism?

Deputy K.F. Morel:

Can I ask the Deputy to clarify, when she says “recently”, is she referring to the COVID pandemic period?

Deputy L.V. Feltham:

Yes, I am, but it could be more recently.

Deputy K.F. Morel:

I understand that Swissport laid staff off during the COVID pandemic. I have not heard of layoffs since then. That happened obviously in many businesses, particularly in the travel sector. I did not refer to that specifically in my discussion with the chief operating officer.

3.16.4 Deputy L.V. Feltham:

Would the Minister please agree to have those discussions with Swissport and also have discussions with any other States-contracted entity and say that such practices, such as fire-and-rehire, are not something that the Government of Jersey supports?

The Bailiff:

You can answer that with regard to Swissport, but the other part of the question is too broad.

Deputy K.F. Morel:

With regard to Swissport, I personally do not think it is helpful to talk about matters that took place 3 years ago. I am much more focused on making sure that Jersey and businesses in Jersey receive the service levels that they need in the airport today.

The Bailiff:

We now come to question 17 that Deputy Tadier will ask of the Minister for External Relations and Financial Services. I understand the Assistant Minister will be answering it.