

STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION

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The Opposition notes the statement by the RGP that it does not want to be dragged into a political row. The Opposition wholeheartedly agree with this statement and has no wish to drag the RGP into any political row in which it has not already become involved through its own actions.

The Opposition maintain that there is a general perception in Gibraltar that, in political and protest situations of which the Government disapproves, the Police has acted as if it were doing so at the whim of Mr Caruana. This is obviously not a criticism of the RGP but primarily a criticism of Mr Caruana, who is known to be a control freak who likes to have a finger in every pie. It is simply a reflection of the political reality in Gibraltar that many people believe that the RGP, like every other institution, on more than one occasion does what it is told to do.

This perception has been reinforced by at least five specific incidents where the Police has become embroiled in political controversy. The five instances are:

- (1) In December 2006 a solitary protestor with a placard was not allowed to demonstrate on the day when the Spanish Minister of State visited Gibraltar.
- (2) In the general election campaign for the October 2007 general election, the Police issued a statement denying a rumour that a Minister was being investigated.
- (3) Before the SDGG National Day rally at Casemates last month, the Police issued a statement saying that they did not have the resources to police the rally. Mr Caruana publicly admitted at the time that there had been a "touching of base" with the RGP in relation to the Casemates rally.

- (4) After the SDGG National Day rally at Casemates the Police gave a figure of attendance which was ridiculously low as was obvious from photographic and video evidence of the event.
- (5) Last week, in relation to the Waterport Terraces demonstration, the organisers claimed to have been told by the Police that booing, shouting, the use of whistles and the use of megaphones was not allowed.

The Opposition has not suggested that the RGP is being manipulated by the Gibraltar Government. What we have said is that there is a perception that in politically relevant circumstances, for instance when there have been protests against the Government by homeowners, trade-unionists and others, the way in which the Police has dealt with the issue is a reflection of the way in which the Gibraltar Government would like to see it handled.

In curtailing the freedom of expression and freedom of assembly of these individuals or groups, the RGP have adopted a new and more forceful approach which was not there before. Moreover, when in the past protests have been supported by the Gibraltar Government and have been directed against the Ministry of Defence or against the UK Government, protestors have been allowed to shout, to boo, to use whistles or to hoot their car horns.

The very odd decision that the RGP took in the middle of a general election campaign, acting to deny a rumour that a particular Minister was being investigated says it all. The normal thing is that Police are never willing to comment on whether they are

carrying out an investigation or not, nor do they react to rumours. This is not an operational matter. It was a political matter and a deliberate intervention during a general election campaign at a time when the governing party was on the back foot.

The Opposition are not saying that the RGP get told to arrest different people because they oppose the Government. What we are saying is that they are reflecting in their conduct during political situations the values and the views of the Government of the day. Clearly, if they do not want to be seen as getting involved in politics they should not meddle in politics and issue press releases at sensitive political moments.

The RGP has always had the full support of the Opposition in carrying out their constitutional duty to maintain law and order and prevent crime. The Opposition prefer that they should not be drawn into areas of political controversy or trade union action which we do not think is good for them or for the community.

ENDS