4.11 Deputy H.L. Jeune of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity of the Minister for Economic Development regarding employment protections (OQ.108/2026).

Further to the Minister's interview with BBC Jersey on 5th November where he stated that workers' rights should take second place to economic growth, will he advise which existing employment protections he considers would impede economic growth and whether he considers these should be repealed or amended, and state whether he would oppose any protections common in other similar jurisdictions being introduced in Jersey?

Deputy F.G. Voisin of St. Helier North (The Minister for Economic Development):

I am grateful to the Deputy for her question, because it allows me to clarify my remarks which were reported by the local media last week. I want to make it clear that I did not say that existing employment rights should be reduced or repealed, and I do not believe economic growth should ever come at the expense of workers' rights. Employees in Jersey enjoy a good range of fundamental protections and I have not and am not proposing a reduction in those existing workers' rights. A strong economy should provide good, secure employment, fair treatment and opportunities for people to progress. Workers' rights have a vital part to play in that. My comments at I.o.D. (Institute of Directors) relate to the lack of growth that Jersey has experienced in recent years and how the Government needs to find the right balance when they consider adding new regulations. Our aim should be to create the conditions in which businesses can grow, while ensuring workers are properly protected and treated fairly. I would also like to take this opportunity to say that economic growth should lead to a higher standard of living for everyone in Jersey, something I believe we are all striving to achieve.

4.11.1 Deputy H.L. Jeune:

I thank the Minister for his answer. I want to then test 2 examples. This Assembly agreed in 2023 to protect whistleblowers and a draft law already exists. Many Islanders have no workplace pension and the Government have only just begun potentially work on this law. Will the Minister support both of these being brought forward in this term, or does he see them as a cost to growth?

Deputy F.G. Voisin:

I think, as with all of these things, they need to be looked at in the whole. This is also a hypothetical question because at the moment there is no proposal to introduce workplace pensions, although there is the draft law for whistleblowing, but that is an enhancement on the existing rights for protection for unfair dismissal.

4.11.2 Deputy A.F. Curtis of St. Clement:

Looking positively, does the Minister see other protections - to the Deputy's original question - that other jurisdictions have that might work hand in hand with providing both rights to employees and benefits to employers? Has he given thought to the example in the U.K. being discussed right now, which is more transparency about publishing pay scales for jobs?

Deputy F.G. Voisin:

Yes, I am certainly open to these suggestions. I think the important thing is that if we are going to achieve a balance, then we need to consider the benefit to the employees against any potential downside to employment. I think that we must remember that our economy contracted last year by 1.7 per cent, and the year before it contracted by 0.8 per cent, so that is 2 years of contraction in our economy. We are doing our people of Jersey and our workers a disservice if we are not focused very much on growing our economy.

4.11.3 Deputy A.F. Curtis:

Just focusing on the latter example I gave on publishing of pay scales, the Minister said there is a balance between employee benefits and employer costs, and that may be financial or not. Is he aware of any specific costs or disbenefits that introducing similar proposed legislation on pay scales would bring to employers that would make them less performant in their industries?

Deputy F.G. Voisin:

On the surface, if it is just providing information on gender pay scales, I see no problem with that, but we need to look at these things carefully, because very often when regulations are introduced there are the unforeseen disbenefits that come out of the woodwork when these regulations are put in place.

4.11.4 Deputy H.L. Jeune:

Earlier the Minister spoke about attracting new industry and laying the groundwork for that. Could he give the Assembly an assurance that Jersey will not compete for business by offering weaker protections for workers going forward?

Deputy F.G. Voisin:

I can certainly agree to that. I cannot see any situation where we would want to encourage an industry sector by reducing laws that would cut right the way across the economy.