



PHOTOGRAPHY BY GILBERT CALLEJA



New Labour leader Joseph Muscat may not have convinced all the lost Labour sheep to return to the fold, but he did at least have his first chance encounter with Malta's shepherd, Archbishop Paul Cremona, at Dee Media studios in Santa Venera yesterday. Both were scheduled for interviews on Reporter, and engaged in a friendly chat about their respective responsibilities towards their secular and religious flocks.

Jason Micallef pressured to step down

KURT SANSONE

NOT just former deputy leader Michael Falzon and leadership runner-up George Abela are calling for Jason Micallef's head.

Labour delegates sympathetic to new leader Joseph Muscat believe the Labour secretary-general could prove to be a divisive factor unless he steps down from his post.

Pressure has been mounting on Jason Micallef to desist from contesting the post of secretary-general when an extraordinary general conference is convened to elect the new administration in the weeks to come.

Only last weekend, Micallef was at Muscat's celebratory dinner in Madliena.

The pressure is coming from all fronts, not least from people who supported Muscat's campaign, who feel Micallef is associated with Labour's electoral defeat, and because of his public feud with Michael Falzon.

Remarks that Micallef passed on Friday last week to the Labour media, just hours before the second round of the lead-

ership contest, were initially interpreted as a dig at George Abela.

But Micallef's claim that he never "danced, hugged or slept with the Nationalists" were clearly applicable to Michael Falzon, known for his cordial relationship with Nationalist secretary-general Joe Saliba.

Saliba himself told Radio 101 he had "found it much easier to work with Michael Falzon rather than Micallef."

MLP delegates found Micallef's words discordant with Joseph Muscat's reconciliatory tone, who has called out to those who felt aggrieved with what might have happened in the "last few years, months or days."

It is yet unknown whether Micallef will bow down to pressure from Labour insiders not to contest.

Alfred Grixti, currently the editorial consultant of Labour's online newspaper maltastar.com, threw his hat in the ring last April. "If the Labour Party does not have a secretary-general who is up to the job, we won't ever make it," Grixti had told MaltaToday, clearly implying that Micallef's time was up after Labour's defeat.

Tax refunds galore in €8.2 million election spree

JAMES DEBONO

THE Inland Revenue Department dished out more tax refunds in the first three months of 2008, coinciding with the general election campaign, than in the whole previous year, figures released in parliament show.

While €5.7 million were re-

funded to taxpayers in 2007, in the three months preceding the election a total of €8.2 million were refunded by the tax department.

In 2007, 692 persons and 18,666 individuals benefitted from tax refunds. In the first three months of 2008, 647 companies and 14,776 individuals were given refunds.

Effectively in the three months

of 2008, the number of persons and companies benefitting from a refund represented 80% of the total number of beneficiaries in 2007.

A spokesperson for the Ministry for Finance attributed the massive increase in refunds to a "payment schedule" issued in August 2007.

According to the payment schedule, 22,000 individuals and

companies were to receive €40 million in refunds due for tax assessments preceding 1998.

Significantly, 15,423 received their due refunds in the first three months of the 2008 right in the midst of the electoral campaign.

The spokesperson explained that the urgency of paying out these refunds was due to the fact that government could end

up paying interest if the refunds are not paid by December 2009. "According to this payment schedule we committed ourselves to issue refunds till December 2009. Otherwise the government will incur interests. This is why more refunds were issued during 2008," the spokesperson added.

So far a total of €14 million have been refunded.

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