

STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION

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The latest statement issued by the Government on Friday on the question of the Waterport Terraces demonstration outside Parliament last week is nothing more than a feeble attempt to excuse the inexcusable. This is not the first time that Mr Caruana has sought to confuse the issue by introducing irrelevant red herrings into the debate.

The central issue is that all Government Ministers were in their seats at the time that the Speaker decided to recess the House and that Mr Caruana only turned up when the demonstrators had been moved from the piazza to the pavement across the road half an hour later. He has failed to explain why it is that he thinks he would have had any difficulty in accessing Parliament when none of the other Members of Parliament, including his own Ministers, had any difficulty and were indeed in their seats waiting for him to turn up and for the meeting to start.

Mr Caruana has given the impression that his decision to stay away until the area was clear was because of some great respect that he has towards the ruling of a past Speaker. This is not very convincing. Anyone who knows him well will consider

it far more likely that it is in his character to stay away and only appear when the protestors had been moved away and then only under a show of force by the Police.

It is true that the ruling which prohibits demonstrations in designated areas around the Parliament was decreed by a previous Speaker at a time when Mr Bossano was in Government. The then Speaker Sir Robert Peliza did this by extending the precincts of the House to include designated areas around it. However, this was Sir Robert's own initiative and without any political involvement by the Government of the day.

Mr Netto as District Officer of the TGWU did blame the GSLP for this decision and complained that the physical limitation as to where people could protest, in relation to the precincts of the Parliament, was undemocratic. Clearly, Mr Netto might not have known, but the GSD should know, that the Speaker is independent in his decision making, he was then and he presumably is now. This is why Mr Bossano did nothing to change the mind of Sir Bob Peliza on this ruling just as the GSD has done nothing to change the mind of successive Speakers after him. Mr Caruana should know that it is not for the Chief Minister to interfere with the Speaker in this way.

In any case, all this has absolutely nothing to do with the supposed ban on shouting, jeering, whistles and

megaphones outside the designated area which the organisers of the Waterport Terraces protest claimed they had been told existed by the Police.

The Opposition rejects the accusation that we are undermining institutions by expressing a political opinion about them. This accusation is a bit rich coming from none other than Mr Caruana who himself has a long history of undermining institutions for his own political ends. The most recent occasion of this was his decision to demote the office of Chief Justice of Gibraltar in order to leap-frog over him in the list giving the order of importance for people in Gibraltar.

It also says much as to the way in which Mr Caruana operates that on the same day as the Waterport Terraces demonstration, completion notices were sent out to purchasers in Phase 1 in an attempt to diffuse and undermine the demonstration. However, when purchasers wanted to take the matter further and complete, they were advised by their lawyers that they could not do so because the Certificate of Fitness had not yet been issued and this was required before completion.

This kind of underhand tactic serves as a stark illustration of the way in which Mr Caruana works.

ENDS