

STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION

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The Opposition considers that a number of serious issues arise following the attitude of the Police towards the demonstration organised by purchasers of flats at Waterport Terraces which took place this afternoon.

There is a widespread perception in Gibraltar that the Police is acting at the whim of Mr Caruana, either directly or indirectly expressed, in enforcing the law more strictly whenever he does not like a particular demonstration.

In December 2006 a single protestor with a placard was not allowed to demonstrate on the day that the Spanish Minister of State visited Gibraltar. More recently, the public statements made by the Police last month in relation to the Casemates rally organised by the SDGG raised many eyebrows at the time. This included the comment before the event that the rally could not be policed because there were not enough resources, and the subsequent count of participants which placed the attendance figure at a ridiculously low number which was shown to be widely off the mark by pictures of the event.

The impression has been given that there is one criteria as to what demonstrators can do when a demonstration is against the Government, or not supported by the Government, and another criteria when it is against another entity. The Opposition takes a very serious view of this. People will recall, for example, the demonstrations that have taken place against Ministry of Defence policy over the years which involved booing, shouting, placards and whistles. On these occasions the law was not interpreted in a way which prevented these peaceful actions which are normal forms of protest in any democratic society.

A spokesman for the Police is quoted as saying that the meeting with the organisers of the Waterport Terraces demonstration was a normal meeting that they hold before such protests. The spokesman said that the legal position and the position in relation to Parliament where specific restrictions apply as set out by the Speaker were pointed out.

This gives the impression that the prohibition of shouting, booing, whistles or megaphones is somehow linked to the location of the demonstration or to restrictions set out by the Speaker when in fact they have nothing to do with it.

In 1993 a past Speaker re-designated the precincts of the House of Assembly to include the lobby of the House, the pavement on the western side of Main

Street, in front of the House, and the whole of the area of the Piazza and the public highway on its three sides. In other words, this was a physical restriction on the area where a demonstration could take place but not a restriction on what a protestor could or could not do.

This restriction was put in place in order to allow Members of Parliament access in and out of the building when a demonstration was taking place. It says nothing whatsoever about booing, shouting, the use of placards, whistles or megaphones while standing on the pavement opposite the Parliament.

It should nonetheless be recalled that in the past, even after 1993, Members of Parliament often received welcoming or hostile remarks from members of the public standing outside the House and the Police has never seen it fit to interpret the law and the Speaker's ruling in the restrictive manner that they have done now.

ENDS