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Industrial minefield looms over public holidays

Karl Schembri

GOVERNMENT IS bound to face a legal quagmire over its budget plan to remove workers' leave entitlement for public holidays that fall on weekends as the unions are warning they

will defend collective agreements in force when the labour law is changed.

Industrial relations expert Dr Ian Spiteri Bailey, a candidate for the PN at the last European Parliament election told *MaltaToday* that what

the government has planned in the budget is morally and legally wrong.

His statement contrasts starkly with what both Prime Minister Lawrence Gonzi and Finance Parliamentary Secretary Tonio Fenech said yesterday when they made it

clear it was government's intention to impose the new measure on all workers by going beyond scrapping clause 17 of the Employment and Industrial Relations Act.

Fenech also admitted to *MaltaToday* that government was

still checking how to implement the measure across the board given that employees covered by collective agreements in force would still enjoy the holidays.

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Leaked Castille email reveals disdain for journalists

Karl Schembri

AN E-MAIL sent by the Prime Minister's Communications Co-ordinator to the editor of *The Malta Independent on Sunday* reveals his indignation at questions, sent to him by a journalist from the newspaper's newsroom, about the government's economic advisors.

In a terse message sent to editor Fr Noel Grima last Monday and leaked to this newspaper, the PM's Co-ordinator Alan

Camilleri expressed his outrage at *The Malta Independent* journalist for following up a story published in *MaltaToday*.

"Now this journalist is following up stories by another journalist from *MaltaToday* to reveal (*naghmlu xalata*) on *The Independent* on Sunday or the *Business Weekly!!!*," Camilleri wrote.

Charlot Zahra, a journalist who works at *The Malta Independent* and *Business Weekly*, had sent an e-mail earlier ask-

ing Camilleri for the names of the experts that were giving advice to the government against the devaluation of the Lira, in view of other economists' opinion in favour of the measure proposed by Opposition Leader Alfred Sant.

Last Sunday, *MaltaToday* had carried a story focusing on the different viewpoints of economic experts on the matter.

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MLP insiders unenthusiastic over 'depreciation' proposal

ALFRED SANT knows it is his third and last chance. He lost the 1998 election and the 2003 election: this time round he cannot afford to lose.

Under constant pressure from his aides to appear as someone with a list of ideas, he unleashed what many insiders see as yet another 'boomerang' proposal. Talking to *MaltaToday*, he said he preferred to speak the truth than appear 'just chummy' with the electorate. The boomerang proposal he calls depreciation. Others prefer to call it by its real name: devaluation. The idea is not unspoken of in circles of economists, but it is a taboo subject in the world of politics.

Sant's proposal has provided a reprieve to the Nationalist party to hit back in the face of criticism for a sloppy first year in Europe. Yet, it is

not only the PN that is critical of Alfred Sant – MLP party officials have told *MaltaToday* that devaluation cannot be sold to the electorate: "All the Nationalists have to do is say that devaluation is about taking away 10cents from every Lm1 you earn."

Labour officials are in a quandary, they know that they have to come up with new ideas but are aware that the new ideas needed for Malta are linked to reforms which hurt people. In a wide-ranging interview with *MaltaToday*, Alfred Sant brushes aside questions about Mintoff and himself and continues to insist that the way forward in politics is to say the truth even if there is a price to pay.

See interview pages 14 and 15

YOUR FREE RECIPE INSIDE

Health reforms are the work of a sick mind, says doctor

Matthew Vella

THE SECRETARY-general of the Medical Association of Malta, Martin Balzan, has reacted vehemently to the proposals outlined in the forthcoming health reforms for new working conditions, the details of which were first published in *MaltaToday* in November, describing the reforms as "either the work of a sick mind, or of somebody who has a heavy axe to grind against the medical profession."

"Various members during the MAM meeting had very colourful adjectives to apply to this document, but in summary the answer is 'no, thank you'," a clearly caustic Balzan told this newspaper.

The confidential report, circulated only to medical associations and medial staff unions,



Dissecting the health sector: planned reforms have been torn to shreds by doctors

highlights various proposals for a "radical updating and adjournment of work practices", which will include a three-tier system of management led by the Ministry, the Health Division and 'Agencies', the hospitals themselves.

Balzan said the document had not identified the shortcomings

of poor management, instead giving the impression "that all is wrong because of lack of discipline and private interest. Not a word of praise for the high quality, high-intensity work which the medical profession provides."

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Telephone enquires also taken on Sunday