

MANUAL WORKER POSTS: OUTSOURCING

**Lodged au Greffe on 19th May 1998
by Senator R.J. Shenton**



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PROPOSITION

THE STATES are asked to decide whether they are of opinion -

to refer to the decision of the States on 18th November 1997, during the debate on the Strategic Policy Review and Action Plan 1997, when they approved the manpower policy of the Establishment Committee, and to agree to halt the outsourcing of manual worker posts unless they have been agreed by the Manual Workers' Joint Council.

SENATOR R.J. SHENTON

Report

My proposition has been lodged in an attempt to take the heat out of the present industrial dispute. Sadly both sides have adopted an attitude with regard to the current dispute and it is difficult to move them from their present positions. The situation is quite simply the matter of whether or not some rather mature ladies should be moved from their present cleaning job when the new College is built.

It seems to me that with a little bit of thought the fears could have been removed from all workers' minds and States' policies could be explained much better if we had discussed and debated the matter sooner. When I met with the two sides I was appalled with the attitude of the negotiators. It seemed to me that there was a feeling of loss of face and that the States members felt that they had the right to dictate where workers went, irrespective of their views. This was not the case and the term macho politicians is not something that fits easily in the Island of Jersey.

The evening produced general agreement that the States had the right on behalf of the people of the Island to determine policies which were to the common good. The Union for their part had every right to plead for those policies to be treated in a way which had the least possible hurt or effect on the employees. One could feel a measure of sympathy for both sides because having reached an entrenched position it was difficult to find a solution which would create a harmonious conclusion and, therefore, the Island would face what has now turned out to be a disastrous Island-wide stoppage. At the end of the evening there was much confusion about whether or not the ladies who were doing the cleaning work at the Jersey College for Girls were being pressured by the Union and were really making a protest on behalf of the union members when in fact their hearts were not in it. It was agreed by both sides that I could go and meet with the ladies who were doing the cleaning work at the Jersey College for Girls and to ascertain from them how they felt about this matter. When I met the ladies at the College it was in the presence of the Headmistress and she can verify what I have to say. The cleaners were quite clear that they wished to stay at the College. They felt that they had been looking after that old building for many years, had worked together and wished to continue working for the States in the new College and enjoy the benefits of a new environment at no extra charge to the States. It seemed to me that there was no pressure being put on them; in fact they were feeling the pressure and it was quite emotional in some cases and although I was quite strict in my questioning of them and made it clear that I had to be sure that their motives were those which had been expressed in the meeting, that they had nothing to fear.

After meeting with them I realized that I was not going to get anywhere with either side. The attitude of the Union was that this was the core issue and therefore, without a promise from the States to continue employing these particular ladies in their jobs at the Jersey College for Girls, there would be no end to the dispute and on the Employers' Side there was this age-old feeling, as I say, of almost macho employer status that the boss calls the tune and the employees should jump to that tune. It was therefore up to me to try and suggest that we moved away from a scene where a dispute was inevitable and when I heard that the Union was going to embark on industrial action on the Friday I did hope to bring that matter to a head by proposing the proposition which is put forward to the States today.

It may interest members to know that for years this Island has been served by the constitution of what is termed the "Black Book". It may well be out of date and needs revising but it contained provisions that served the Island well and there were many disputes that had been averted by reference to the Manual Workers Joint Council, which have an equal number of employer and employee representatives. It requires a two-thirds majority to pass a resolution and it is always difficult when you have both sides equally represented. But nevertheless we have been able to avoid confrontation politics in the past and there was no reason why we could not do this again.

The Manual Workers Joint Council very often refer to the status quo. What this means is that both sides recognize that whatever statements have been made are withdrawn, that the Union for their part go back to working normally, and without working to rule as they have been, and certainly not have any stoppages which would affect the Island generally. The employers for their part will withdraw any statements made with regard to future policies until the matter has been properly discussed and consultation has taken place within that Joint Council. If at the end of the day, and only if at the end of the day, a resolution cannot be found, then the matter could go further and very often could go to the States. It is this therefore that one was asking for the parties to agree to. The Union for their part would have accepted such a course of action, but the employers would not and therefore that is why today it is not a question of giving in to the dictates of the Union but merely an opportunity for members to see whether this industrial action which is causing a considerable amount of harm to the public and indeed to the economy of the Island should continue. I feel that there are times in industrial relations where one has to turn the other cheek - and this is one of those occasions - and I do feel that the fears of the workers should be allayed by clear understanding of the policies being carried out by the States. At the present moment no worker feels secure in his present employment, with the various policies which are being expounded - there is outsourcing, there is privatisation and are there talks of major sell-offs of Island activities, which does not in my opinion provide for a secure Island in the future?

The outsourcing policy by and large is an attempt to create an opportunity to have work done by various organisations at a central point not necessarily in the Island, so that the employees who are required to work in these departments will not be a

drain upon the Island's immigration policies or the economy. There are companies which have outsourced their IT departments and various other activities and they have been done quite successfully, but there is a problem with it because it does mean that the outsourcing could affect the opportunity for young local residents to move up in the finance industry; an opportunity which they have seized in the past and which they have very much enjoyed.

Privatisation is a different matter. Privatisation is handing public work over to private contractors because - one, the quality of the work can be improved; two, the service can be bettered; and, three, usually this can be done with a saving to the government. The present dispute has not produced any claim that the quality of the work would be affected by a transfer to contract cleaning or indeed to privatisation. In fact the States made it quite clear to me that they were more than satisfied with the work carried out by the cleaners. It seems to me therefore that it must be on the question of saving money that we are looking to move this particular service outside the public employment sector. The basic ingredients of this dispute centre therefore upon money and if one realises there are 11 ladies employed at the Jersey College for Girls and they work on average approximately 15 hours a week for which they enjoy earnings which in total for the 11 employees is something like £66,000. It seems to me that if we are going to make savings it can only be made in two ways. One is by the employment of an outside contractor who will take on cheap labour, cheaper than the rates paid by the States and in most cases immigrant labour, because it is unfortunately those particular people who are looking for this work. The ladies concerned have for some years now provided an extra cash injection for the family budget and they are all local people or people who have been residentially qualified over the years. What reason can there be for us moving them to employ someone who is going to take on the same amount of people to use them in jobs which are not going to be discarded or done away with but rather will be there so what impact has this on immigration? In my opinion this policy feeds immigration rather than doing anything about the problem.

The problems faced by the Jersey College for Girls cleaners are no different to the problems that will be faced in all areas of States employment where privatisation is regarded as being the answer to the state of Jersey's economic ills. Can anyone feel safe in any department? Can we contract out our maintenance whether it be the Harbours or the Airport? Can we contract out our Police activities? The transport of prisoners from La Moye to town has been discussed; the monitoring of the surveillance cameras. All these things can be done by outside sources, I know this only too well, and they can be done more cheaply than the authorities can do it themselves. Would one suggest that this is the answer to our Island problem? The savings that we could make by doing these things. The effect it will have on all these people whether they be civil servants, manual workers or members of the uniformed services. Is this the way that the Island needs to go? When one considers the waste of public money in other areas does anyone suggest these savings can be the answer to our problems? I doubt it very much and therefore the fear that is being shown today by the manual workers will be manifested by civil servants when their jobs are affected by the other sectors that I have spoken of. I think it is time that we as government decided where our vote would go and how we want to see the Island operate in the future. I have always been opposed to 'Jersey Limited' - this ideal foisted upon us by the employer organisations. I have heard and I have had representation where people would like to take over and run the car parks. The States would receive a tremendous boost to its budget but we would hand over our control and indeed our destiny to outside interests who would run the car parks to suit themselves. The same thing could apply to the Harbours and to the Airport. There are people resident in our Island who see these as wonderful opportunities for them to invest. They have invested in airports in other places, why not Jersey? Why not take over the management; after all it is management at times that has been our biggest problem. The same with the harbours. I know of people who would be willing to take over the harbour and privatise it and run it at a profit but they would be responsible for the charges and we in turn would be selling our birthright. I merely raise these things to States members because they are the things that are being talked about and the worker is no longer someone to be thought about as a non-academic - they are as learned about the problems of life as we are and they are fearful not only of their future but the future of their families. I believe that the States should look hard and long at what is being proposed. I think we should guard against those politicians who are being impressed by business people who would wish them to take a strong line. If our Island's ills can be solved by outsourcing, by privatisation, by selling off our birthright, then I fear that the Island will not be the Island that we have known in the past. We need to work therefore quite seriously on the policies that we are adopting and we need to look again at this particular dispute. Perhaps it has given us time to reflect on the way that Jersey is going. Perhaps the hurt that was caused to innocent people by the stoppage can be used to greater effect in providing a future for all of us. I think States members will recognise that the policies of Jersey should not be based on macho politicians dealing with the most vulnerable people in our society. It does not reflect well on us and it is not the answer.