

COMMENT

Jersey Evening Post

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Making progress on marriage

THE majority of Islanders will likely welcome Chief Minister Ian Gorst's proposal to introduce same-sex marriage in Jersey.

Extrapolating the views of JEP readers, who resoundingly backed the change in an online poll last year, and those who responded favourably to a States consultation, it seems that most people are supportive of equal marriage laws.

Some will feel that Senator Gorst's proposal is long overdue, and that Jersey should have introduced such legislation years ago, but it is undeniable that the three-month consultation that was held gives authority to his backing of what is a potentially controversial law change.

Yes, there are still some corners of the Island who oppose same-sex marriage – mainly from religious viewpoints – but as Senator Gorst said in his proposition: 'It would be unreasonable, and inappropriate, to continue to deny same-sex couples the opportunity to get married.'

This is not a victory of secularism over religion – it is a victory for equality and fairness. It is also worth noting that the proposer, Senator Gorst, is a man who has a strong faith and religious beliefs.

If Senator Gorst's proposition is successful then Jersey could host its first same-sex marriage in 2017. Only then will the harbingers of doom, who forecast iniquity and the loss of morality should 'gay marriage' be allowed in Jersey, see that any effect on the Island should be positive.

They won't forget

DAPHNE Minihane, the chairwoman of Age Concern Jersey, is quite right to question in today's front page article why it seems that pensioners are always targeted first when the States proposes cuts.

The potential scrapping of the Christmas bonus and axing of free television licences for the over 75s will hit hard.

Harsh as it may be, the Medium Term Financial Plan will have an impact on all sections of the community and every section must be prepared for its effects, but it does appear somewhat mean to chip away further at the limited benefits our pensioners enjoy. Ministers must bear in mind that not all pensioners in this Island draw huge pensions and live in luxury.

Would it be too obvious to suggest means testing first, allowing those who are in need to receive what they deserve?

States Members should remember that despite pensioners seeming an easy target, it is this Island's pensioners that make up the majority of voters and they do not easily forget.

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Letters to the Editor

Join the discussion

To be considered for publication, letters must include full name and postal address. Letters and comments are accepted on the understanding that they may be edited.

Dogged determination of Deputy on tax figures

• From John Boothman.

YOU have to give Deputy Geoff Southern marks for dogged determination.

In support of his proposal to levy a 25p surtax on incomes of over £100,000, he first predicted this would yield £46 million. When I suggested the actual outcome would be a good bit lower, without explanation he lowered his estimate to £40 million. In response to a further prompt it then came down to £23 million – exactly half the figure he first thought of.

Well, I suppose £23 million doesn't sound very much when you say it quickly, so is it a case of third time lucky? Sadly not.

The Income Tax Department releases details of high earners in three bands: £100-150,000, £150-200,000 and over £200,000. In 2012 there were 2,500 taxpayers in band 1, 900 in band 2 and a lucky 1,100 in band 3 (all numbers rounded).

If we assume that the average income in bands 1 and 2 was in the middle, ie. £125,000 and £175,000 (which is probably optimistic),



Details of high earners are released by the Income Tax Department

the projected tax yield would be £3,125,000 and £3,375,000 respectively. For ultra-high earners of more than £200,000 it is harder to guessimate the average but if we set it at £250,000 (ie £50,000 above the threshold) the yield would be £3,250,000. Adding the three figures together we get to £14,750,000, a long way from Deputy South-

ern's revised £23 million.

Taking the total earnings of those in all three bands (4,500 in all), I estimate they are already contributing some £150 million of income tax to the Island's Exchequer – not an amount to be sneezed at, and not people we want to lose should they choose to up-anchor and go elsewhere.

That would tie in with a response to Deputy Southern back in 2012, when the then Treasury Minister stated that the top 5% of income earners paid over a third of all personal income tax and the top 10% almost half.

Of course, it may be that the actual average income in band 3, and therefore the potential harvest from a surtax, is a lot higher than my guess. But here we encounter another difficulty. Many ultra-high earners fall into the wealthy immigrant (previously 1(1)k) category whose tax liabilities are fixed by agreement with the Treasury; unpicking those agreements would be a political nightmare and in all likelihood a legal impossibility. Therefore, until the Income Tax Department enters the fray I am sticking with my original £15 million estimate: not an insignificant sum, but a long way short of Deputy Southern's figure and perhaps not enough to justify jeopardising a low-tax reputation that has taken decades to build.

Little Court,
Mont Cambrai, St Lawrence.

Marriage in religion – a sorry tale of inequality

• From Dee Edwards.

CANON Ashenden defines marriage as Christian and only for straight couples. If his view of marriage is based on church dogma, then he has a selective memory of church history.

Marriage became a church sacrament only in the middle ages. Prior to that time, the church regarded it as pagan and matriarchic. Marriage was not, nor has been a trade brand exclusive to the church.

The early church wouldn't accept marriage because it was founded on pagan goddesses and very significantly, it was matrilineal – women had rights to inherit property. 'Husband' came

from the Saxon definition of a man 'bonded' to the 'hus' which was the property of the 'hus-wif'. Bridegroom was the bride's 'servant' but the biblical tradition was the opposite; patriarchal – man dominated woman. The early church 'divorced' itself from marriage by insisting celibacy for clerics because it made the church wealthier if his widow and family couldn't inherit church assets.

The church grudgingly began to recognise common law marriage in the 13th century when a simple blessing in facie ecclesiae or outside in the doorway was performed but it still violated canon law. It soon realised marrying people was a money

spinner so the Council of Trent defined the marriage sacrament in 1563. Many clerics opposed it and thought it shouldn't be made church law. The dissenting beliefs of these 'fundamentalists' were based on St Jerome and St Ambrose who said that marriage was a crime against God and St Augustine proclaimed it a sin.

Religious views on matrimony are at best patriarchal and at worst misogynist. Some claim the Bible is androcentric but fundamentalists use it to reinforce their machismo; maintaining righteous dominance over women. They see wives as chattels – just part of the furniture. St Paul, the founder of the Christian church said: 'The head of every man is Christ and the head of the woman is a man' (1 Cr 11:3). Canon Ashenden tacitly supports this shameful history by scapegoating gay marriage in the hope you won't notice his sleight of hand; the perpetuation of inequality in marriage.

Marriage takes many forms as it evolves but for Canon Ashenden to imply it has only one definition for ever runs contrary to historical fact. Biblical marriages were also polygamous and endogamous – marrying within the family. Anti-miscegenation laws were only abolished in the USA in 1967 which prevented white from marrying black people. People are free today to plan their family rather than being religiously compelled to procreate when they can't afford to.

Marriage has always evolved but the history of marriage in religion is a sorry tale of inequality. When a loving marriage succeeds – between anyone – it's due more to their credit rather than the church. Respect all people Canon Ashenden. Love is the genie that defies your religious bigotry.

Gwalchmai,
Ynys Môn,
Holyhead.

Fun and Games in Ireland?

• From Kathleen O'Connell.

I HAVE asked a very good friend of mine to post this letter to you, as I will be on my way home this weekend after a lovely holiday in glorious weather.

When we arrived in Jersey on 23 June we were not aware that you were preparing to welcome your fellow islanders for the wonderful Island Games. We found ourselves caught up in the colourful atmosphere of cycle racing around your streets and the amazing beach volleyball. What a brilliant idea that was right in the heart of St Helier.

The bar in our hotel was packed each evening and we met some of the athletes and their supporters. We had a wonderful time considering we knew nothing about the Games beforehand.

We learned that it all takes four years in the making and Jersey had obviously worked hard to make it a roaring success. We have learned since that the 2019 venue is to be chosen since Menorca pulled out. I wonder would the organisers consider my country (Ireland)? We have the welcome



The colourful atmosphere of cycle racing around the town

and the 'craic'. The Irish love a challenge and as we are an island with countless sporting arenas, great transport systems and great air-links – I wonder what you are waiting for? Ask our tourism chiefs to show you around.

Ballsbridge, Dublin 4, Ireland.