

STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION

26/2010

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The Government is keeping information from Parliament and from the public in order to hide the shortcomings of their policies and in this way protect their own political interests. Their refusal, for example, to supply precise information on the amounts due by Andalus airlines in respect of landing charges and passenger tax can only lead to the conclusion that Government have something to hide. Indeed, there are grounds for believing that an indirect subsidy is being provided to the airline by allowing them to delay these payments.

The Opposition clearly has a particular interest in monitoring the performance of Andalus airlines given that there is public money indirectly involved in the operation, both revenue and expenditure. This takes the form of the landing charges, the passenger tax, the £50,000 marketing subsidy, free overnight parking and the use of the airport bus to ferry passengers to and from La Linea.

Commercial airlines landing at Gibraltar airport are charged depending on their Maximum Take-Off Weight (MTOW) which can vary if different types of aircraft are used. Parliament was told last year that until then Andalus had been charged £106.20 or £111.51 or £116.82 for each landing. The Government have had no difficulty in providing the amounts outstanding in landing fee charges by this and other airlines in the past. In October Parliament was told that Andalus had not paid any landing charges at all since they started flying in April, but that they had settled the amounts for April and May since the answer to the question in the House had been drafted. The Government added at the time that repayments had been agreed with Terminal Management in order to bring the payment of these fees up to date. It was also pointed out to the airline at the time that they had to keep up with their monthly payments even though this strict system of paying on time was not the one that they were used to in Spain.

At the last meeting of Parliament, Shadow Minister for Civil Aviation Dr Joseph Garcia tabled another question in order to follow-up the information on the matter that the Government had supplied last year. Dr Garcia was told that the Government “no longer considers it appropriate to provide details of sums due” by named commercial entities. The Government did advise that a total of £247,510 was owed in departure tax by all the commercial airlines that used Gibraltar airport and a total of £88,496.09 was outstanding in landing and parking fees. When pressed further, the Minister with responsibility for Civil Aviation provided a breakdown of these figures by airline without identifying the name of each carrier. However, he hinted that Andalus were still not up to date in respect of the payment of landing charges or passenger tax.

Commenting on the matter, Shadow Minister for Civil Aviation Dr Joseph Garcia said:

“The Government have now taken a policy decision to deny updated information to the Parliament and to the people of Gibraltar because it is not in their narrow, partisan political interests to provide this information, even though it has been given in the past. The plain fact is that they do not want the Opposition to use the data which they supply against them in the run up to a general election, particularly when this data may expose the shortcomings of their policies. This denial of information to suit their own party political ends is totally unacceptable.”

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