

ALL OUT WAR

GONZI HITS BACK AT SANT WITH LIBELS



Gonzi, Cabinet sue Labour leader Alfred Sant over 'liar' and 'corruption' comments – Page 3

Sant undeterred - 'If Gonzi wasn't corrupt, he'd have introduced a Whistleblowers Act' - Page 18

mt SURVEY

Labour trounces PN on corruption issue

Only 26% think PN has best policy to fight corruption **pg 4 >**

DCC's 'protest' resignation: 'We disagree with Falzon'

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PM agrees with Auditor's recommendations **pg 6 >**

AD calls for revocation of Lidl permit **pg 11 >**

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Labour trounces PN on corruption issue

Only 26% think PN has best policy to fight corruption

MALTATODAY'S survey has revealed a large trust deficit on the corruption issue, with only 26% of respondents preferring the PN's policy on the subject. On the other hand, Labour emerges as the more trusted party with a 42% approval rating.

The survey shows that the MLP's focused campaign to delegitimise Lawrence Gonzi's cabinet has left a deep mark amongst voters.

Through the campaign Labour has reiterated its pledge to show zero-tolerance for corruption and has continued to highlight corruption allegations against prominent cabinet members.

Labour's electoral campaign started with revelations that monies from the Good Causes fund, supposedly reserved for charities and non-profit organisations, were channelled towards private companies.

With MLP spokespersons Leo Brincat and Joseph Muscat promising on TV that the MLP will soon reveal another corruption case, Labour seems intent on exploiting this issue right up to the bitter end of the campaign.

The PN has pre-empted the campaign by focusing exclusively on Lawrence Gonzi, whose integrity remains intact. Labour has reacted to this stratagem quoting Eddie Fenech Adami's maxim that whoever does not fight corruption, is part of it.

Yet the prevailing perception that the ruling party failed to ad-

dress this issue does not necessarily result in a Labour landslide.

While this shows that the PN has hit rock bottom on this issue, it also shows that some people would still vote for the PN even if they are dissatisfied with the government's record. In fact, 5% of Nationalist voters prefer Labour on this issue but would still vote PN.

Only 63% of Nationalist voters think that their party has the best policies to tackle corruption compared to 89% of MLP voters, who trust their own party on this issue.

The survey also shows that a significant 6.4% opt for the two small parties as the bulwark against corruption.

Azzjoni Nazzjonali still scores 3.1%, despite the legal troubles of four of its candidates who will contest the elections while facing court proceedings. Alternattiva Demokratika, whose candidates face no such problems and which constantly harps on the need for transparency in the planning process, weighs in at 3.3%.

All parties contesting the election are promising reforms to fight corruption and increase transparency.

The PN is promising a Freedom of Information Act as well as protection for those who reveal cases of abuse while in government employment. The Whistleblower Act, first proposed by Alternattiva Demokratika 18 years ago, is now part of the agenda of all four

parties contesting the election.

The Labour Party has also tackled the issue of conflict of interest. Opposition leader Alfred Sant has also made it clear that he would not allow his ministers to continue with their private practices. While the present code of ethics allows Ministers to receive retainers as sleeping partners in their companies, Sant promises to sever any links between his ministers and their professional or business

activities.

Alternattiva Demokratika has focused its campaign on abuses in the planning sector. By publishing a MEPA Audit Officer report on the approval of Polidano's supermarket in Safi, AD has

forced the resignation of the Development Control Commission board: the first real casualty of the electoral campaign.



mt SURVEY

BEST POLICY ON CORRUPTION ACCORDING TO VOTING INTENTION (%)

	MLP	PN	AD	AN	None	No answer
PN voters	4.6	62.5	1.7	1.7	11.5	18.1
MLP voters	89	1.3	0.7	1	2.6	5.5
Non-committed	35	13.8	3.7	4.6	19.8	23

BEST POLICY ON CORRUPTION ACCORDING TO AGE GROUP (%)

	MLP	PN	AD	AN	None	No answer
18-34	44.9	19.9	5.8	6.4	10.3	12.8
35-54	43.8	26.4	2.8	1.6	11.2	14.3
55+	37.9	32.7	1.4	1.4	9.7	16.9

WHICH PARTY HAS THE BEST POLICY TO FIGHT CORRUPTION? %

MLP	42.4
PN	25.9
AD	3.3
AN	3.1
None	10.8
Undecided	14.6
No reply	1.8

METHODOLOGY

This survey was held between Monday 11 February and Thursday 14 February. A total of 1543 persons were contacted, 900 of which accepted to participate in the survey. The survey results were weighed according to age/sex distribution of the population. The survey's margin of error is +/-3.26%.

Louis is hard to place.

Gonzi is ashamed of his ministers and of himself for not having been smart enough to replace them when he still could.

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For some reason best known to himself, the Prime Minister took over Mater Dei Hospital from his Minister of Health, Louis Deguara, who kept himself busy closing down health centres. How can we forget this?

Vote Gonzi. Get Louis.

Labour. The only way.



DCC approved ODZ supermarket due to ineligibility of other sites

MATTHEW VELLA

THE former Development Control Commission (DCC) chairman Philip Azzopardi yesterday told MaltaToday the commission's resignation came in protest at the Malta Environment and Planning Authority auditor's report into the award of a planning permit, claiming the DCC had acted illegally. "We maintain that we have always undertaken our responsibilities without any personal interests and all decisions were taken at the best of our abilities and with a clear conscience."

The Lidl supermarket permit was the source of a complaint by Alternattiva Demokratika to audit officer Joe Falzon, who in a report published this week claimed the DCC had taken "the law into their own hands and ignored the provisions of the [Structure] plan" by awarding the permit for the construction of the supermarket in an outside development zone.

Falzon accused the DCC of ignoring Structure Plan policies by permitting "a development which manifestly goes against planning policies... and they created a dangerous precedent which should allow development outside devel-



Workers on the site of the Lidl supermarket look on as Alternattiva Demokratika officials yesterday held a press conference on the MEPA auditor's report on the award of the permit for the supermarket (full report on page 11)

opment zones not in accordance with policies."

MEPA chairman Andrew Calleja yesterday said the DCC did not have to consider the need for an environment impact assessment for the application because

it did not qualify as a Category 1 project. In a letter he signed on their behalf, Calleja said the DCC members were "not in agreement with your conclusions. It is expected these clarifications will help you comprehend the actions

of the DCC.

The DCC board yesterday said the Lidl supermarket had qualified as a large supermarket which had to be located either within or on the edge of a town centre, according to policy guidelines which also suggest alternative locations. "The fact that it does not qualify agricultural areas as being a preferred location does not exclude their consideration," Calleja said.

He said the DCC felt that the South Malta Local Plan, which also deals with supermarkets, was specifically aimed at "safeguarding the amenity of residential areas".

The plan states that large supermarkets should preferably be located within or on the edge of town centres "provided that higher standards of parking provision

and on-site loading/unloading facilities are fully catered for to the satisfaction of MEPA".

The policy states that where outside-town sites are not available because of the size of the supermarket, or because the road network cannot cater for the additional traffic, the other alternative sites are local centres, commercial areas, mixed use areas, tourism areas and entertainment priority areas.

The policy rules out the siting of large supermarkets in residential areas, "unless there is strong planning justification for departing from the sequential approach stipulated above. Supermarkets will not be permitted within residential priority areas."

However, since large sites are not always possible to be found in town centres, the policy suggests locating the development in an urban area whilst safeguarding the residential areas and residential property areas.

Calleja wrote that the policy was designed to avoid conflict with residential use due to the impact of large supermarkets in residential and nearby villages like Kirkop, Zurrieg, Qrendi and Mqabba did not have alternative commercial, mixed use, tourism or entertainment priority areas, the only location would have been the village centre, something Calleja said "highlights the impossibility and impracticability of siting a large supermarket within these predominantly residential village cores."

The only alternative was therefore a site on the periphery of the town, and that the outside development zone earmarked for the development of the Lidl supermarket had "already been committed with a number of farm buildings currently in disrepair and abandoned."

Yesterday, Environment Minister George Pullicino said it awaited MEPA action on the auditor's recommendation to amend the Development Planning Act to allow for the modification or withdrawal of an approved permit if it found a development application is approved contrary to official policies.

Pullicino said government had a record of moving legislation to ensure that a transparent planning process.

New DCC board

In the wake of the mass resignation of the DCC board, the prime minister yesterday appointed six members for the DCC A board. The resignation of Charles Micallef St. John, who resigned in solidarity with the other members of the board even if he wasn't present for the decision on the Lidl supermarket, was not accepted. The government thanked the outgoing members for their services to the authority.

The new members appointed by the prime minister are architects Elizabeth Ellul (Chairperson) and Ruben Sciortino and Daniel Cordina, and Mr Peter Axisa. MEPA appointed Mr Mark Edward Psaila and Mr David Smith.

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Gonzi accepts MEPA auditor's report on Caqnu supermarket

JULIA FARRUGIA

PRIME Minister Lawrence Gonzi yesterday affirmed with MaltaToday that he will be accepting the conclusions of the damning report issued on Wednesday by the Malta Environment and Planning Authority's auditor Joe Falzon.

In his report on the award of a planning permit for the construction of a supermarket in an outside development zone in Safi, Falzon concluded there had been "gross irregularity" in granting a permit to developer Charles Polidano to construct the Lidl supermarket.

With the report published after pressure by Alternattiva Demokratika on Wednesday, the MEPA Development Control Commission subsequently resigned en masse.

"I believe that the auditor's report is a report which I accept and I want to implement all the recommendations listed in this report; because this report focuses on a particu-

lar issue. In such cases there needs to be solutions, even when these happen in such circumstances," Gonzi said when asked by this newspaper on the matter.

The DCC's block resignation was the last thing the Nationalist government needed after having had a report on the financing of the health service revealed first thing Wednesday morning by Labour leader Alfred Sant.

Asked whether this incident was all the more unwelcome given that the auditor had published the report, right on the eve of a general election, the Prime Minister simply answered: "Oh no not really. The auditor has his duties. He did his job. My instructions are that we implement all the recommendations put by the auditor," Gonzi said.

In his report on the permit granted to developer Charles Polidano 'ic-Caqnu', auditor Joseph Falzon concluded amongst other things that "MEPA is advised to propose an amendment to the Devel-

opment Planning Act to allow for the modification or withdrawal of an approved permit if it is shown that a particular development application has been approved contrary to official policies."

Caqnu's development was defended by none other than Environment Minister George Pullicino. In an interview with MaltaToday on the 3rd February 2008, Pullicino stated: "I ask citizens: where should we locate our supermarkets? I live in a flat and I would not like a supermarket next to me. We have to cater for the needs of the new society. This case is different from an ODZ application for 87 residential units in the same area. The application for a supermarket was for a commercial and not for a residential development. While residential development can be sited within development boundaries, commercial development could create problems if sited within residential sites."

The report was published following pressure by Alternat-

tiva Demokratika which made the complaint about the case, to do so in spite of the fact that MEPA Board Chairman Andrew Calleja had not made his comments about the case.

On 6 November 2007, the development application was approved by the DCC by six votes to nil despite the fact that in its DPA report, the Planning Directorate had recommended a refusal giving seven reasons why it should be refused.

In fact, the DPA report dated 13 September 2007 had stated that the application was "not acceptable in principle in view that the proposal is not located within or adjacent to a scheme (edge of scheme) or designated area for development but completely ODZ."

Falzon said in his report there was "no indication whatsoever why the Board was viewing the application favourably, especially when one considers that the Planning Directorate had concluded that the application was not acceptable in principle."

"The Structure Plan poli-

cies (together with the policies listed in the South Malta Local Plan which apply for this locality) are very clear in respect of applications for development outside building zones. The DCC chose to ignore them all," Falzon said in a strong indictment of the planning process.

Therefore, "the provisions of the Structure Plan and Local Plans are irrelevant as any building may be constructed, provided that the DCC (or the MEPA Board as applicable) considers that it provides an essential service to the community."

Falzon did not mince his words about the DCC decision. "...they took the law into their own hands and ignored the provisions of the plan. In this way they acted in a way which if far beyond their powers to do... Consequently I would recommend strongly that the six members of the DCC who voted in favour of this application should shoulder their responsibility for their error of judgement."

Bad fall injures Gonzi's 'safe pair of hands'

JULIA FARRUGIA

THOSE "safe pair of hands" have just run into some unwelcome pain.

Wednesday was just not Lawrence Gonzi's day. Running on an extremely tight schedule, with a report revealed by Alfred Sant exposing the government's plans for a new system of financing public healthcare, and the damning MEPA auditor's report which prompted the mass resignation of the DCC board, Lawrence Gonzi had to endure the last straw.

A few minutes before his debate in Naxxar, Lawrence Gonzi slipped and injured his right thumb. Evidently in great pain and at times sweating, on Wednesday night the premier still put on a brave face to answer questions by former Sunday Times editor Lawrence Grech.

Gonzi's personal bodyguard was seen pushing people away from the Prime Minister's right hand. A few hours later, Lawrence Gonzi had a meeting with youths in Tarxien, this time round showing up with his thumb wrapped in a bandage.

"The pain is enormous. It's martyrdom," Gonzi told MaltaToday yesterday morning. "I brought a doctor to check my thumb."

With his swollen blue thumb, Gonzi yesterday tried hard juggling his normal duties around. He constantly greeted people with his left hand, and he had to rely on his entourage to arrange his shirt before events.



AT EASE - Lawrence Gonzi's sore thumb meant he was unable to even tuck his shirt in. Luckily, his aides were more than willing to smarten him up before his encounter with supporters at Villa Arrigo yesterday

And when asked to join young students with their interactive assignments at St Elmo Valletta Primary School, Gonzi had no other option but to push buttons with his left fingers. He confided with this paper

that his toughest chore was to sign PN scarves at the end of party activities. Then again, after such a trying Wednesday, Gonzi did brave all the day's activities despite the mishap. Thumbs up for perseverance!

Gonzi avoids questions on health fees, says tax cuts for next budget



LAWRENCE Gonzi yesterday avoided questions about a health financing reform policy paper which had proposed the introduction of payment for public healthcare.

The 2004 document, revealed by Opposition leader Dr Alfred Sant on Wednesday, specifies that "the Cabinet has agreed in principle to this concept but fees for Maltese citizens will not be introduced for the moment due to their political underpinnings."

During a PN activity in Naxxar, Lawrence Gonzi reiterated once again that he had notched up a list of successful results with unemployment reaching its lowest ever level, with the number of gainfully occupied persons up to 170,000, and that his government introduced numerous incentives to attract women back to the workforce.

He said the income tax cuts the PN has proposed would be included in the next budget if re-elected. Gonzi mentioned as examples the SmartCity project, the investments of Lufthansa Technik, HSBC and several pharmaceutical companies.

He reminded his audience that

his party is promising a one-year tax holiday for women who re-enter employment, for each child born from 2007 onwards. These incentives will generate "more work and better work", Gonzi insisted, saying women would have better jobs. "Instead of sewing jeans, females can work on aircraft maintenance."

At the end of a PN event in Naxxar, journalists were instructed not to leave their seats until Gonzi's exit from the building. Only a NET TV journalist was allowed to ask Gonzi a question as he was being ushered out of the building, avoiding any questions from other journalists.

"It is more than clear that the MLP is panicking. The Labour Party has its back against the wall, and has no other solutions for the challenges ahead. The truth is that when Sant was Prime Minister he came up with a tax on medicine," Gonzi told the journalist.

Despite being asked by MaltaToday on the fact that Cabinet had agreed in principle with the introduction of fees for public healthcare, Gonzi walked towards his car and instead focused on a reply to the NET crew.



TAG TEAM - With wife Kate in tow, Gonzi yesterday said he would introduce the tax cuts pledged during this election by Budget 2009



YOUTH ATTACK - Gonzi made a late appearance on Wednesday night in Tarxien to meet his younger voters, who turned out en masse for the party, with an evidently pleased Gonzi giving supporters a rousing speech

PHOTOGRAPH BY GILBERT CALLEJA



Labour leader Alfred Sant yesterday met local operators and tourism stakeholders to discuss Labour's plans for the regeneration of the northeast



Labour proposes rehaul of northeast harbour to favour tourism

DAVID DARMANIN

GATHERING the press, constituted bodies and a sizeable group of tourism key-players based in the North-East Harbour district, Labour Leader Alfred Sant yesterday described his proposals on a regional plan for the regeneration of Bugibba, Qawra, St Paul's Bay and Xemxija.

Further to an extensive consultation process spearheaded by the Labour spokesperson for tourism last summer, a plan was published with an aim to redevelop the area into a tourism mecca. "A new Labour government," Sant said, "will appoint a 'task force' led by the prime minister and incorporating relevant ministers, entrepreneurs and social partners. Together, we will draft and implement a zone-specific business plan with a clear objective to favour a new beginning for tourism in the area."

Proposing that the action plan for the regeneration of the area is staggered in three separate phases, Sant went on to list the main priorities set by the Labour Party for the area.

"First, we need to appoint a Tourism Zone Management Committee, empowered with its own resources and executive power," he said. Such committee would be able to take over the maintenance, public cleanliness, waste collection as well as the development and overlooking of public facilities – including an effective information system geared for tourists and road signs.

"The Committee office would also serve as a one-stop-shop for administrative needs of the tourism operators in the area."

Without going into specifics, Sant mentioned that this committee would also work with the local council in keeping a balance for residential use of public space and coastal areas.

Enforcement of regulations limiting noise pollution caused

by construction development was also mentioned. This would be aimed at protecting both hotel guests and residents from some of the unnecessary inconveniences caused by neighbouring construction sites.

Other than that, Sant failed to outline any plans for residential harmonisation once tourism in the area is boosted as the MLP is hoping to achieve. Although this newspaper was prepared to ask on possible plans in this regard, questions from the press were first pushed forward, and then denied on grounds of the event "not being a press conference."

The Labour Leader went on to mention a set of fiscal incentives aimed at demolishing old hotels and reconstruct newer ones, the "identification of the remaining public space" to develop new hotels, as well as for any investment aimed at improving the existing facilities within the area.

"A scheme shall be made avail-

able to act as an incentive to owners of vacant apartments in the area to rent their properties out to tourists. This way, besides increasing 3-star hotels in the area, we would be also increasing bed capacity for self-catering accommodation."

Another incentive proposed is for the "better use" of coastal space in the area, with a view to develop more sandy beaches, a large yacht marina as well as a breakwater to cater for maritime facilities and niche tourism needs – such as diving and marine excursions.

On this, a spokesperson for the Classic Car Museum in Bugibba spoke of a business proposal for a service that caters for cruise ships in the area. Unaware of such discussions, Sant confirmed the proposal with spokesperson for tourism Evarist Bartolo, who he was flanked by. "A number of foreign companies are also interested in investing in this project,"

Bartolo explained. In reply, Sant said that he "would see a yacht marina work better, but we won't rule anything out – if it works, it works." He then mentioned a business proposal for the area that, under the Nationalist government, was neither denied nor granted. "It was left pending," he said, "and this is unacceptable."

On marketing and branding, Sant explained that there should be "a strong campaign in Northern European Countries run by the government, local tourism operators, Air Malta and other airlines so that older people in cold countries would be able to spend their winter months in Malta."

"By means of a private-public partnership," Sant continued, "a car park taking a capacity of 3,000 vehicles will be developed in the heart of Bugibba, together with numerous other car parks in the area," adding that a park-and-ride scheme similar to the one

operating in Valletta shall also be encouraged in the area.

Also mentioned was the development of a new bus terminal, specific branding of the area as well as human resource training for personnel working in the tourism sector within the region.

From the floor, a GRTU spokesperson deemed the plan commendable, but suggested a wider focus on infrastructure – especially with regards to waste management and public lighting. Street lighting was an issue also echoed in other comments taken from the floor.

Godwin Cutajar, who chairs a committee representing restaurants and bars of the area in question intervened in an appeal to pay special attention to executive power granted to the proposed committee, since when a similar set-up for Bugibba was founded in the late 1970s "the committee used to take decisions but had no power to implement them."



BIRTHDAY BOY - surrounded by party officials, Alfred Sant yesterday celebrated his 60th birthday, taking a break from the hectic electoral race for some cake and champagne

Brincat accuses government of scaring off IT investors

MATTHEW VELLA

LABOUR MP and Information Technology shadow minister Leo Brincat yesterday expressed his condemnation of the Nationalist Party's refusal to take on an invitation for national consensus on IT. Brincat said many people of

good will and especially main operators in IT were taken aback by the fact that IT minister Austin Gatt had "capriciously chosen to categorically refuse the MLP's invitation for national consensus on IT as the two parties had done previously during the early 1990s."

Brincat said it was a nega-

tive sign to foreign countries which caused harm to the IT industry. "This ties in with foreign reports from IT operators who were approached by high officials warning them that if Labour was elected their IT business would be destroyed, that Labour wanted to discontinue the MyPotential scheme, and

for IT companies to tell their workers to exercise the right to vote cautiously and warn them of the repercussions of a Labour victory."

Brincat said the ball was now in Gonzi's court to declare whether he supported Gatt's negative statement. "His answer is urgently expected from both local and foreign

industry players who asked me for peace of mind on the consequences of a Nationalist loss at the elections. If Gonzi stays silent at this crucial moment, his silence will serve to confirm his complicity in this destructive negative campaign which has put vote hunting before the national interest."



THE ONLY BOATS ANGLU WANTS TO SEE
 Anglu Xuereb's press conference on tourism was yesterday held at the Valletta waterfront by the cruise liner terminal, in which he has a stake, and possibly the only source of 'boat people' Xuereb must appreciate. Yesterday he claimed asylum seekers are keeping tourists away from Malta

Xuereb claims immigrants "keep away tourists from coming to Malta"

CHARLOT ZAHRA

FAR-RIGHT party Azzjoni Nazzjonali (AN) deputy leader Angelo Xuereb continued with the party's anti-immigration rhetoric during a press conference on the party's proposals on tourism yesterday morning at the Valletta Waterfront.

"If we open more Open Centres in the localities, we can change for the worse the attraction that our country has because of its safety record," Xuereb, one of the country's major tourism entrepreneurs on the Island, said during his one-hour speech.

Challenged by MaltaToday to elaborate on this statement which makes a mockery of intercultural dialogue, one of the main purposes of tourism, Xuereb was oblivious to this.

"Go and ask the residents of Birzebbugia and Balzan where there are the Open Centres. The culture is different, there is fear. The general public shows empathy towards a foreigner because

they really do suffer.

"We do not have any problems with them as individuals, but when they come in masse, then that's the problem. If 100, 200 come, probably they will spread with a village. But if you have a thousand people, then that's different.

"On Wednesday, I was on a television programme together with Mgr (Philip) Calleja and a number of refugees on UTV. During that programme, the Colonel (Brian Gatt, head of the Detention Services) mentioned that 50% of the 8,870 boat people that landed in Malta come here for an economic reason, not because they have poverty in their country, but simply to have a better life.

"We speak of them as 'insieken'. Therefore we are speaking of 50% and he said it not once, not twice, but three times. However when they asked them during the TV programme why they wanted to come to Malta, they said they came for a better life.

"There were others who really said they came from Sudan, because they said they had hardships there."

Xuereb then paraded a proposal that is one of the darlings of the far right. "I come out with idea: if we had to propose to the European Union (EU) to give a guarantee to private investment that is made in their countries so as to create wealth and job at their home countries.

"I asked them: would you go back to your own countries? They said: No, we want to go to Europe.

"Come on! We welcome them, but if I had to employ somebody, I would employ a Maltese national. They want to stay on as Malta is beautiful!

"If you have an Open Centre – we already have three of those which are a no-go area. Imagine having an Open Centre in each town and village in Malta. We will end up with no-go areas all over the island. Then tourists will come here and say: Why did I come here at all?" Xuereb

Imagine having an Open Centre in each town and village in Malta. We will end up with no-go areas all over the island

claimed.

Asked by MaltaToday whether AN agreed with Opposition Leader Alfred Sant's proposal of building a golf course at Magtab, Xuereb said the party was in favour of one golf course in Malta, but would not commit himself on a location when asked to do so.

"MEPA had already identified 5 places in 1990 where golf courses can be built, it's up to MEPA to see where it should be located. We surely need a golf course if we want to attract quality tourists, we must give them the quality service they are expecting."

At this point, AN leader Josie Muscat said that when the Prime Minister had changed the Xaghra l-Hamra project into an environment park, he had instructed MEPA to identify three different areas for a golf course. "They should have identified these areas by now," Muscat said.

czahra@mediatoday.com.mt

AD threatens legal action against Polidano and Lidl



TAKING ON BIG BUSINESS - AD says it will take action to halt the construction of the Lidl supermarket, behind. From left - AD candidates Saviour Sammut, Patrick Galea, Carmel Cacopardo, AD chairperson Harry Vassallo, Ralph Cassar and Chris Mizzi

DAVID DARMANIN

HOT on the heels of Alternattiva Demokratika's (AD) publication of a red-hot MEPA Audit Office report yesterday, and the consequent en masse resignation of MEPA's Development Control Committee (DCC), AD yesterday called a press conference outside the Lidl construction site in Safi, asking for a revocation of the site's development permit, which "as the Audit Office report testifies, was issued illegally."

The issue concerns the issue of a permit for the construction of the supermarket by developer Charles Polidano in Safi, in an outside development zone. The report by MEPA's auditor Joe Falzon was published earlier this week after pressure by Alternattiva Demokratika.

AD yesterday warned it would sue the developers and take international action against the German supermarket giant Lidl if the permit was not revoked.

AD's spokesperson for sustainable development Carmel Cacopardo said: "The decision to build a supermarket outside the development zone (ODZ) goes against the local plan that applies to Safi," adding that de-

velopment had not been submitted to environmental impact assessment, as regulations require.

Expressing satisfaction with the DCC's collective resignation on Wednesday evening, Cacopardo described the deed as one that confirms the "acceptance of responsibility for what they (DCC members) did."

But the DCC board yesterday also said it had resigned in protest at the MEPA auditor's report.

"The next step," he added, "is that the people who appointed the committee also accept their political responsibility. The committee members were appointed by government – by the Prime Minister and the Minister for the Environment and Rural Affairs in particular. Therefore, the government is obliged to offer an immediate remedy by revoking the permit for this supermarket."

Accusing Minister George Pullicino for irregularly extending development zones, Cacopardo added that "with the extension, Pullicino committed himself to allow development permits to be issued only within development zones."

"If no action is taken it means that the words uttered by the minister were merely for pur-

poses of gratuitous propaganda," Cacopardo said.

On his part, AD Chairperson Harry Vassallo cited proposals on the Greens' coalition manifesto, assuring that "in a coalition government, AD will not allow committee appointments to be made by ministers, but by a parliamentary committee after a public hearing," adding that such methods would decrease the risk of public appointees turning out to be "disloyal to the community."

Vassallo also took the timely opportunity to insist on the need for the introduction of laws aimed to regulate political party financing – a matter he described as one that led to "both PN and MLP dragging their feet for years over."

Asked by MaltaToday about what steps AD would be ready to take if the government refuses his appeal to revoke the permit, Vassallo said: "We will be taking action against the developers in order to halt the construction and have the site restored to its original state. Furthermore, one needs to understand that a multinational organisation is behind this development. We would also consider applying pressure through the German Greens over this issue."

Arnold Cassola in double election race

CHARLOT ZAHRA

ALTERNATTIVA Demokratika candidate Arnold Cassola has confirmed he will be on the Italian Greens' list for the upcoming Italian elections, making Cassola an electoral contestant in two elections.

The nominations for the Italian elections in fact close on 5 March, just three days ahead of Malta's general elections.

"I can confirm that the Italian Greens have put my name on the list for the next, where I will be one in a list of a number of candidates, although the list has not been finalised yet. I am concentrating on the general election in Malta, however if the Italian Greens think that putting my name on the list will help, then it's no problem for me,"



Cassola said yesterday. Claudio Paroli, from the organising committee of the La Sinistra – Arcobaleno (the Left – the Rainbow), said in an interview that Cassola would be featuring again in the European list, from where he was elected back in 2006, making him the first Maltese MP in the Italian parliament.

The Italian greens are part of a left-wing federation of parties in Italy launched back in December 2007 to unite Italian left parties, after the centre-left Democratic Party decided to contest the April elections alone. The Left-Rainbow federation comprises the Communist Refoundation Party, the Party of Italian Communists, the Greens, and the Democratic Left (SD).

OP



Ralph Cassar

Stopping the haemorrhage in healthcare

As a progressive party Alternattiva Demokratika – The Green Party, upholds the principle that the State should guarantee the provision of a comprehensive, free health service for all residents of Malta and Gozo.

It is with concern that we note that Mater Dei Hospital and the various health centres all over the island are dangerously understaffed. This is creating a bottleneck in the provision of an efficient service as promised by the present government and a health peril for all patients making use of the State's health service. The building of a new hospital has by no means resolved the cri-

sis in the health sector, which has dogged government for a number of years. This problem is bound to exacerbate with time unless remedial action is taken. We are informed that the vast majority (75% or more) of the final year medicine students have already made arrangements with hospitals in the UK, in

order to be able to undergo their pre-registration training there followed by employment within Britain's NHS. This rapid bleeding of healthcare professionals overseas has been going on since Malta's accession to the EU and is one of the major reasons behind the critical paucity of junior medical staff at Mater Dei.

The driving forces behind this exodus of newly-grad medics are the miserable working conditions (including salaries) and the lack of a well defined career progression path for junior doctors to progress towards higher ranks in timely manner and not at the whims of politicians.

Alternattiva Demokratika – The Green Party believes that it is imperative for Malta to try to stop this haemorrhage in human resources. A country which has a scarcity in a resource should go to great pains to make sure that it does not lose more of this precious resource. Unless it is addressed, this problem will seriously cripple the health service in Malta. In fact we have already started to witness this in primary care centres, outpatient clinics and a number of wards which to date are still being kept closed at Mater Dei Hospital. Medical staff is even made to cover multiple areas under the smokescreen of redeployment.

We support the government's move to propose a better salary package to all consultants. However we believe that the government should offer junior doctors a more attractive entry-level salary package.

Although we acknowledge that it might be impossible for the Maltese government to match the conditions being offered by the hospitals in the UK, it can at least try to narrow the gap. AD also believes that once the junior doctors acquire a certain amount of years of experience, they should automatically progress in their careers without having to wait for the issuing of a call for applications.

As from this year, pharmacists who graduated before the accession date of 2004 will now become eligible to relocate to the UK as well. This group by far constitutes the majority of pharmacists in government employment and will further undermine a service which is already in crisis. In our electoral manifesto entitled *Bil vot tieghek il-bidla* (your vote means change) which is downloadable from: www.alternattiva.org.mt (Downloads) we proposed that the government should offer all the health care professionals a more attractive salary package and career pathway.

A government who has invested €700 million in a hospital should not and cannot shy away from investing in qualified staff to man the hospital itself. Unless of course Government is shortsighted so much to miss the wood for the trees.

Ralph Cassar is a candidate for Alternattiva Demokratika on the 7th and 11th districts

OP



Joseph Muscat

You won't find this in directives

Over the past decade, the county's conservative establishment successfully encroached on the European Union issue, culminating in membership in 2004. Since then, it is increasingly clear that the incumbent political elite is out of its depth.

The first – and maybe minor – problem is one of political fatigue. The last general elections were all about EU membership. Effectively the outgoing's government political mandate expired with the signing of the Accession Treaty some days after the elections. The target was getting Malta in the EU and there was evidently no post-membership action plan.

The second, more significant, problem is that the conservatives are realising that they drove the country in an essentially progressive bloc where people of my ilk are more comfortable in sharing common European values than centre-right representatives.

Labour's main pre-membership argument was the economic and bureaucratic burden of accession would be too trying on our fragile economy. Nevertheless, La-

bour never questioned the key values that make us Europeans. Indeed, recent history shows that when in government, Labour introduced some of the most mainstream European legislation that modernised this country: the separation between state and church, the raising of mini-

mum education age, giving women their natural right to vote, the decriminalisation of homosexuality, the introduction of pensions and thorough social services, the introduction of a minimum wage, just to mention a few.

Thus, it should come as no surprise that Labour hit the

ground running when it won the European Parliament elections and became an integral part of the Group of European Socialists.

Labour in government will have a proactive European agenda, promoting European values while safeguarding the national interest. Malta's

European Union membership is not being called into question. The Nationalist Party's attempts to inculcate doubts about this is simply a last resort smear campaign.

Our society deserves much better than this. We should be focusing on the generational culture change that is needed to take this country up to a higher level. We will not find how to do this written down in one directive or another. It is the change that comes from within ourselves.

Take governance principles, for example.

Being European means firing a minister who wants to reinstate public servants being found guilty of corruption.

Being European means that political office holders must quit their business when taking up their posts.

Being European means never considering awarding a sensitive public contract to a company owned by the family of a convicted drugs lord involved in a major corruption scandal.

I hope that the next five years will mark the beginning of this culture change.

Joseph Muscat is a Labour Member of the European Parliament



Labour in government will have a proactive European agenda, promoting European values while safeguarding the national interest. Malta's EU membership is not being called into question. The PN's attempts to inculcate doubts about this is simply a last resort smear campaign.

Since the introduction of the euro on January 1, 2008, the National Euro Changeover Committee has been monitoring and investigating complaints about price increases to ensure that the euro changeover process is a fair deal to consumers.

The NECC informs complainants of the outcome of the investigation in every occasion whether it was proved that their complaint was justified and also when it was found that retailers and business operators acted fairly, correctly and according to the law.



The results of the NECC's work so far is as follows:

107

In 107 cases the prices of products and services were reverted back to their original price

96

96 complaints proved to be unjustified or untrue and cases were closed

77

The NECC issued 77 warnings

We promised to continue working to safeguard your interest. This is precisely what we're doing.

Linja Ewro 154

euro@gov.mt

Health WARNING Vote Gonzi and pay for health care

"The Cabinet has agreed in principle to this concept, but fees for Maltese citizens will not be introduced for the moment due to their political underpinnings."

Health Financing Reform Policy Proposal, Ministry of Health, the Elderly and Community Care, December 2004

One News: Can you exclude that you have or ever had plans to introduce fees for health care?

Lawrence Gonzi: Yes, I exclude it completely.

One News, 11 February 2008

Labour. The only way.



OP



Tonio Fenech

opinion

Prudence when using taxpayers' money

Another word for subsidies is "state aid" and state aid means taxpayers' money. In paying out subsidies governments are effectively spending taxpayers' money.

This meaning is all too often forgotten when arguments are made on how governments should be generous in dishing out subsidies. Rather, I would argue that governments should be prudent in using taxpayers' money.

The PN policy position on subsidies has always been to spend taxpayers' money sparingly and without indulgence.

This is not say that we say an outright "no" to state aid.

There are areas where it is right and proper to use state aid to stimulate economic growth, to encourage business and to promote the creation of new jobs.

In such cases, the PN prefers to use other forms of state aid, such as tax incentives, rather than subsidies which typically consist of cash hand-outs in the form of grants.

This is why the PN's main electoral platform is a set of attractive tax incentives consisting of significant income tax reductions for workers, women, professionals, self-employed persons, traders and

small businesses.

Chief of these is the 35% income tax rate which will go down to a maximum of 25% for all those earning up to €60,000 (Lm25,758).

PN governments have already reduced income tax on a number of occasions and twice in a row in the last two years alone. The results have always been a boost in economic growth but also a consequent increase in tax revenues. Lower tax rates make extra effort pay and so increase productivity, encourage investment and stimulate economic growth, thus generating more earning for works and profits for the self employed also contributing further to the sustainability of public finances.

Tax incentives are also used regularly to attract investment as well as to stimulate job creation, training and research, amongst others.

We subscribe to this type of state aid as it has always paid for itself and more.

On the other hand, state aid in the form of subsidies has a history of becoming a lifeline on which beneficiaries become over-dependent. Subsidies reward the status quo, reward inefficiencies and keep a business merely in a position

of trying to make ends meet. They do not reward extra effort or encourage investment and are merely a drain on public finances. At the end of the day it is only investment and higher productivity that creates jobs and wealth.

For this reason, we have always sought to curtail the use of subsidies, financial handouts, in the case of state-owned companies which, by definition, should operate on a commercial basis.

The use of subsidies in the case PBS, Gozo Channel and the shipyards are a case in point. We have already returned the first two to profitability and we are undertaking a restructuring programme with the objective of returning the shipyards to viability too.

Over the past years, in line with Malta's EU Accession Treaty, we have to financially support the shipyards. This shows our strong commitment to returning the yards to viability and if anything, we were at times accused of having been too generous.

We also agree to support other sectors, such as agriculture, which are important not just in their own right but also for the country, notably for the protection of the environ-



We want to continue supporting all families with a subsidy on their water and electricity bills as is already the case today



Josie Muscat

ment and the preservation of our countryside.

Finally, the term "subsidies" is often also used to refer to social assistance support. I think we must be clear on this point. For the PN, social support is right and proper in a society that espouses solidarity as one of its values.

In such cases, the state is not supporting what should otherwise be commercial operations. It is supporting citizens, especially those mostly in need and those in whom we are committed to invest. Hence the justification.

This is why we support a continued state support for social assistance programmes.

This is why we strongly invest in educational and public health services.

This is also why we want to continue investing in our stipends system.

This is also why we want to continue supporting all families with a subsidy on their water and electricity bills as is already the case today.

And this why we are also committed to continue relieving from the surcharge altogether some 30,000 families who are most in need.

Tonio Fenech is Parliamentary Secretary for Finance

OP

A moral approach, a Christian inheritance

I have practised the medical profession for forty years. A doctor's duty is to try and heal the body. In the modern age however, in order to do that we frequently have to try and discover the psychological roots that very often are the cause of the physical trauma.

And what I see in my surgery often shocks me: mothers who are anxious to discover why their teenage unmarried daughter has failed to become pregnant; married men who bring in their foreign girlfriends, how acquired I dare not ask, and interested only in knowing if they have HIV; single mothers who claim they do not know who fathered the child they are carrying. And I have to do the best I can for them, for my moral convictions cannot override the oath I had taken to help all those who need my help; a distinction that seems to be beyond the ability of certain journalists to grasp.

So of course I am concerned about the family. All available research emphasises how the health of any society utterly depends on stable families. I never buy the argument that goes "But what can you do? This is the present. You cannot turn back the clock."

That does not mean that nothing should be done to combat the loss of that fine distinction between liberty and what, in Maltese, we call *libertinagg*, which is the shedding of all forms of responsibility. I do not



I strongly believe that a society without morality is a failed society

ing should be done to combat the loss of that fine distinction between liberty and what, in Maltese, we call *libertinagg*, which is the shedding of all forms of responsibility. I do not

accept that moral restraint is an old-fashioned idea that has had its day. On the contrary I strongly believe that a society without morality is a failed society, and whoever supports this lack of morality, for whatever reason, is a person with a serious moral deficit.

In a seminar on sexuality and the beginning of life held in February 2005 at the Millennium Chapel, the Minister for the Family and Social Solidarity declared "today it's a fact that premarital pregnancies, especially amongst adolescents, is increasing. The number of separations between young couples is also increasing."

The Minister goes on to state: "This is happening despite the fact that Malta has developed a liberal education in this field. Indeed our schools, sex and sexuality... form an integral part of subjects like biology, personal social development, and religious studies."

Maybe so, but it is obviously not working. In the same seminar, the National Obstetrics Information System was quoted to show that 17% of all deliveries were to mothers who were never married, while 5% were girls below fifteen years of age and therefore still attending school.

No wonder that the National Council of Women have asked for better sex education in our schools, and why all those in the sector will tell you that that young girls just do not know enough about safe sex.

That seminar suggested that educational programmes not only emphasise the importance and meaning of love and sex but also teach that both carry a strong burden of responsibility. A reference was also made to an article in the "Il-Gens" issue of the 8 January 2005, which suggested that certain measures taken by the State were having the contrary effect to what was desired; that in fact they were helping to create a mentality of "hawwad... imbaghad jahseb l-Istat." (Mess up, and then the State cleans up after you).

This is exactly what Azzjoni Nazzjonali means when it insists that it is counter-productive to allow a single mother to declare that the father of the child was "unknown": that these fathers should be made to support their offspring and not expect society to do it for them; that the Benefits System is in urgent need of a complete redrawing.

It is indeed unfortunate that the "liberal" brigade seems all too eager to condemn any

moral approach that stems from our Christian inheritance. Not content to adopt a liberal lifestyle themselves, they seek to foist it upon the nation.

So yes, Azzjoni Nazzjonali will: Financially support families so that no mother should be forced to go to work.

Will demand that single mothers name the father of their children. It is his duty to support the offspring he helped bring into the world. If this support is not possible then the State will provide until such time that it is. Responsibility needs to be learned the hard way.

Will help young couples to acquire a residence without letting the huge burden of debt destroy their relationship.

Will ensure that there are appropriate programmes of sex education in our schools.

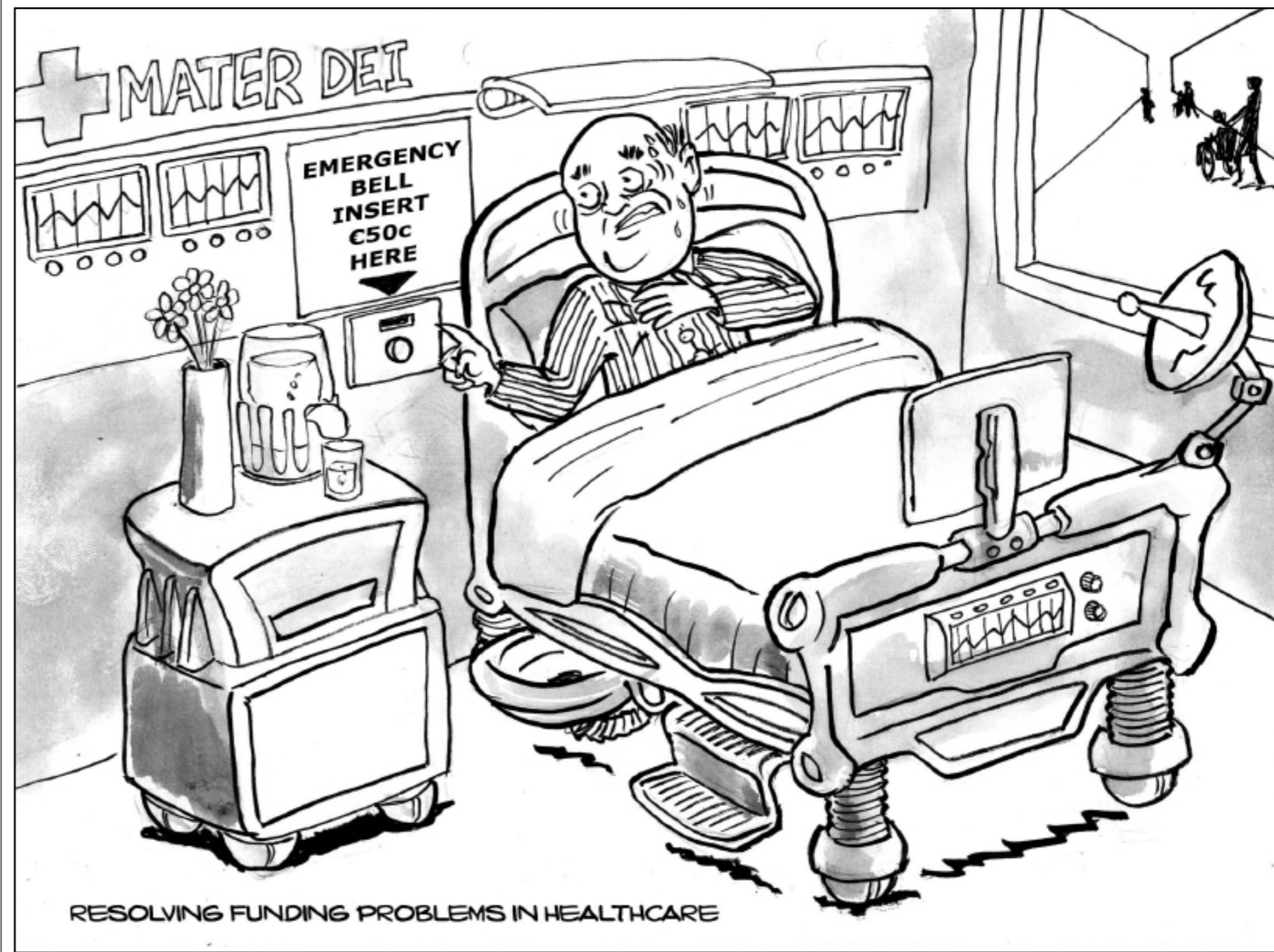
Will ensure that students leave schooling with the necessary skills to find work, whether as employees or as self-employed.

Will review the Benefits System to strike off the list those who have no right to live at the expense of the honest citizen.

Azzjoni Nazzjonali means what it says and says what it means.

Josie Muscat is the leader of Azzjoni Nazzjonali

editorial



maltatoday
Editorial

MALTATODAY, MEDIATODAY LTD, VJAL IR-RIHAN, SAN GWANN SGN 9016 • MANAGING DIRECTOR: ROGER de GIORGIO • MANAGING EDITOR: SAVIOUR BALZAN • ACTING EDITOR: MATTHEW VELLA
Tel: (356) 21 382741-3, 21 382745-6 • Fax: (356) 21 385075 • Website: www.maltatoday.com.mt • E-mail: maltatoday@mediatoday.com.mt

Exposing and reforming MEPA

THE MEPA auditor's report slamming the permit issued by MEPA for the development of a supermarket in Safi as 'grossly irregular', has stirred up a real hornet's nest with far reaching political consequences.

This criticism brings into play the credibility of MEPA and that of the DCC board members, all of whom (bar an absent member) voted in favour of the development, in defiance of the refusal of the planning directorate, as well as the timing of the report, strategically released, just ten days before the election.

The auditor criticised this decision on various grounds. Firstly, the application related to an outside development zone and the sheer magnitude of the project required an environmental impact assessment. He also stressed that the DCC did not base its decision on approved policies. The auditor further recommended that an amendment to the development planning act be introduced allowing permits to be modified or withdrawn if issued against official policies.

This permit can be taken as a case study on just how the authority set up to ensure sustainable development should not act, and raises the question of the criteria for competence and accountability of MEPA, which has been at the centre of controversy ever since its inception. This case raises many queries. Should the DCC members carry on being appointed by the Prime Minister or rather should their appointments be sanctioned also by parliament? Should practising members of the architectural profession be members of this board or does this create a conflict of interest? What latitude does the DCC have to overrule a decision of the planning directorate? Are there sufficient legally binding criteria for approval of developments or are these being capriciously overruled at DCC level?

Equally pertinent is the question of why did the DCC members resign en masse: was it because their justifications for their own decision were brushed aside by the auditor and/or also because they were bowing down to their call to resign from the complainant, which happens also to be a political party?

This case serves as sufficient evidence that MEPA is due for root and branch reform, confirming the decision taken by the prime minister to captain and anchor this authority in his second administration if he is re-elected. Lawrence Gonzi's agreement with and acceptance of the recommendations of the auditor and the willingness on his part to implement the recommendations shows political maturity, and also a sense of political expediency, as he was left with no alternative but to accept and look ahead lest this issue derails his election campaign.

In accepting the recommendations, what is the prime minister effectively deciding? Does this mean that this 'legally' granted permit will be revoked? Is this legally possible? Is the prime minister hinting that a way to revoke the license will be found, as was the case with Ramla il-Hamra? Whatever the answer, the prime minister is acting correctly in committing himself to implementing the recommendations rather than trying to defend the indefensible.

The proverbial bull must be grabbed by the horns and for MEPA to really be

the custodian of sustainable development, a number of priorities must be set. The authority must be autonomous in its actions. This effectively means de-politicising it and making all major appointments subject to parliamentary scrutiny. Members of all boards should declare their interests before appointment. A stricter definition needs to be given to outside development zones by limiting the exceptions to the overriding principle, and certainly by insisting that environment impact assessments be made compulsory in developments of a major nature. Appointees should be given a strict term without possibility of re-appointment. The representatives of the political parties should not sit on the MEPA board while the board should further open up to non-government organisations.

This supermarket saga leaves little doubt that the reform of MEPA must be a top priority for the incoming government because it raises eyebrows on the way planning policy has been interpreted by the DCC in the granting of a permit for a large supermarket in an outside development zone.

Elderly woman dies in house fire

A 72-year old woman, Pina Callus, died tragically early yesterday afternoon when her bedroom caught fire. The incident, in Carmel Street, Luqa, happened at around 12.30pm. The mother of six, who was bedridden, lived with two of her adult sons but was alone in the house at the time. Sources believe the fire could have been ignited by a cigarette burn on the bed. Magistrate Antonio Mizzi launched a magisterial inquiry and police investigations are under way.

Man jailed for violating probation order

A 22-year-old man from Zabbar was jailed for a year after a court found that he had violated the conditions of a probation order. Gary Mifsud had been placed on probation for three years in March 2006 after being convicted of drug and fraud charges. His probation officer, however, testified that the accused had not followed his directives. The man was said to have suffered from drug problems and had been found guilty of fraud but in August 2006 was found having broken the court's orders. He was then ordered to start a residential rehabilitation programme, and warned he would be imprisoned and fined should he break the order. The court was presided by Magistrate Lawrence Quintano. The Prosecution was led by Inspector Dennis Theuma.



The real workers' party

Labour calls itself *il-partit tal-haddiema*. Then it does nothing to generate work and everything to bring on trouble and massive job losses. The decades-long track record of *il-partit tal-haddiema* is an unbeatable one of sending Malta spiralling into recession with sky-high unemployment.

The Nationalist Party is the real workers' party, putting job creation at the top of its priority list. This government has generated 20,000 jobs in just four years and has brought Malta close to full employment. This is not through the creation of Labour Corps or putting people on the public sector pay-roll, but by pursuing sound economic policies and creating the right climate for investment.

Today there are almost 170,000 people in employment. This is the highest number ever in the history of Malta.

This government is committing itself to keeping the momentum going. And on the basis of its track record, you know it can be trusted to do so.

Compare this to Labour's promise to generate just 2,000 jobs a year. Alfred Sant and his men are not even aware that Malta needs 5,000 jobs a year to avoid rising unemployment. The short-fall of 3,000 jobs means that 15,000 people will join the ranks of the unemployed in five years of a Labour administration – a national disaster. We already experienced some of that during the Sant government of 1996-1998, when unemployment shot up and Malta went into recession.

Think about this when you are choosing who is best fit to govern – Lawrence Gonzi or Alfred Sant, the real workers' party or the one for whom *il-partit tal-haddiema* is just a name. This is about people's lives, their work – and yours.

You can't put a price on peace of mind.

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This is a paid advert by the Nationalist Party.



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Gonzi

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War games



Saviour Balzan

sbalzan@mediatoday.com.mt

The billboards adorn the roadsides. Smiling children on billboards vying for attention next to billboards of ministers accused of being corrupt.

Thankfully the children are not uttering blasphemy or groans and growls from The Exorcist, so no one can take them to court. Yet in the other billboard, the ministers, Nationalists of course, are being labelled as corrupt.

Now it is a perception that is very easy to glue into people's minds. But proving that any of the ministers are indeed corrupt is another thing.

It is an effective way of painting all Nationalist ministers on a permanent kickback and cash for favours, but what Nationalist ministers have done has been committed by all the politicians who have landed themselves positions as ministers. It has nothing to do with corruption. It has more to do with our political system of appointing party boys to the secretariats. Once party boys are installed in position of power, the machine of favours starts working the wrong way round and strange things start to happen.

This hullabaloo has to do with ethical behaviour and political responsibility, but not corruption. Corruption is indeed present, as it has always been; but there is little evidence that it is being perpetrated by the minister himself.

I stand to be corrected. But until now, this campaign has talked about blinkered ministers and lack of political responsibility, not hard evidence about corruption.

To me the real corruption cases were the ones before 1987 with planning permits and trade licences, and then in the early 1990s with the AWTS. But everything is a pale reflection of what happened before 1987.

So, if a member in a ministerial secretariat was discovered to be dishing out favours or taking bribes, it does not mean that the minister is corrupt. Should the minister take the flak?

Yes, he should take the political responsibility, but it does not follow that the minister is corrupt.

If Gonzi had just once accepted the resignation of Muglietti all this talk by Sant would have evaporated into

thin air. Gonzi may well regret that error in judgement.

But back to corruption and campaigning.

It is obvious that what started as a very humpty dumpty campaign by Labour has suddenly taken the PN by surprise. The PN and PM have turned their frequencies to response mode and have been robbed of their initiative to set an agenda.

And the worry in the PN camp is that Sant will pull yet another rabbit out of his hat. This time they expect the Labour leader to come with an accusation that will give them little or no time to respond.

Not all the things that Alfred Sant says are funny, but his latest reference to the corruption at Freeport is quiet funny. It involves a person who is well known for his political sympathies and those sympathies are not with PN, AN or AD but, strangely, Labour.

For good or for bad, the man in question is such a well known Labourite that he is known in his circles by a nickname, which happens to be the name of a very well known Labour minister.

Alfred Sant has taken out his secret weapon and unleashed it on the enemy. This secret weapon is mustard gas; it kills all, maims all and does not distinguish between good or bad, capable or incapable and competent or incompetent.

He says the whole Cabinet is corrupt.

All? Did you say all?

It must be the DNA, something in the molecular structure of Nationalists. According to the geneticist Alfred Sant, they must all be damned corrupt.

This is when the man loses me.

Mortal sin!

On his revelation of the secret health report, no one can blame Sant if he stands up and shows what was being discussed. Ray Xerri's – the author of the report – affidavit is rather farcical.

Come on, in the years before Gonzi became PM, I am hundred and one per cent sure that the Cabinet did discuss the idea of looking at removing some free health services.

And so, what is the big deal? Is this a mortal sin?

Again shame on the politicians for relegating this fundamental issue to the coliseum. And shame on those traditionally loquacious economists for keeping their mouths shut.

All out war

It is all out war. I am faced with two sets of acquaintances, one who ask me how could we even live under Sant, and the other saying they would rather die than living under Gonzi. And then another smaller group questions if I have any DNA left in my system that is green. The hysteria has reached incredible heights and proportions and at times it is rather farcical.

Cassolata

Well since we are on the popular subject of farce, there is nothing that should beat Arnold Cassola's decision to contest two elections, the one in Malta and the one in Italy.

I have nothing against Arnold, but surely he cannot think that it is acceptable to stand in two different sovereign countries at the same time for two separate national elections. Come on, Arnold are you Maltese or Italian?

He knows, does he not, that his chances of election in Malta are very small, but strangely rather good in Italy. And let us face it, there is nothing like a fine tiramisù in the narrow streets of Rome, nothing like the dolce vita and nothing like the vibrant evenings in Italy's towns.

If the Maltese Greens had any sense they would have convinced Arnold to choose between being a Maltese or an Italian, though everyone knows that really and truly Arnold is Maltese and the only things that are Italian are his smelly toes.

Now, this does not diminish my respect for the Greens, my esteem for their right to campaign and for their anger at being sidetracked by the hysterical Nationalists who believe that people owe the PN government a living.

But in my tradition of being a pain, I could not but refer to this Cassolata.

Surely, the Guinness Book of Records has a new episode to report here: a politician who stands for two elections in two different countries with two separate electorates. Wow!

Lino has the solution

The hunters are gathering next Saturday and Sunday to listen to Lino

Farrugia.

The man will probably tell his fellow brethren that he has the keys to keep them shooting at a bundle of feathers. The man who loves to dress up in white suits and ridiculous white shoes has used these occasions to hurl abuse at all those who think that hunting and trapping should not continue.

On Saturday and Sunday, Lino Farrugia will preside over "yesterday's men". Men who thought they would blast the birds to bits and pieces and that no one would stop them.

Well, as in so many other cases, the chickens have come home to roost. And the only way Lino will have his way is to organise a coup d'état and take Malta out of the EU.

And yes, together everything really is possible.

Soaring prices and a free lunch

Oil has hit \$102 a barrel and everyone is still talking of growth in the economy and cutting the surcharge and cutting taxes. Someone should give all politicians an electric shock to get them back to their senses.

This country is obsessed with giving anything and everything for free. And this must be the only nation to offer Maltese citizens the chance to return to their country and avail themselves of a free airline ticket.

But please do not worry chums, the next Prime Minister is going to solve all the problems, in fact the next PM has already figured out how the government will be offering more services by collecting less money and taxes.

It is called reverse thinking, and it overshadows everything the English speaking Maltese by the name of Edward de Bono suggests with his lateral thinking.

And since we are at it, has anyone offered a free air ticket to millionaire Edward de Bono to return to his mother country and vote? Yes, because even millionaires love free lunches.

And if de Bono does decide to return to vote, do please inform him: That if he votes PN he will keep Sant out of Castille.

That if he votes MLP he will keep Gonzi out of Castille.

That if he votes AD he will piss off a lot of people at Castille.

That if he votes AN he will piss off a lot of people at Castille.

That if he does not vote, he will be exercising his right.

That if he does not have a vote, he is indeed a lucky man!

ELECTION SPECIAL
maltatoday

WILL BE BACK NEXT MONDAY - DON'T MISS OUT



Happy birthday - Alfred Sant accepts a gift on his 60th birthday yesterday

'Birthday boy' undeterred despite Gonzi libel suit

CHARLOT ZAHRA

A crowd of ecstatic Labour supporters chanting "Viva l-Labour" and "Happy Birthday to you" welcomed Labour leader Alfred Sant in Zejtun

yesterday evening. As Sant stepped off the "Kowc tal-Bidla" in Misrah 13 ta' Dicembru together with the deputy party leaders Charles Mangion and Michael Falzon, the crowd fired a number of red squibs.

Sant radiated a beaming smile and waved at the crowd to thank them for the very warm welcome and the wishes on his 60th birthday yesterday.

This was the last leg of a whistle-stop tour on board "Il-Kowc tal-Bidla" which also took him to Birzebbuga and Marsaxlokk, where he was welcomed with a "12-petard salute".

Passing on to business, the Labour leader accused the Nationalist government of lack of transparency in its decisions, where corruption and incompetence are rife in order to help out the blue-eyed boys.

"A new Labour government will adopt zero tolerance against corruption," Sant insisted.

The latest case of corruption was revealed a few days ago, where people had to pay thousands of liri to get a job with the Malta Freeport.

Referring to the scathing MEPA internal auditor's report about the award of a development permit to Charles Polidano "Ic-Caqnu" for a Lidl supermarket in an ODZ area outside Safi - which led to the resignation of the Development Control Commission en masse - Sant did not mince his words. "This is another case of corruption," he said.

"Gonzi has sued me for libel for calling him a 'liar' about the report on the financing of the public health sector, as well as for describing him as 'corrupt' in an interview with The Sunday Times. He can sue me for another libel now," he challenged the Prime Minister.

"If he was not corrupt, Gonzi would have introduced the Whistleblower Act four years ago. We will protect all those who make revelations about cases of corruption," Sant pledged.

The Labour leader then asked: "Does Gonzi know about people close to him who are involved in cases of corruption in MEPA or not?"

Sant recalled the famous statement made by former Nationalist Prime Minister Eddie Fenech Adami that whoever does not fight corruption, is corrupt himself as well.

The Labour leader described as "pathetic" Gonzi's reaction to the revelation of the report which exposed how government has plans to start charging for healthcare. "The reaction was of somebody who was blatantly caught lying," Sant said.

"He used a civil servant to take ownership of the report in order to defend himself. Gonzi, you have to defend your own reputation not a civil servant!" he added.

czahra@mediatoday.com.mt



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Football

Nedved in Juve doghouse

JUVENTUS winger Pavel Nedved has been handed a two-match ban for his dismissal against Torino and is facing internal disciplinary measures.

The Czech veteran was one of the Bianconeri's better players in Tuesday evening's Derby della Mole stalemate, but he blotted his copybook with a needless dismissal.

Nedved was shown a straight red card during stoppage time for pulling Gianluca Comot-

to's hair and will miss two matches - including the weekend's heated derby against Fiorentina.

Juve President Giovanni Cobolli Gigli was reportedly livid with Nedved and has issued a fine of around £5,000.

However, the repercussions may not stop there as Cobolli Gigli and director Jean-Claude Blanc are meeting with advisers Paolo Montali and Riccardo Montanaro to discuss further disciplinary measures.



Pavel Nedved being sent off

FIGC: No anti-Juve bias

THE Italian Football Federation has issued a reply to Juventus' letter complaining of mistreatment from referees. "There is no foul play."

Juve have been the victims of a number of errors from officials this term, prompting suggestions that they are still being punished for the Calciopoli scandal.

With La Gazzetta dello Sport publishing a 'corrected' table placing the Old Lady top and players and officials at the club becoming increasingly irate, President Giovanni Cobolli Gigli sent a letter to the FIGC asking for an investigation.

However, it seems that President Giancarlo Abete hasn't found any grounds for Juve's

claims. "The bitterness on the behalf of the directors, Coaches and players of Juventus is understandable, as is the case with other sides during the course of the season," the reply letter reads.

"But there is no doubt over the impartiality of this championship and the referees' preparations. "We are sure that Juventus will get over the sadness of the past few days and the club's project will prevail."

While this response is entirely predictable, it will by no means appease the Turin side should more disputed decisions go against them in the coming weeks.

Rafa shares Gerrard pain

LIVERPOOL boss Rafa Benitez says he shares Steven Gerrard's frustration at their failure to mount a serious title challenge this season. The Reds are well off the pace in the title race, sitting in fifth spot a massive 17 points behind leaders Arsenal. Skipper Gerrard launched a damning assessment of the club's league form earlier this week and Benitez says it is a view shared by everyone connected to the club and that he has no problem with Gerrard voicing his displeasure. "Everyone at Liverpool shares Steven's sentiments, there is no question about that," Benitez said. "We wanted to be further up the table and the fact that we are not is a disappointment to everyone."

Formula One

Alonso tips Hamilton for title

FERNANDO Alonso has tipped Lewis Hamilton as likely to win the drivers' championship in 2008 and says the British driver will find his second season much easier than his debut year.

"After a year things become easier and that will give him an advantage," Alonso said. "After a year you know all the circuits

and how the races go. You understand the pressures so there are many things that will give him an advantage compared to last year."

When asked if Hamilton could win the title, Alonso replied, "Possibly, yes. The two Ferraris and two McLarens will be able to fight for the championship."

Boxing

Holyfield approached by Tyson

HOLYFIELD told the Guardian newspaper that Tyson had approached him through a third party about a rematch.

Their second fight ended with Tyson, who lost to Williams in 2004 and is battling against bankruptcy, biting a chunk out of Holyfield's ear.

"Tyson is one of the greatest fighters ever - but he doesn't want to fight any more. It's purely about money."

Four-time world heavyweight champion Holyfield knocked Tyson out when they first met in 1996.

"There has been some talk between us," he said.

Tyson, once the most feared boxer alive and still the youngest man to ever to win a world heavyweight title, has run up huge debts and served

time in prison over the past decade.

Tyson's last fight came in 2005 when he stunned the boxing world by quitting against journeyman Kevin McBride, insisting he did not have "the fighting guts or the heart anymore".

Although Tyson is officially retired, Holyfield insisted the New Yorker still had it in him to box.

"I think he could - if he wanted to. I don't underestimate no man," said Holyfield. "He's 41 now. I'm four years older but the big difference is I've always kept in shape."

"Who knows with Mike? Soon after Jeff [Fenech] called, Mike went to South Africa and it's gone quiet since then."

Pursuits

Sudoku

3		4			9		8	1
		8		3	6			2
2	9			1		6	4	
8		5	6	4				
		9	5					
4					1			
		2	1				3	
		3	2		7			
		1		5			2	

Yesterday's solution

4	9	1	8	3	7	6	2	5
5	6	2	4	9	1	3	7	8
8	3	7	5	6	2	9	1	4
2	8	3	1	5	6	4	9	7
7	4	9	2	8	3	5	6	1
1	5	6	7	4	9	8	3	2
9	1	5	3	7	4	2	8	6
6	2	8	9	1	5	7	4	3
3	7	4	6	2	8	1	5	9

Sudoku rules are extremely easy: Fill all empty squares so that the numbers 1 to 9 appear once in each row, column and 9x9 box.

Chess

White to play and mate in three moves

1. Ne7+ Nxe7
2. Qc4+ Kd6
3. Bf4++

Across

- Nevertheless (7)
- Diabolical (7)
- Mistrust (7)
- Person that loses (5)
- Path (5)
- Advanced in years (3)
- Subsides (6)
- Takes fright (6)
- Lock opener (3)
- Alien (9)
- Sink or bend downward (3)
- Concurs (6)
- Toe piece (6)
- Besides (3)
- Seaport in NW Israel (5)
- Tomb (5)
- Loudly (7)
- Refuge (7)
- Flap attached to a cap (7)

Down

- Cushion for kneeling (7)
- Day for washing clothes (7)
- Capital of Austria (6)
- Dog trained to retrieve game (9)
- Rub vigorously (5)
- Put up with (8)
- Opening of the nose (7)
- Pertaining to Cornwall (7)
- Lack of knowledge (9)
- Heat to excess (8)
- Car shelters (7)
- Warship (7)
- Sporting dog (7)
- Command to a horse (7)
- Roe of sturgeon (6)
- More pleasant (5)

Answers to the MaltaToday crossword will be published tomorrow

Today's Weather

MOSTLY CLOUDY
18°C / 11°C
UV INDEX: 4

WARNINGS: Nil
WEATHER: Partly to rather cloudy
VISIBILITY: Good
WIND: Light and variable (force 2 to 3) becoming light to moderate Northwest (force 3 to 4)
SEA: Slight becoming slight to moderate
SWELL: Low Northwest

Court hears of 15-year-old's 'nightmare trauma'

RAPHAEL VASSALLO

THE lawyer defending a 15-year-old girl charged with murdering her mother last Tuesday, told the criminal court yesterday that his clients' life had become an "endless nightmare", as her mother would repeatedly send her out to buy her drugs,

and would often beat her when she refused to comply.

Dr Joseph Giglio was making his preliminary statement before Magistrate Antonio Mizzi during the arraignment of the teenage girl, who cannot be named as she is a minor.

Also arraigned before Magistrate Mizzi was Robert Zahra, a 31-year-old minivan driver from Hal-Ghaxaq. Along with the girl

he stands accused of the murder of Theresa Sciberras from San Gwann, killed by a shot from a firearm and several wounds from a pointed instrument in her home on Tuesday 26 February.

Both pleaded not guilty to all charges, which include murder, accessory to murder, possession of and trafficking in drugs, unlicensed possession of a firearm,

and attempting to conceal the corpse, among others.

In his opening statement Giglio described how the murder victim, who suffered from psychological problems, would regularly ask her daughter to buy cocaine and cannabis from Zahra.

She would also expect her daughter to prepare these substances for her own consump-

tion. This situation, Giglio said, had gone on for a long time before the murder, as can be attested by numerous reports made to the police. As a result, his client was in a state of severe trauma before, during and also after the fateful events of last Tuesday.

Requesting a care order instead of probation, Dr Giglio told the court that incarceration, under these circumstances, was "not ideal" as it would only exacerbate an already serious case of trauma.

"We must assess what lead the girl to commit such an act", he said.

After hearing submissions by both the defence and prosecution, Magistrate Mizzi acceded to the defence counsel's request to entrust the underage defendant to the Female Ward 1 at Mount Carmel Hospital, instead of incarceration at the Corradino Correctional Facilities. Mizzi also recommended that the accused be placed in the care of social workers while at the hospital.

For his part, Zahra was denied bail, had his assets frozen and was remanded in custody.

Green light to Dwejra boathouses was no election stunt - MEPA

MEPA'S Qawra and Dwejra Heritage Park Steering Committee yesterday said the controversial sanctioning of the illegal Dwejra boathouses in Gozo "was not an election stunt".

The committee said the process had been ongoing since 2005 and was part of the heritage park action plan approved by stakeholders.

The committee said the boathouses which did not conform to the plan were refused by the MEPA board.

The sanctioning all the boathouses comes with the removal of all second floors and rooftop structures and reducing boundary walls to a height of not more than 1.2 metres. Owners are to pay a major fine and a planning contribution fee that will go for the improvement and management of the area.

It also said Nature Trust and the Italian branch of the WWF had coordinated the implementation of the plan, part funded by the EU's LIFE Third Countries scheme.

The plan in fact calls for the conservation and preservation of resources and features of scientific, cultural and aesthetic interest in the area, amongst which the protection of natural and culture heritage, the setting up an educational visitors centre with information panels around the park, restriction of hunting and trapping in the area, analysing ways to slow down the erosion of the Azure Window, tackling illegal dumping and degradation connected with the nine quarries around the area.



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