

HEALTHCARE POLICIES PG 23

ELECTION EVE ARREST WARRANT



'I am not informed of this. I don't agree with the timing.' pages 10-11



PHOTOGRAPHY BY GILBERT CALLEJA

PN lead drops to 1.7% as MLP gains 5.8% **pg 5** ▶

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Newspaper post

On the record

James Debono digs in the archives to see what the candidates have been saying the last few years



Austin Gatt
PN candidate on 1st District
On public broadcasting
"In my opinion, the state does not need to own a station. It should encourage the emergence of serious private stations and farm out the public service obligation to these stations. But we have not reached this stage."
15 October 2006, MaltaToday

On the smart Dubai investors
"They will have 440 villa and apartments. Obviously they will be selling or renting these properties. They are not here for charity. They are here to make money..."

On the Smart City concept
"The Dubia Internet City concept consists of ICT offices, commercial areas and lodging areas. If we do not want it, we don't do it... we cannot benefit from the advantage of 5,600 jobs without including all three components of the concept... Our premise was that of importing to Malta the Dubai Internet City model which is the most successful information technology hub in the world."

On the dockyard
"We're in a changing market – traditional ship repair has moved to low cost countries and specialized ship repair has become a new lucrative market – if the shipyards become financially viable then we'll have a great asset for Malta. So let's not start chopping off heads before we have proved it is not viable."
20 February 2005 MaltaToday

On quality programmes on PBS
"The main argument is that the quality of broadcasting is not measurable in any other way except subjectively."
20 February 2005 MaltaToday

On reading newspapers
"I rarely read newspapers; I'm not a newspaper or television fan. I normally let my wife tell me what's going on."
20 February 2005 MaltaToday

On elections
"Basically in a country which is fully democratic, where there are no conflicts of principles... people will decide on the basis of their pockets. It all depends on how people are living and the prospects they see for their children."
15 October 2006, MaltaToday

John Dalli
PN candidate on 6th and 10th district
On asking forgiveness
"I was wrongly accused and defamed, therefore it is I who should forgive."
9 December 2007

On working under Gonzi
"I feel comfortable working with a leader who was democratically elected to lead by the people I am committed to serve."
9 December 2007

On Alfred Sant
"If it were up to Alfred Sant, I would not have been sent to the Gulag, but I would have been sent to the gallows a dozen times."
9 December 2007

On disgruntled Nationalists
"I have stated publicly when speaking in the Party General Council, in front of everyone, that I felt that many diehard Nationalists were feeling discarded. These people did not necessarily support me."
9 December 2007

On the dockyard
"There is a big increase in ship-building orders and in the prices of ship repairing. The market is there. But our costs are still very high and there must be courageous changes to address these issues, especially in the areas of work practices, productivity, flexibility, labour costs, and overhead spending."
9 December 2007

Michael Falzon
MLP candidate on 2nd and 10th Districts

On dining with Charles Polidano
"I am employed at Bank of Valletta as a lawyer and my relationship with Mr Polidano is purely professional. Mr Polidano is one of the biggest clients at the bank and I speak to some 50 contractors every day, because I handle all the contractors at the bank."
MaltaToday 4 March

On holding the picture of the Blessed Virgin in his pocket
"I am not ashamed of this, I am a Maltese and a Christian."
MaltaToday 5 March

On a frame-up against a colleague in relation to leaks on MLP's Dubai delegation
"This was nothing but a frame-up against a person who worked with me...only to damage me and the party. I was abroad at that time but two contractors who were in that famous meeting tried to contact me to warn me on what was going to happen."
May 6 2006 speech in Rabat club

On his anonymous admirer
"I received an anonymous letter as well as threats in November... whenever something illegal takes place I report it to the police...I told the Commissioner; Mr Rizzo I authorize you to proceed irrespec-

...tive of who is involved... Yesterday I told the Police Commissioner and Inspector Cordina on what was being said in the corridors of the MLP centre. I also indicated the names. I now leave it up to the police to investigate how the information was divulged."
May 6 2006 speech in Rabat club

On his intimate friends
Some intimate friends warned me to get rid of him or her even if they have done nothing. They told me that if they throw mud at you something will stick. But I have never abandoned anyone in my life. As a party we say that nobody is disposable, let alone someone who worked for the party for the past 11 years."
May 6 2006 speech in Rabat club

Carmelo Abela
MLP candidate on 2nd and 3rd districts

On doing away with the junior lyc-ue exam
"Definitely something has to be done, not only because this exam, whether we like it or not, is creating a lot of trauma for students and parents, but also because at the age of 11 we are labeling and at times excluding a lot of students... There should be a combination of exams and assessments along the scholastic year which would ease the tension that lead to negative experiences in the early years of our children."
15 May 2005 MaltaToday

On raising school leaving age to 17
"In our final plan we do not refer to the school leaving age. After discussing with stakeholders we decided that we should not commit ourselves on this. We are not committed to increase the school leaving age to 17."
10 February 2008, MaltaToday

On Gonzi's green credentials
"As PM, Gonzi is responsible for Pullicino's actions. He has to be extremely bare-faced to now say that a mistake might have been made when he extended the development zones in 2006, when he was PM and he had the ultimate responsibility. He has not even promised that he is going to reverse this decision which was made in violation of EU laws, and which constituted a sheer act of vandalism on Malta's environment."
17 February 2008 MaltaToday

On breaching the Dublin Convention
"The Dublin Convention was not drawn up with illegal immigration in mind," he replies. "It was intended for people in distress at sea. In the case of boat people, this distress is self-inflicted. After all, they knew the risks before trying to come here. Now, I am not saying that we should not rescue people in distress at sea. As in the case of St Paul, we should take them in... but only with a predetermined agreement with our partners in the EU, so that they do not stay here longer than necessary."
10 February 2008 MaltaToday

On MLPN billboards
"Look at their billboards. One accuses the other of being corrupt, and the other of now having any ideas. What kind of a choice is that? Hardly surprising that people are fed up..."
10 February 2008 MaltaToday

the necessary support and education."
10 February 2008, MaltaToday

On resurrecting trade schools
"The closure of trade schools left a gap in the secondary level. That is why many students are being lost in the way simply because they do not have an inkling for academic subjects. The mistake was closing trade schools without creating an alternative. MCAST is not an alternative to trade schools, as it starts after the age of 16."
10 February 2008, MaltaToday

Harry Vassallo
AD candidate on 8th and 10th districts
On electing 4 MPs
"Yes. Up to four people in Parliament. We can elect people from anywhere...If we don't get into parliament next time round I would resign. Eighteen years is enough to give to one's country."

On resigning from post as AD leader after the election
Irrespective of the result of the March 8 general elections, AD would have to elect a new Chairperson immediately afterwards, and Vassallo confirmed that he will be calling it a day. "I think it is a good thing that nobody stays too long in the leadership of political parties for too long. I believe I can be proud of my work for the benefit of the party."
17 February 2008 MaltaToday

On Lawrence Gonzi
Prime Minister Gonzi is in fact the only local politician in the last 41 years who sat down on a table and negotiated a political alliance, and that political alliance was going to be between PN and AD."
17 February 2008 MaltaToday

On giving children their childhood back
"We want to change the whole concept of education. We want to give childhood back to children. They spend too much time on homework and private lessons and very little time on play. Even absenteeism is a reaction against this kind of schooling. We are killing their creativity in the name of the examination rat race."
10 February 2008, MaltaToday

On streaming
"Educational experts do not agree on this. Some favour a selective system while others favour comprehensives. Others favour the introduction of both systems giving parents a right to choose. For us this is not a major issue. The most important thing for us is to ensure that every child is given

issue..."
10 June 2007

Josie Muscat
AN's candidate on 2nd and 3rd districts
On far right label
"What is far right in us? We want to elevate peoples' status higher, we are concerned with the levels of taxation being imposed upon the middle class so that their monies go to the rich, and we're concerned the gap between rich and poor is growing. Is that far right?"
17 June 2007

On marriages with foreigners
"I'm not saying it's wrong. I can't tell people who to marry. My uncle was married to an English woman; my daughter-in-law is of mixed stock but born here. But it worries me: look at single-parent families, broken marriages, more cohabiting couples and more people refusing to get married. It's this whole state of affairs that worries me, and it's being compounded. There's also illegal immigrants, which as you know are now allowed to bring their families here."
17 June 2007

On re-negotiating the EU treaty... on hunting
"No, and it's important that we stress this. Nobody is above the law. What we want to do is renegotiate the treaty 'a modo nostro'... in a way that is acceptable to both the hunters and the EU."
10 February 2008

On AN's proposal stating that "... illegal immigrants will be flown to Brussels so that the EU, that is so free with its criticism, can deal with them..."
"What's so illegal about that?"
10 February 2008 MaltaToday

On breaching the Dublin Convention
"The Dublin Convention was not drawn up with illegal immigration in mind," he replies. "It was intended for people in distress at sea. In the case of boat people, this distress is self-inflicted. After all, they knew the risks before trying to come here. Now, I am not saying that we should not rescue people in distress at sea. As in the case of St Paul, we should take them in... but only with a predetermined agreement with our partners in the EU, so that they do not stay here longer than necessary."
10 February 2008 MaltaToday

On MLPN billboards
"Look at their billboards. One accuses the other of being corrupt, and the other of now having any ideas. What kind of a choice is that? Hardly surprising that people are fed up..."
10 February 2008 MaltaToday

MEPA auditor Mistra report concluded

SABRINA AGIUS

THE Malta Environment and Planning Authority's auditor has reportedly completed his investigation into the award of a permit for a discotheque on land in Mistra owned by Nationalist MP Jeffrey Pullicino Orlando, and has handed his findings to MEPA chairman Andrew Calleja.

The report was passed on to the chairman yesterday, according to One News last night, but attempts to contact both Calleja and auditor Joe Falzon yesterday proved futile. Environmental organisation



Andrew Calleja



Jeffrey Pullicino Orlando



Joe Falzon

Flimkien ghal Ambient Ahjar (FAA) yesterday called for the findings of the auditor to be made public, while noting that Pullicino Orlando had requested that MEPA revoke the permit on his land. The Mistra area was earmarked for an open air, 8,000-capacity disco in an area that

is a Natura 2000 site. The case has now been reported to the Commissioner of Police by both the Prime Minister and the Opposition leader for an investigation into whether any monies exchanged hands over the award of the permit. FAA yesterday welcomed MEPA's recommendation to

refuse a Malta Tourism Authority proposal for the touristic development of Mistra Bay, on which the open air night club permit depended. "FAA is now strongly recommends that whichever government is elected next week, the new administration should put a stop to the threat of con-

tinuous applications Outside the Development Zone by regulating that only essential infrastructure is to be assessed by MEPA, while applications that are blatantly unsuitable will not even be considered," spokesperson Astrid Vella said.

FAA added that its is expecting that all necessary measures are taken to rehabilitate the ecologically and scientifically important saline marsh of places like the Mistra Bay area, which has been allowed to degrade and fallen subject to the development threats.

sagius@mediatoday.com.mt

'Farcical' request to revoke Mistra development

ZMINIJIETNA – Voice of the Left expressed its objection to the proposed development in Mistra of an entertainment venue.

The NGO said that it was "farcical" that since the proposed development had become an electoral issue, the owner of the land in question Jeffrey Pullicino Orlando, was now requesting MEPA to block further applications for development on his land.

"We ask what would have happened had this issue not become public knowledge. The area in question is classified by MEPA as a green area of ecological and scientific importance and falls outside the development zone. The area also falls under the Natura 2000 Conservation area. Rather than issuing an outline development permit, MEPA should not have processed this application in the first place."

Labour will revoke Mistra permit

MATTHEW VELLA

LABOUR'S environment spokespersons Joe Brincat and Roderick Galdes yesterday said a new Labour government will instantly revoke the outline permit issued abusively by MEPA to protect Mistra under the EU's Natura 2000 programmes. The spokespersons said this would be part of Labour's reforms in the MEPA operations that will ensure the "messaging about" with the management of MEPA by the Nationalist government would only be a "nightmare from the past". Labour are riding on the wave of revelations that Nationalist

candidate Jeffrey Pullicino Orlando, whose green credentials had earned him Nature Trust's "Green Politician of the Year" award, was aware of an application for an open-air 8,000 capacity disco on his land at Mistra.

"The last days of the PN in government will go down in history for the revelations of the unlimited scandal within MEPA... and the Prime Minister wants to keep everything hidden by sending Pullicino Orlando to challenge Alfred Sant, when documents prove that an outline permit was issued, and that Pullicino Orlando was informed of an application and took no steps to stop it."

FAA calls for Polidano permit withdrawal

ENVIRONMENTAL NGO Flimkien Ghal Ambient Ahjar has lent its voice to calls for the withdrawal of a permit for a supermarket outside the development zone in Safi. The Chamber of Planners of Wednesday demanded that the ODZ permit, deemed irregular by MEPA's own auditor, should be repealed by virtue of the Development Planning Act 1992, Article 13 (5).

Last year, MEPA's DCC (A) board had approved an application for a supermarket of the German Lidl chain: one of seven applications submitted by entrepreneur Charles Poli-

dano. The approval of the Safi supermarket was challenged by Alternattiva Demokratika, which last week revealed the contents of a report by MEPA auditor Joe Falzon's, which had found "gross irregularities" in the way the permit had been issued.

After the report, the DCC (A) board which approved the permit resigned en masse. If the permit is withdrawn, all works are expected to be stopped on the Safi supermarket site. FAA also expect that the land would be reverted into an agricultural area as soon as possible.

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Health & Credibility WARNING

Vote Gonzi, get more lies and pay for health care.

Another damning document! Shortly after Gonzi's cabinet discussed fees for health care services, his government informed the EU that:

"The Maltese government has proposed the establishment of a national health fund to finance the public health sector. This fund could be (...) financed in part from social security health contributions. Other potential sources of income for the national health fund include hypothecated taxes, government grants and miscellaneous fees."

Preliminary National Report on Health Care and Long Term Care, Ministry of Health, the Elderly and Community Care, April 2005

Quizzed after the revelation that his cabinet had agreed in principle to fees for health care, a fumbling, faltering Gonzi replied as follows:

One News: Can you confirm that you had other similar reports?

Gonzi: What about, Miriam?

One News: On financing health!

Gonzi: Not only on financing of health, but on everything.

One News: Did you have other reports concerning health?

Gonzi: Yes yes yes.

One News: Later after this one? After this one?

Gonzi: No no I don't think so.

One News: You did not?

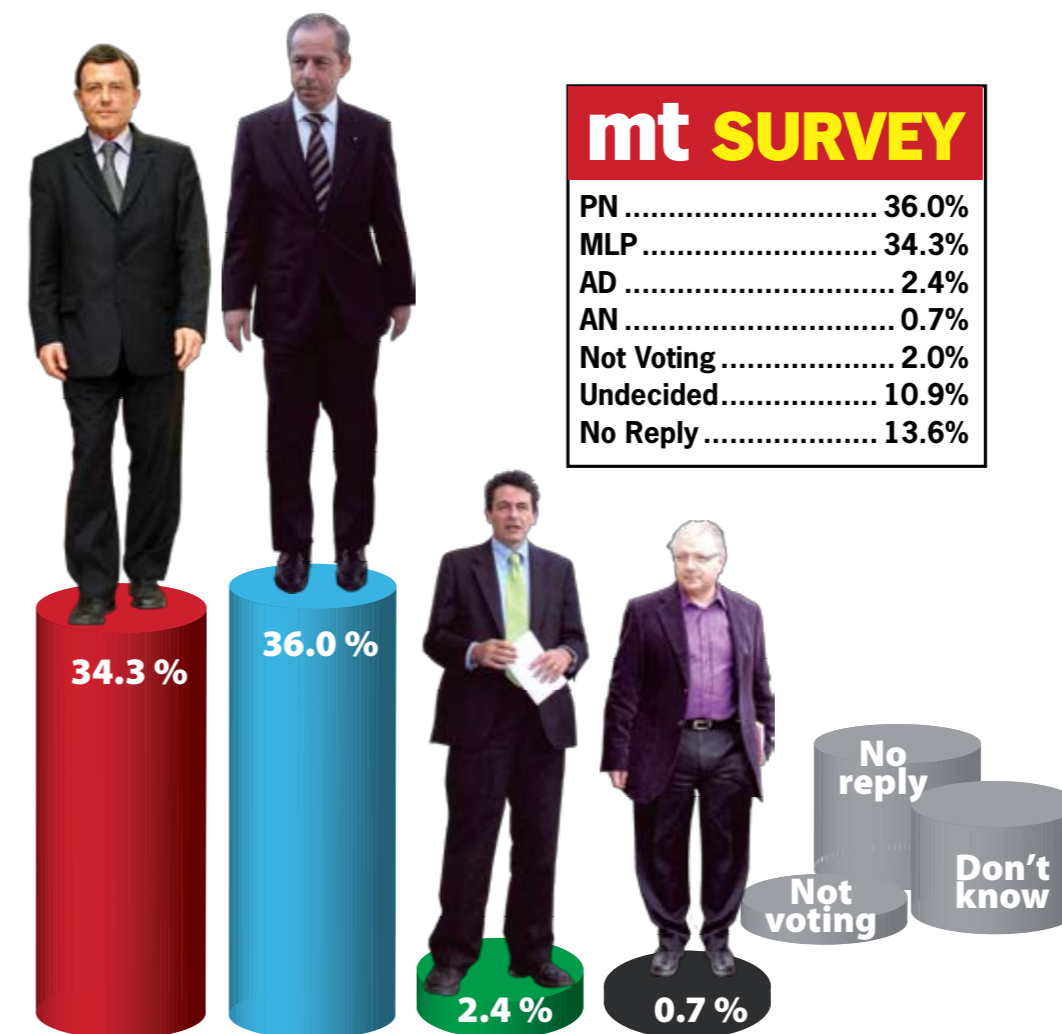
Gonzi: No, not after this one. Not after the December one.

on Xarabank, 29 February 2008

Labour. The only way.



PN losing ground to Labour



Why PN is leading despite shift to Labour and growth of AD:

THE survey shows the PN leading by 1.7% despite a net loss of 6.1% from its 2003 pool of votes to the other three parties in the race. On the other hand the MLP makes a net gain of 5.8% from former PN and AD voters.

This discrepancy between the shift in favour of the MLP and the survey's overall partly arises from the over-representation of PN voters in the survey.

While 31% claimed to have

voted for the MLP in the 2003 election, 47% replied that they had voted for the PN.

This is an indication that former MLP voters were either more reluctant to state how they had voted in 2003, or have refrained from participating in the survey.

Still, the shift towards the MLP is partly offset by the PN gaining a majority of new voters. When all these factors are weighed the election remains too close to call.

How PN voters in 2003 would vote now:

PN	67.3
MLP	5.7
AD	1.9
AN	0.3
Not Voting	1.9
Don't Know	11.5
No Reply	11.3

How new voters would vote on March 8th:

PN	45.2
MLP	26.2
AD	2.4
AN	2.4
Not voting	2.4
Don't know	16.7
No Reply	4.8

How MLP voters in 2003 would vote now:

MLP	83.4
PN	2.8
AD	0.5
AN	0.3
Not Voting	0.5
Don't Know	7.3
No Reply	5.3

How respondents had voted in 2003:

PN	46.9
MLP	30.8
AD	1.2
Underage	6.6
No Reply	14.5

Methodology

This survey was held between Friday 29 February and Tuesday 4 March. A total of 2,115 persons were contacted, 1,200 of whom accepted to participate in the survey. Respondents were randomly chosen from the telephone directory which covers all Maltese localities including Gozo. The survey results were weighed according to age/sex distribution of the population according to the 2006 Demographic Review issued by the National Office of Statistics. But the shifts between the parties' electoral support in 2003 vote and present voting intentions are based on the raw figures. The survey's margin of error is +/-2.82%.

JAMES DEBONO

THE last MaltaToday electoral survey before next Saturday's general elections shows the PN at 36% - barely 2% ahead of the MLP. The PN's advantage falls within the survey's +/-2.8% margin of error.

Still, the same survey shows the PN making a net loss of 6.1%, when present voting intentions of respondents are compared to how they claim to have voted in the 2003 general elections.

This is a clear indication that despite the wafer thin PN advantage, the election remains too close to call.

The survey in which a to-

tal 1,200 respondents participated was held between Thursday and Tuesday.

Compared to last week's survey, a rise of 1.4% in the number of non committed voters has resulted in a 2.5% loss for the PN and a 1.2% gain for Labour.

AD's vote has remained stable at 2.4%.

Although the number of undecided voters has decreased by 2.4% the number of those refusing to divulge their voting intentions has increased by 4%.

The PN's losses come in a week during which the PN lost the initiative to Labour. The last few days have been dominated by Jeffrey Pullicino Orlando's antics fol-

lowing the MLP's revelation that he owns a tract of land earmarked by MEPA for the development of a countryside discotheque on a Natura 2000 site in Mistra.

The survey also comes in the wake of the publication of a Ministry of Health report suggesting fees on health services, as well as a damning Audit Office report on Charles Polidano's ODZ supermarket in Safi.

The PN reacted by revealing that Charles Mangion and Karmenu Vella had failed to declare income from a property owned by MIRCA properties and rented to the Freeport.

The survey shows the PN losing more votes to AD than

the MLP. While the PN loses 1.9% of its 2003 vote to AD, the MLP is losing 0.5% of its 2003 vote share to the third

party. But while the PN gains nothing from AD's small 2003 pool, Labour gets a small fraction of these votes.

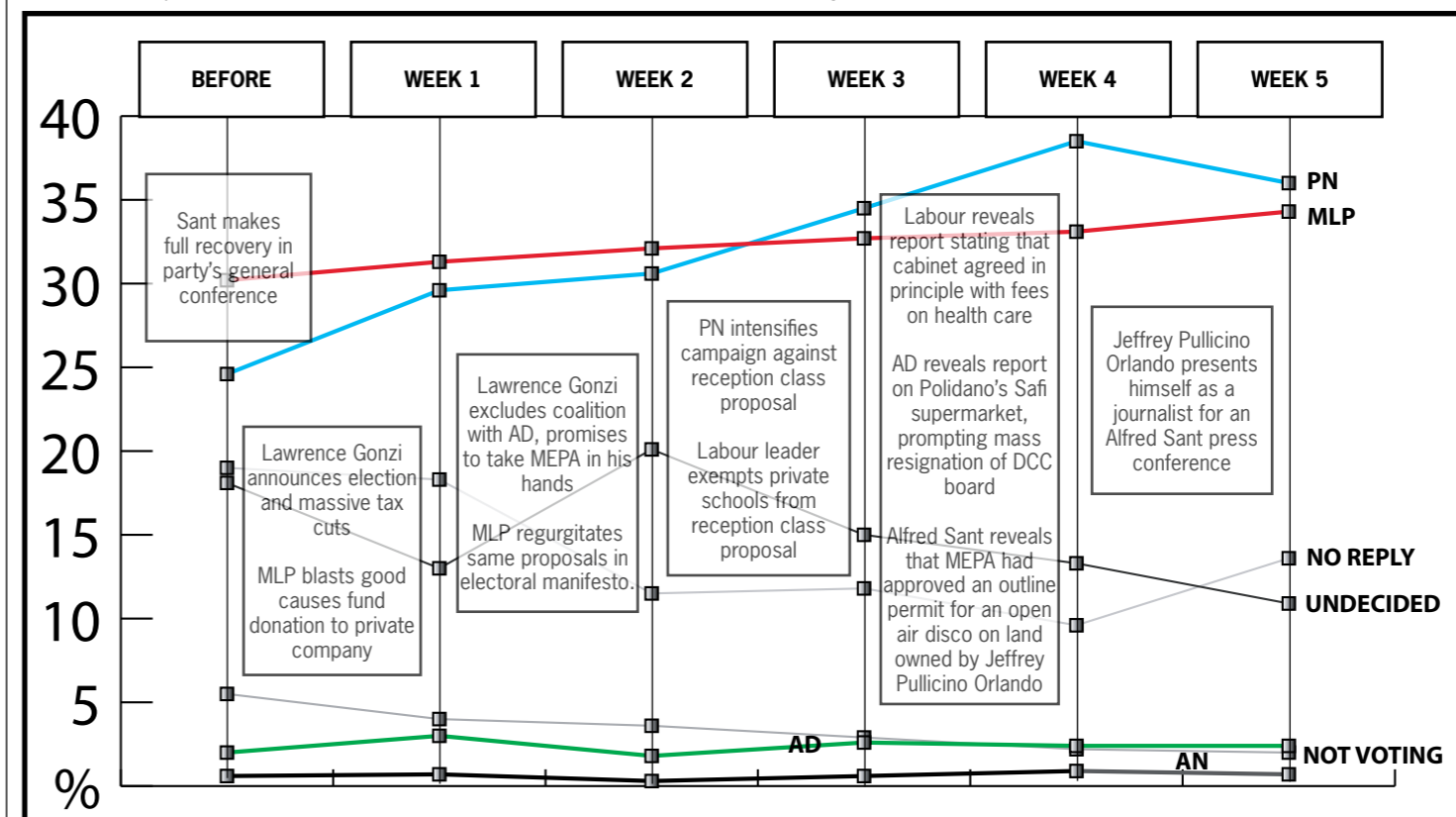
For the fifth consecutive time the survey shows the Nationalist party losing more votes from its 2003 tally than the MLP.

This week's survey shows the PN registering a 3.8% net loss to the MLP and a 2.3% net loss to the AD and AN.

The MLP which is losing 2.8% of its 2003 vote to the PN makes a net gain of 5.5% from the PN and a further 0.3% from the smaller parties.

For the second consecutive week the PN leads the MLP among those who would be voting for the first time on 8 March. Among this category the PN gets 45.2% against the MLP's 26%. This could be an indication of the PN's more intelligent use of the internet and the media to target these voters.

Gains among new voters, who number 17,000 in all, could partially compensate for the shift to Labour.



The battle of the issues: PN trounced on corruption but wins on most issues



MALTATODAY surveys carried out over the past three weeks show the PN winning on all major issues except the cost of living and the fight against corruption.

Although the MLP trounces the PN by a wide 17% margin on corruption, the PN soundly beats the MLP on taxation, job creation, education, healthcare, immigration and the environment.

Defying ideological stereotypes, the PN is at its strongest on job creation where it is preferred choice of the absolute majority of respondents while the MLP is strongest on fighting corruption where it is the preferred choice of 42% of respondents.

Both parties score their worst results on immigration. The MLP also scores a lowly 23% environment.

Apart from immigration, the PN scores its worst score on the cost of living issue where it is the preferred choice of 38% of respondents.

On most issues the PN enjoys the advantage of being the incumbent party using the tools of government to promote its agenda.

On the other hand as the party in government the PN is more exposed to accusations of corruption than the MLP. The small parties only leave an impact on their pet issues; in AD's case the environment and in AN's case illegal immigration.

When it comes to bread and butter issues like job creation voters tend to prefer the bigger parties.

The environment

The survey result reflects AD's historic role in raising the profile of environmental issues and its consistent opposition to spring hunting, golf courses and mega development projects.

This is especially the case among younger voters aged between 18 and 34. Among this category while 26% express a preference for AD's environmental policies only 14.4% express a preference for the MLP's policies.

But widespread support for AD's environmental policies does not translate itself in to a landslide for the third party when it comes to voting intentions.

While 18% prefer AD's environmental policies to those of the rival two parties, only 2.6% would vote for the Greens in the forthcoming election.

In fact 42.8% of those who think that AD has the best environmental policies are equally split between the PN and MLP. Only 11% of these would vote for AD.

This is an indication that the environment is not such a primary concern for these voters who

are swayed to vote for the other parties.

Yet significantly 44% of those who prefer AD's environmental policies are either undecided or refusing to divulge their voting intentions in the next elections.

Immigration

The absolute majority of voters do not identify with the immigration policies of the mainstream parties and 11% think that the far right Azzjoni Nazzjonali have the best policy on this subject.

Like other extreme right parties in Europe AN has exploited popular apprehensions on this issue turning a veritable human tragedy in to political football.

With the other parties largely silent on this issue during the electoral campaign AN has emerged as the vocal party on this issue.

AN has called for the closure of open centres and has threatened to pull out of Malta's legal international obligations in the absence of help from the European Union. Yet the party favours the importation of foreign labour in sectors where Maltese labour is scarce.

AN's immigration policy is highest among males (15%) and those aged under 34 (14%) and lowest among females and those over 55.

Significantly, AN attracts its greatest support among younger males. Among the males aged 18 to 34 years of age AN's stance on immigration is more popular than that of the three other parties. Among this category 25% opt for AN's immigration policy.

The widespread support for AN's immigration policies is not reflected in electoral support for the very right party which registers only 0.6% in the latest Malta-Today poll.

50% of those opting for AN's immigration policies would vote for one of the other three parties. More of these would vote for the PN (26.3%) than for the MLP (21.3%).

Yet significantly 49% of those who opt for the far right's policies on immigration are still not committed on their voting intentions.

This means that 4.3% of all respondents opt for AN's immigration policy and would not state for which party they would vote in the forthcoming election.

Taxation

The MLP has spent the last five years attacking the PN for increasing the tax burden, but has failed to capitalise on fiscal discontentment.

After two consecutive budget tax cuts and an electoral pledge

to cut income tax further, the incumbent party has re-invented itself as the tax slashing party.

The electorate does not seem receptive to the bold fiscal proposals made by the smaller parties.

Significantly the Labour Party only manages to beat the PN among those aged between 35-54. This age group composed of persons who are in the middle of their working lives are the most inclined to Labour's policies.

Education

The survey held – amidst a storm of controversy on Labour's reception class proposal – shows that the PN's scaremongering campaign which dubbed the reception class proposal as a "repeater class" has left an impact on the electorate.

The "repeater class" mantra now features in every speech by PN exponents to the extent that the Prime Minister himself warned that a Labour victory would amount to five years in a repeater class for the whole country.

The MaltaToday survey was held days before Alfred Sant counter-attacked with his own dose of scaremongering, accusing the government of planning to close down junior lyciums and to abolish the junior lyceum exams.

Effectively, the two parties have now turned education in to a game of political football leaving little space for intelligent debate on this matter.

Jobs

Ironically the PN beats the MLP on job creation, an issue which traditionally dominates the agenda of social democratic parties.

Riding high on promises of 5,600 new jobs created by Smart City and boasting the lowest unemployment rates in the past decade, the PN is considered as the party with the best policy on job creation by an absolute majority of respondents.

While 51% prefer the PN's job creation policies, only 36% prefer Labour's. The small parties are only chosen by 1.5% of voters confirming that people still turn

to the big parties when it comes to bread and butter issues.

The PN's high rate of approval on job creation is boosted by 6% of present MLP voters who consider the PN's job creation policies as better than their own party's. Only 0.6% of present PN voters opt for Labour's employment policies.

Healthcare

The PN is judged to have the best policy on health care despite the MLP's revelation of a report issued in 2004 which proposed fees for public health services. The report claims that the cabinet agreed in principle with the report but would not implement it because of its "political underpinnings."

The survey on health was conducted after the publication of this report. The Prime Minister denied that the cabinet had ever considered charges on health and declared that he would resign if a future PN government were to impose such fees.

Although the report confirms that Gonzi had resisted pressure to introduce charges on health services during his term in office, it made a mockery Gonzi's earlier claim that the cabinet had never discussed the imposition of any such fees.

The PN has countered the MLP's campaign by reminding voters that a Sant led government had imposed a fee on people collecting free medicines. While 39% favour Labour's health policies, 47% favour the PN's policies.

The survey reflects public satisfaction with the new Mater Dei hospital which has been hyped as one of Lawrence Gonzi's major accomplishments.

The survey shows that PN voters are more enthusiastic on the their party's health policy than MLP voters.

Cost of living

The MLP enjoys a slight advantage over the PN on the cost of living issue-the primary concern

of the Maltese population according to MaltaToday's surveys carried out during the past year. The Labour Party has been harping on the cost of living issue for the past years.

It's promise to reduce the surcharge by 50% is aimed at leaving more money in people's pockets.

Yet during this campaign the MLP has shied away from anachronistic solutions to control prices.

Corruption

Only one fourth think that the PN has the best policy to fight corruption. On the other hand 42% think that Labour has the best policies on this issue.

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

Through the campaign Labour has reiterated it's pledge to practice zero tolerance on corruption and has continued to highlight corruption allegations against prominent cabinet members.

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 address 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 party on this issue.

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

How the parties fare on the issues:

	PN	MLP	AD	AN	None	No Answer
Taxation	39.8	33.5	1.5	0.1	6.1	19
Environment	38.7	22.8	18.4	1.5	3.9	14.7
Immigration	23.5	17.8	2.7	11.1	10.2	34.7
Education	48.9	32.2	1.2	0	3.1	14.7
Job creation	51.1	35.9	0.8	0.7	3	8.5
Health Care	46.8	39.3	0.7	0.8	2.3	10.4
Cost of Living	38	39	1.1	0.9	7.2	13.8
Corruption	25.9	42.4	3.3	3.1	10.8	14.6

MLP discusses gender equality issues

Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca fails to show up

DAVID DARMANIN

MLP'S early celebration of Women's Day was marked by the absence of social affairs spokesperson Maire-Louise Coleiro Preca yesterday, at a gathering of around 100 female Labour exponents addressing gender issues, social injustices, equality at the place of work and sexual harassment, among others.

The event was wrapped up by Labour Leader Alfred Sant, who reiterated his party's position on the need of gender equality.

"At university we have a majority of female students, but then numbers go down drastically as soon as you start looking at the number of women in employment," he said. "When we appoint women on government boards, efficiency issues are always scrutinised before deciding. This is not the case with deciding on board appointments for men. We are in a situation that allows women to be appointed in key positions only because they are efficient, whereas men don't have to be efficient. This is why there should be a quota system."

Moderating the talk was One TV presenter Simone Cini, who started by handing over the microphone to Labour candidate Helena Dalli.

"The Labour Party is focusing on continuation of work that we have been carrying out for the past 20 years," she said, before being interrupted by Cini in order to explain that the talk shall not only ask for the contribution of Labour candidates, but also of all present.

"OK," Dalli said. "Take two. I was talking about continuation, so this is the continuation of a continuation." But as Dalli was about to start her address again, Labour leader Alfred Sant upstaged her with his late entrée, inspiring the crowd to surpass Dalli's speech with a hearty, welcoming applause.

When she started again, Dalli cut her speech short by saying that after all, "there is no need to mention all the work Labour did in the past years with regard to gender issues."

"A lot of work that could have continued after 1998 has not been continued," she said. This was later confirmed by Alfred Sant when he said: "When Labour was last in government, we did not have enough time to implement all that we had in mind with regards to gender issues, but a lot of measures were on the runway," failing to continue the allegory by linking the Labour song slogan "the only way is up".

On her part, Labour candidate Lorna Vassallo spoke about a problem faced by numerous parents. "The daytime gap between 14:30 and 17:00 is not being addressed," she said. "A lot of childcare centres are being closed at 13:00, serving a useless



purpose."

She then explained that by the time children finish school, parents are still at work and that there is not enough availability of services to cater for the time between end of school and end of work.

In another intervention, Vassallo also mentioned that politics in Malta are male dominated, due to the vast majority of politicians being men, "starting with our very able leader," she specified.

Then came Labour candidate Marlene Pullicino's turn, the estranged wife of the same PN candidate involved in the Mistra Bay controversy, Jeffrey Pullicino Orlando. Pullicino spoke about

domestic violence, garnering the crowd's full attention when she said "we should work together as Christians."

"Up until yesterday, a pregnant woman was beaten by her husband, and was in turn sent to Appogg with her children, while her husband was allowed to stay home," Pullicino said. "This is unfair. It was the perpetrator who should have been chucked out."

Addressing Sant directly, Pullicino concluded her intervention by saying: "As of Monday, God willing, when you are elected to power, I appeal to you to look into these matters."

Pullicino also spoke of the im-

portance of work-life balance, stating: "We should be living in a society that pays enough wages that enable parents to spend more time with their children."

On quality of life, Pullicino remarked that the most popular illness among women is depression, "whereas we only speak of breast screening."

Also present was university professor Mary Darmanin, who clarified why she chose the Labour activity over a university speech over the same issues running at the same time. "I was asked to contribute at a university event this morning. From all the speakers invited it seemed that they are all of the same political

belief, so I decided not to go."

At that point, Helena Dalli complained that she was not invited either. Later, Dalli refused to answer a question on gender equality policy on the grounds that this was within the remit of Labour spokesperson for social solidarity Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, who was not present for the meeting. After making a sign to show that she would rather not answer, Simone Cini broke the seconds of silence that followed to ask if it would be better for Coleiro Preca to answer. "I would much rather wait for her." By the end of the meeting, Coleiro Preca had not yet arrived.

On her part, former Sea Malta chairperson Marlene Mizzi, seated right next to Sant, confidently said: "Although I recognise that many women may encounter problems at work, we must make sure that there is no self-pity. I'm not saying that there are no problems, but once we encounter difficulties we must find the strength within ourselves to resolve them. We must look for solutions, without expecting other people to do this for us."

Mizzi proceeded to insist on the need to "change the culture of men, especially at the work place," suggesting that this is done by proper parenting and early education – an idea to which Sant later concurred.

"I agree with Marlene about the need of culture change," Sant stated. "Equality needs to be practised, not just discussed. We need to focus on education, as of a very young age."

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AN proposes Gozitan devolution

SABRINA AGIUS

AZZJONI Nazzjonali leader Josie Muscat yesterday presented citizens with a contract comprising the 10 points of its electoral campaign, including making Gozo an autonomous region "governed by Gozitans", at a press breakfast at The Palace Hotel in Sliema.

"If one had to analyse the content of this electoral campaign, one would realise that politicians talked about reception

class, surcharge, overtime and corruption, as if politics was only about those matters" said Muscat.

According to the party leader, other important matters were left out. As noted by him, these would include topics involving alternative energy and the health system.

Muscat noted: "They did talk about health, but no one mentioned how it shall be reformed and financed. They say that our health system is free, but nothing is free. We pay National Insurance and VAT."

Muscat then presented the 10 points which AN are promising to follow. Among these proposals are the idea of having an auditing company, having the president elected by the people. A recurring AN commitment is to have a smaller parliament, fewer cabinet ministers and fewer local councils. Tough measures to protect citizens feature

Other AN proposals are that the state should have an independent council, and to promote unity within the family.

AN believe in having a just

rental regime. If elected to Government, AN are proposing that there should be a collective effort to reduce taxes so there can be more money in hand. Muscat further said that there should be a substantial increase in the national pension, as pensioners are most at risk of falling below the poverty line.

The country should have measures to reduce bureaucracy Maltese entrepreneurs.

Muscat said that Gozo should be an autonomous region and it should be led by Gozitans themselves, as no one knows better

than the Gozitans themselves what is best for Gozo.

Before closing the press briefing, Muscat said that AN was the only party who was not scared to talk openly about crucial problems which Malta is facing including illegal immigration, the importance of the family and hunting.

Muscat stressed on the fact that Malta is a country which has "political parties but no politics", saying that it is time for politicians to mature, so that people can start trusting politics again.



AN's Martin Degiorgio and Philip Beattie

Anglu Xuereb at war with Sliema council over yellow lines

SABRINA AGIUS

AX Holdings chairman and AN deputy leader Anglu Xuereb has accused Sliema mayor Marina Arrigo of deliberately ignoring MEPA's instructions that the Palace Hotel in Sliema should have its own coach lay-by.

During a press conference held yesterday morning in front of his High Street hotel,

Xuereb presented the MEPA permit which states "the approved drawings show a coach lay-by which is currently being used for car parking spaces. This runs counter to the approved plans permit. To this effect MEPA, is giving 15 days notice from the date of issue of this letter to rectify the situation."

In response to the threatening enforcement by MEPA, Xuereb felt that he had to paint double

yellow lines along the pavement in High Street.

However, the statement issued by the Sliema council insists that the lines "have been carried out on instructions of Mr Angelo Xuereb, without seeking authorisation from ADT and from the council."

Throughout her statement, Sliema mayor Marina Arrigo refused to call the hotel by its name, claiming that "permits related to this hotel, for which

a permit by MEPA has been issued, do not feature an application for a new hotel but an extension to The Victoria Hotel."

The Sliema mayor persisted that the hotel needs an MTA permit to operate and another permit should be sought by ADT for an un/loading bay in the area. As yet, the Sliema council is saying that the hotel does not have these permits.

Xuereb replied that it is necessary for the hotel to have an

un/loading bay as coaches are blocking the road.

"The treatment meted out the Palace Hotel by the Sliema Mayor is very different from that afforded to other hotels in the area" said Xuereb. He made reference to the Plaza Hotel, belonging to Mrs Arrigo's family. Xuereb presented some photos featuring the respective lay-bys, with these hotels having loading and unloading areas reserved.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY GILBERT CALLEJA

Vassallo threatened with imprisonment on election eve

CHARLOT ZAHRA
KURT SANSONE
RAPHAEL VASSALLO
KARL SCHEMBRI

IN a last-gasp twist to the electoral campaign, the police delivered two arrest warrants to Alternattiva Demokratika (AD) Chairperson Harry Vassallo in connection with a VAT-related case, four hours after a NET TV journalist had asked him about the case.

Speaking during a press conference at the AD headquarters in Sliema, accompanied by his wife, two kids and other AD officials and candidates shortly after the arrest warrants were delivered, a resolute Vassallo said that the electoral campaign "has reached the pits" with this episode, and that the PN was repeating the same tactic adopted by in the 2003 general elections when former Prime Minister Eddie Fenech Adami had dumped AD during the PN last mass meeting at Luxol.

"The Nationalist Party has been cooking up this booby-trap for the past five months since instead of informing me immediately with what had happened in court, this file was left in a drawer somewhere to be used by the Nationalist Party in the most squalid electoral campaign that it has ever led," he insisted.

Vassallo explained that at the end of a press conference at the party headquarters at 12pm yesterday, a NET TV journalist approached him and asked him for his reaction for the fact that a fine imposed by the Courts for him in connection to non-filing of VAT returns had been converted into a two-year prison sentence.

"This was the first time during this electoral campaign that a NET TV journalist and cameraman attended an AD press conference. At the end of the press conference, the NET TV journalist asked me for a comment and asked me whether I knew that a prison sentence against me had been delivered.

"This was news to me because I only learnt about the court decision, which was taken five months ago to convert the fine into a prison sentence, four hours after the NET TV journalist left," Vassallo explained.

Four hours after the PN journalist approached him, at 4.15pm yesterday, two police officers went to AD's headquarters in Sliema and gave him a copy of two "Documents For A Person To Be Detained in Prison" dated 27 September 2007.

However, the police did not execute the arrest warrants as Vassallo informed them that he had filed for a reconsideration of the presidential pardon.

Vassallo explained that this judgement was delivered in connection with the non-payment of Lm6,000 in fines for non-filing of VAT returns for a

company in which he has not been involved for the past 10 years.

However, he was still registered with the VAT department as the person responsible for the company.

"I have been present for various court sittings in connection with this case and I explained that I could not present the returns of a company for which I have not been employed for more than 10 years.

"As the law stands at present, it seems that the court did not have any other option but to impose fines and I requested a Presidential pardon since I was being fined thousands of Liri, not because I did not pay taxes but because the returns had not been filed during the years while I did not have control over the company since I had resigned as Director".

Vassallo explained that his request for a presidential pardon was denied and he asked for a reconsideration of the case.

"I do not know whether the President of the Republic would like to consider my case or not. If for the second time he thinks that I should be sent to prison for two years because somebody else did not file a VAT return, then I will go to prison.

"What I can say is that irrespective of whatever happens during this election and whether I am sent to prison or not, I will wage a campaign to eradicate this damning bureaucracy," a resolute Vassallo said.

Since Vassallo was appointed AD leader, he has not practised his legal profession, still less involved himself in business activities.

"My income has become Lm400 a month as an employee of the party. I do not have the financial means to pay these fines," he said.

There are thousands of people who have passed through such trouble and others paid huge fines when they did not owe a single cent of tax.

"I think I was the only one that was informed about my situation by a NET TV journalist, one day before the election campaign ends and five months after the court's decision," he said.

Vassallo said he was still of the opinion that it is not reasonable that somebody continues to be fined thousands of liri because bureaucracy asks him to fill these returns on time.

"Neither do I believe that somebody should be sent to prison because in reality he does not owe any money in connection to tax that he has collected or on income that he has made. I have not earned anything nor collected any VAT during all the years for which I have been fined," he said.

Vassallo said that until now, he had made his battle with the tax authorities in private "with a lot of personal trouble and for many months and

years. I could not make a public campaign on this situation as I have a direct and personal interest in it.

"However, now that the PN has used this personal situation for its own benefit, I am happy that this thing has come out in the public and therefore I can promise that I will wage a campaign so that law enforcement is carried out in a reasonable manner and when there are a couple of missing papers the people are not treated like violent criminals," a resolute Vassallo said.

Net TV informed before Police Commissioner

In a press release issued around 7.30pm, the media manager of Media.link, Louiselle Vassallo, said the organisation was informed as early as Tuesday – a full day before the police commissioner – but avoided the question of how they got to know about the prison sentence.

"Media.link received information yesterday (Tuesday) that Dr Harry Vassallo was found guilty in court cases that amount to Lm6,000 and that about them he had requested a presidential pardon, that was refused.

"On the first opportunity we had after this information reached us, that is during an AD press conference today afternoon, we took Dr Harry Vassallo's own comment to get his version about this case."

Harry Vassallo however said the Net TV journalists had asked him specifically about his prison sentence before he even knew about it and four hours before police officers turned up at the Green party's office.

Contacted yesterday evening, Commissioner for Police John Rizzo said he did not know about the case and wanted to investigate the matter.

"I am not informed of everything that happens in the Police Corps. I am reading Harry Vassallo's press release now," Rizzo said.

When asked why the police decided to proceed with the arrest yesterday, just four days before an election when the court order had been issued in October last year, Rizzo said these matters took time.

"I don't agree with the timing," he said. "But not everybody reasons things out this way."

Asked on who within the police corps would have issued such an order, Rizzo said: "I will have to investigate and will be issuing a statement on the matter."

In a press statement issued shortly afterwards, the police said "it was normal practice for such arrest warrants, which are very common during the year, to be sent to district police so they are executed from there".

The statement added that a preliminary investigation showed that around 4pm, a police sergeant posted at the Sli-

ma police station had informed Dr Vassallo that "he had to regularise his position about these warrants".

"The allegations made by Dr Harry Vassallo are totally different from what is being reported by the Sergeant. Therefore the Police Commissioner ordered an immediate investigation to establish the whole truth about this case," the statement concluded.

Meanwhile Media.link's manager claimed her organisation had "no link whatsoever with actions that the Police and the Courts took against Dr Vassallo".

She said: "Media.link, like any other media organisation, is expected to investigate information that reaches it about a political party leader who has Court sentences against him."

Joe Saliba alleges frame-up against PN

Contacted by MaltaToday Joe Saliba denied any knowledge of the case, still less any involvement.

"You don't think we would be stupid enough to do something like that right before an election? From what I've been told, the court decision was taken five months ago. Why did they go to arrest him today? It doesn't make sense. I think this is a sign of the sorry state we have reached, that some people would go to such lengths to damage the Nationalist Party. I think this is a frame-up (montatura) intended to damage our electoral chances. This is spin."

Asked if he thought that AD itself engineered the frame-up, Joe Saliba avoided giving a direct answer.

"I can assure you that I want to find out who is responsible as much as AD does, if not more. Whoever gave the order for the arrest to be made today, is responsible. I don't know who it was. It could be someone in the public service who has a grudge against us."

Still, Saliba had no explanation as to how his own party media knew and acted upon this story despite its politically explosive nature.

The Office of the Prime Minister declined to answer questions but sent a standard reply to the media claiming it had no idea who was behind the arrest warrant.

"The Prime Minister has no idea whose initiative this was," the head of the prime minister's secretariat Edgar Galea Curmi alleged, adding GOnzi hoped this would be established in the police investigation.

"The Prime Minister does not agree that a Conviction Ticket issued on the 27 September 2007 be executed more than five months later and during such a sensitive time. The Prime Minister was not aware of any tip off that the NET journalists had about this issue, and only learned about these developments following Dr. Harry Vas-

sallo's press conference." AD insists PN lost all sense of decency

But AD's deputy chairperson Stephen Cachia was unmoved by Saliba's and the prime minister's replies, accusing the PN of losing "all sense of decency and sense of the truth when trying to convince people that it had nothing to do with today's events with regards to Vassallo."

"Once again the PN has used the last days of the electoral campaign to try to discredit AD with mud-slinging tactics. The facts of today's events speak for themselves and need no further comment.

"These are the same tactics the PN used in the 2003 General Elections and in the 2004 European Parliament Elections," Cachia charged.

"Joe Saliba and Media.Link have absolutely no credibility in this regard and it is clear that the manner in which this case was orchestrated by the PN media, unfortunately with the complicity of the Police, clearly shows that the PN is in a state of panic and has exceeded all limits of arrogance.

"We appeal to all voters to give a strong message against this arrogance by voting for AD next Saturday.

"AD salutes the courage of all those voters we are meeting everyday and who are clearly stating that they will be voting AD next Saturday," Cachia insisted.

VAT department denies involvement

"Of all days, did they have to go today?" was Finance Parliamentary Secretary Tonio Fenech's immediate reaction when called yesterday night. "This is news to me. I don't know anything about this, absolutely. The VAT department wouldn't be involved in enforcing a court sentence, as far as I know."

Fenech is politically responsible for the VAT Department. VAT Commissioner Joe Sammut also said he was "absolutely unaware of the case".

"As far as the VAT Department is concerned I was informed that a company of which Harry Vassallo was a director had not sent in its VAT returns for a number of years. Early last year the VAT Department, as is customary in these circumstances, referred the case, along with others, to the police to proceed. Some five months ago the courts decided to levy a fine for every day that the missing returns are not filed.

"Turning the fine into a prison sentence is drastic but the VAT Department has nothing to do with the case at this stage. It is the court that decides the matter.

"When the VAT Department refers cases to the police it is privy to the individuals involved, especially when the case refers to a company."



PHOTOGRAPHY BY GILBERT CALLEJA

AD Chairperson Harry Vassallo flanked by colleagues and friends as he holds the arrest warrant yesterday

Gonzi makes appeal to protest voters

'Put national interest before your pastime'

JULIA FARRUGIA

PRIME Minister Lawrence Gonzi yesterday launched an appeal to protest voters and vouched he would do his utmost "for Malta to move ahead".

Interviewed by TV personality John Bundy at a public meeting outside the Parliament, Gonzi was yesterday lauded by Bundy himself for his "photogenic looks" referring to his latest billboard in which a solemn looking Gonzi is portrayed along the statement, "Your mind is at rest with Gonzi".

Gonzi drove the point home saying people could only be serene under a Nationalist gov-

ernment.

In his appeal to protest voters, Gonzi alluded to voters to consider the national interest ahead of pastimes, a veiled reference to hunters. "What is in the country's interest? The pastime or the family, your mother, your father, your wife, the elderly or your kids... we can't leave the country deteriorating for things which are not important!"

Then to tone down his emotional appeal, Gonzi joked that everybody sees his own interests - pointing out that despite his injured thumb, he kept up with his mission to convince people to vote PN.

But Gonzi told voters to put their interests aside while

warning of a protest vote, alluding to the 1996 Labour victory. "Maybe you're right. You suffered. That Labour vote has to be cast in favour of the PN - let us not forget the lessons we learnt in the past."

Gonzi said that just a couple of votes could make a difference "exactly like what had happened in one particular election".

Then John Bundy asked Gonzi over the accusations of corruption leveled at the Nationalist Cabinet, and asked what action would be taken against those who lied.

"If next Monday you'll be up there," pointing his finger towards Parliament, "what was said on corruption will remain

just words, or will you see that action and justice is done, including with those who said lies?" Bundy asked.

Gonzi said that in his four-year premiership, whenever he had received any allegations he had handed all information to the competent authorities for their investigation. Gonzi said that whenever he had taken this step, he had no cameras along with him, and attached Sant's attitude for first calling the Commissioner of Police a "smokescreen" and then asking him to investigate allegations on the Mistra permit.

A stern Lawrence Gonzi pledged that "if the results show that there is something which is not correct, the one to blame

will have to pay a high price."

The Prime Minister then targeted another sector whose interests have been one of the pet subjects for far-right Azzjoni Nazzjonali, namely army soldiers. Answering a placed question by Bundy, Gonzi appealed to the electorate to appreciate the efforts of what soldiers and police officers do for their country.

In a reference to the medical brain drain, Gonzi also said that Maltese doctors were going abroad not because of low wages or their working conditions, "but because they are so good that other countries are taking them away from us."

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY GILBERT CALLEJA



PHOTOGRAPHY BY GILBERT CALLEJA



Sant condemns 'unacceptable' attempt to muzzle Harry Vassallo

MATTHEW VELLA

OPPOSITION leader Alfred Sant yesterday expressed outright condemnation of the arrest warrant issued against Alternattiva Demokratika chairperson Harry Vassallo, after the company he was part of 10 years ago had failed to submit its VAT returns.

"It is shameful that Gonzi acts in this manner. If the PN are scared of AD, they should tackle the party democratically," Sant said yesterday in Zabbar, where Labour held its last public gathering before today's mass meeting in Gozo.

"They had to issue an arrest warrant today... on the eve of an election, after knowing that procedures had started back in October 2007, but instead they postponed their decision

to this day. Worse than that, it was a NET TV journalist who informed Harry Vassallo before the police did," Sant said.

"We respect the democratic process... this is Malta, not Ukraine. It is unacceptable that arrogant acts like these take place... We condemn what happened today, and we condemn Gonzi's complacency on corruption. This is what's wrong with our country."

Sant's address in Zabbar yesterday, a familiar penultimate stop for Labour's electoral campaign, drew a large mass of supporters who greeted Labour officials with fireworks and squibs.

Sant paid tribute to the numerous supporters in attendance yesterday, saying that on 8 March, voters will have to choose between a government of arrogance and one of honesty and efficiency.

"The government of GonziPN has turned into a corrupt government that stinks of arrogance. We're dedicated to giving people an efficient and cleaner administration that will not waste tax money or corrupt people, but one that reassures people their money is being used wisely."

"Love us or hate us, we've always said the truth, even when this wasn't always a palatable one," Sant said.

"They accuse us of being too serious, but we'd rather be serious than sport a smile of untruth. We've never fooled you, and we never will."

Sant said the Nationalist government had increased the tax burden by 20% in four years to Lm50 million a year. He again pledged refunds on VAT from education.

He also accused Lawrence

Gonzi of repeatedly lying on Cabinet's discussions over introducing fees on public healthcare. "Gonzi said I should apologise... he will get no apology from me for calling him a liar; it's he who will have to apologise."

He listed the entire catalogue of accusations Labour launched throughout its electoral campaign against the Nationalist Cabinet. "How could you trust someone who has lied to the Maltese and Gozitans? They have a record of incompetence that is hard to believe and it's as if nothing happened: Gonzi has defended all his ministers."

Sant did not omit Nationalist MP Jeffrey Pullicino Orlando, who earlier on the meeting was described by Labour deputy leader Charles Mangion as a "part-time politician, part-time farmer, a part-time dentist, a part-time journalist... and now

a full-time cry-baby (bekkej)."

"Pullicino Orlando said he didn't know of the project on his own land when his architect had informed him of the application by registered letter," Sant said. "It's another lie and I won't discuss it with Pullicino Orlando anywhere except through my lawyers and in court."

He also accused Gonzi of not taking the case seriously. "Gonzi defends him and propped him up for a TV press conference to face me. If Gonzi said he referred the case to the MEPA auditor, why did he provide Pullicino Orlando the credentials for a press conference? As Gonzi head we were going to the Commissioner of Police, he asked the commissioner to investigate the case."

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Lunch for a new beginning

Labour dines and wines journalists at the height of an electoral campaign that comes to a close this evening. KURT SANSONE was present

LABOUR leader Alfred Sant looked confident, cool and relaxed when he entertained journalists to a lunch just two days before the close of the electoral campaign.

Sitting next to me, Sant was in a jovial mood shifting the discussion from serious political matters to more trivial issues such as his dietary requirements.

For the inquisitive, Sant has no special dietary needs. The advice Sant has been given by his doctors is to eat everything in moderation, and he has no ban on hot spicy sauces. Though he did refrain from drinking a glass of wine.

Briefly, the discussion turned towards the troubles of people stuck in hospital waiting lists. He reiterated his shock at the case of a 90 year old woman who was given an appointment for a cataract operation four years down the line.

The subject of cancer was also broached.

"You look into the mirror and see a different self," he said of his harrowing experience. "It makes you look at things from a different perspective."

All around the Labour entourage looked relaxed, oozing confidence that people would vote their party back into power after 10 years in the wilderness.

The lunch, held at Mamma Mia restaurant in Ta' Xbiex, was informal with no pre-assigned seating arrangements. It was Labour's way of saying "thank you" to the journalists that followed the campaign. Even NET TV journalists Amanda Ciappara and Keith Micallef were present.

Sant then asked me what stories were brewing and half-jokingly said that as a party they provided us journalists with fodder during the past few days, re-



fering to the leaked PN cabinet document suggesting payment for healthcare services and the

Jeffrey Pullicino Orlando Mistra scandal.

We're waiting for you to drop

the third bomb, I suggested, to which Sant smirked and kept silent. There is talk of Labour coming up with a last minute bombshell to shock the Nationalists, but none of the party officials yesterday would confirm or deny the rumour. We will probably be kept guessing until today's debate between the leaders on TVM.

Yesterday's lunch reminded me of another similar event organised by the Labour Party in 2005. Then as now, a rather relaxed Labour delegation hosted journalists for lunch on the eve of local elections that gave Labour a resounding victory.

Sant would relish the prospect of having that victory repeated next Saturday. To see whether the electorate would allow him that possibility, we will have to wait until Sunday afternoon when lunch would be served at the Naxxar counting hall.

A day of campaigning in pictures

Photography by
Gilbert Calleja



GO TO JAIL, DO NOT PASS GO: AD chairman Harry Vassallo, accompanied by family, tells the press of his presentation with an arrest warrant



LARGER THAN LIFE: Prime Minister Lawrence Gonzi addresses a "taht it-tinda" meeting in Valletta



SIZE MATTERS: Gonzi specifies a fine economic point at a Business Breakfast at the Westin Dragonara in St Julian's



FLAGGING SPIRITS: Never a dull moment for the kids at Labour's Zabbar gathering



RIGHT SAID FRED: Labour leader Alfred Sant in a rousing moment from yesterday's Zabbar meeting



LABOUR IN WAITING: Leader Sant and deputy leader Michael Falzon



PN candidate Georg Sapiano stresses a point at yesterday's Business Breakfast



WOMEN'S DAY: Marlene Mizzi discusses gender equality with Alfred Sant



LAUGHING MATTERS: Josie Muscat in one of his lighter moments





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

Some people like to live dangerously. They like the excitement of turning on the evening news to find out that they don't know where they stand the next day. They like the thrill of turning up for work to find out that their colleagues have been laid off and they might be next. They like the rollercoaster ride of seeing the boss worried about the latest blow to business, the most recent shock to the system.

Other people like a quiet life. They like peace and prosperity, calm and serenity, security and stability. They want to know where they stand and where they're going to. They like to be able to plan their lives knowing that no bad frights lie round the corner.

The Nationalist Party in government has done all it can to put Malta on an even keel, to make the country safe, sound, stable and very attractive to investors. It has generated 20,000 new jobs in just four years, brought Malta's finances into line and taken Malta into the Eurozone.

Malta is doing extremely well. But it only takes a few bad decisions to send things spiralling downwards once more.

This Saturday, make yours a good decision – a decision to keep Malta going on the right track.

We know exactly what kind of change you have in mind, and we promise to deliver. You can take our word for it.

iva, flimkien kollox possibbli
gonzipn

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Emmy Bezzina and Norman Lowell file protest against BA

SABRINA AGIUS

FRINGE candidates Emmy Bezzina and Norman Lowell, respectively lawyer and his client, but also sole candidates for the Alpha Liberal Party and far-right Imperium Europa respectively, have filed a joint judicial protest against Broadcasting Authority chairman Joseph Scicluna and CEO Kevin Aquilina, claiming the allotment of just five minutes

of public airtime to present their political message was "humiliating".

Norman Lowell's political broadcast was cancelled by the BA after its legal consultants agreed the message could not be broadcast because it was deemed to be inciting racial hatred – which is against recently enacted BA guidelines. The judicial protest claims the censorship goes against the country's broadcasting laws and the Constitution.

The two candidates expressed

their disgust towards the "abusive and discriminatory attitude in their regard" during election time.

The two said they are holding the BA chairman and CEO personally responsible for "abusing, deceiving, discriminatory and arrogant acts against them".

Bezzina is contesting the first district, while Lowell is contesting the eleventh and twelfth districts.

sagius@mediatoday.com.mt

Georg Sapiano sues it-Torca

NATIONALIST candidate Georg Sapiano filed a libel suit over allegations made in his regard on last Sunday's editorial of the Union Print weekly newspaper it-Torca. A court application claiming damages of over €11,500 (Lm5,000) for libellous content was presented against Union Print director Lino Cassar and Torca editor Alexander Farrugia.

Sapiano took issue with the way the editorial referred to his personal earnings claiming that it ran into hundreds of thousands of Euros over the past two years, and the subsequent comparison made to his earnings of when he carried out some legal work with former PM Karmenu Mifsud Bonnici, when Sapiano had just graduated.

Hamrun mayor sues Nazzjon editor

ELECTION 2008 will most likely qualify as the election with the largest number of libel suits filed during the campaign period.

Yesterday MLP candidate and Hamrun mayor Luciano Busuttil, together with local council executive secretary Philip Massa, filed a libel suit against Nazzjon editor Alex Attard.

Busuttil and Massa insist that an article in the PN daily In-

Nazzjon on 14 November 2007 tarnished their reputation, by falsely implying that they had acted in a discriminatory way and that they were responsible of maladministration.

Both the Hamrun mayor and executive secretary insist that the contents of the article contain false statements intentionally meant to damage their public reputation. Dr Justine Caruana signed the writ.

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Crying at the discotheque.

According to the files at MEPA, on 23 September 2005, architect Paul Camilleri wrote to Dr Jeffrey Pullicino Orlando, to inform him that he was going "to file an application at the Malta Environment and Planning Authority to grant permission for the utilization of open area as an open-air entertainment area on the site off Misra Road, San Pawl il-Bahar."

(Letter Ref: Misc N635 File Number: G-0239)

No ham-acting is going to convince us that Jeffrey did not know he was consenting to the rape of Misra Valley.

Nothing is going to convince you that Gonzi can prevent this sort of thing from happening again. One spinner today, someone else tomorrow.

Vote Gonzi. Get sleaze. Forget the environment.

Labour. The only way.



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A prelude to PBS's swan song?

CHARLOT ZAHRA

THE Nationalist Party's pledge in the 2008 electoral programme, approved at the party's extraordinary general council, to remove the television licence fee "because it is outdated" has come as a surprise to most media analysts.

In Europe, a majority of countries still have a television licence fee which partly or wholly finances the public broadcaster in the respective countries. Only Belgium (Flemish region),

Gibraltar and Hungary have removed the television licence, while Liechtenstein, Luxembourg and Monaco have never had such a licence.

Until four years ago, the fees collected from television licences passed on directly to public broadcaster PBS. However, in 2004 when the infamous restructuring took place, a new Broadcasting Policy was adopted by the Ministry for Investments, Industry and IT (MIIT), which is politically responsible for PBS.

Under this policy, PBS gets a yearly grant of €1.17 million

(€0.5 million) for programmes which are considered as Extended Public Service Obligation programmes.

It is the Ministry for Tourism and Culture which allocates these funds and decides on an annual basis on which kind of programmes they have to be spent.

All the other programmes, including the news and sports bulletins, have to be financed from income from advertising and the farming out of programmes.

However, the allocation of these funds by the Ministry for

Tourism and Culture to PBS for public service programmes is currently under investigation by the European Commission.

The EC investigation was launched in October 2006 following a story carried by this newspaper a month earlier detailing how the state broadcaster failed to use a staggering 33% of the EPSO funds earmarked for quality programmes and instead used them for operations.

As a result of the restructuring four years ago, the total number of employees at the public broadcaster was brought down from



Dominic Fenech

178 to 64.

Asked to explain the rationale behind the PN proposal and why the PN has stated that the television licensing system "has now been superseded" when a majority of European States still maintained such a system, a spokesperson for the Ministry for IT and Investments told MaltaToday:

"The electoral promise is made as you rightly point out by the Nationalist Party. Though of course we are a Nationalist Government I think it is proper that you put your questions to the party rather than to the Government," he said curtly.

The Ministry spokesperson pointed out that "PBS has not been funded from TV licences since 2004. TV licences to date are collected by the Malta Communications Authority and the revenues are transferred in favour of the consolidated fund.

"PBS is run from its own resources and revenues generated commercially. PBS also has a Public Service Obligation contract with the Government that has, since 2004, provided PBS with €1.17 million in exchange of the obligation to transmit public service content.

Asked whether the decision to abolish the licence fee was a prelude to closing PBS down, the MIIT spokesperson said curtly: "It is obtuse to suggest that an electoral commitment to abolish TV licences is equivalent to an intention to abolish PBS.

"The standing Public Broadcasting Policy of the Nationalist Government is explicit in that it considers the existence of public TV and radio as an obligation of the state. We have every intention to continue to live up fully to this obligation," he told MaltaToday.

The MIIT spokesperson failed to reply to questions put by this newspaper as to whether the stakeholders, such as PBS management and workers, have been consulted by the Nationalist Party before this proposal was included in the electoral programme or not.

On her part, Helena Dalli, the Labour Opposition's main spokesperson on broadcasting, told MaltaToday that "a new Labour Government is committed to giving to the Maltese people the national television station that it deserves and which many other countries have. We are not going to sacrifice quality for commercial reasons.

"The Maltese people deserve a much better television station than the one it has today. The

COALITION possible? YOU decide

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HOW? AD will form a coalition with the major party entrusted by the president to form a coalition on the basis of shared priorities for the country.

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Nationalist Government has reduced the National television station to a purely commercial television station where the skills of its highly-experienced workforce were discarded and work was instead given to contractors which nowadays have a monopoly over this station.

"Many people are sick of the fact that they have to pay for a television licence for a station which instead of being a national station, has ended up as an excellent business for four blue-eyed contractors.

"With the pledge that it is making, the Government is trying to alleviate a bit of this discontentment and the fact that the people are feeling that they are not getting good value for their money.

"I believe that if the people have a suitable national television station, they would not hesitate to contribute to it because besides the fact of having a station which really makes us proud, they would also be getting good value for their money. This is, after all, what people in other countries do.

"There are also EU structures where, in the case of a national station, the Government would be able to provide help," Dalli told MaltaToday.

The experts' view

Asked for his assessment of the PN's proposal to remove the television licensing system if elected, PBS Editorial Board acting chairman Dominic Fenech told MaltaToday: "There's little to assess. The string of promises which even the dumbest voter will have no difficulty translating into pocket money continues to get longer," he said.

Questioned as to whether he agreed with the PN's claim that the television licensing system "has now been superseded", when a majority of states in Europe still maintained such a system, or not, Fenech said: "It has become outdated in the sense that it has become just another tax, of which none goes to PBS.

"If on the other hand, the money collected from television licences were to be put back into public broadcasting, then no,

there would be nothing outdated about it. On the contrary, the notion of taxing a service in order to keep up the quality of that service is a modern one," the history professor said.

Asked for his view on how the public broadcaster should be financed in the current scenario, whether through a system of licence fees, a grant or through advertising, Fenech told MaltaToday: "It should be financed in all the ways you mention, within the limits of fiscal reason. Once you tax a service, in this case through licence fees, it makes sense to dedicate the revenue to the improvement of that service.

"Advertising revenue of course is always welcome, provided that the broadcaster does not become over-dependent on advertising to the point of perverting the public broadcaster's mission.

"Advertising follows ratings, but ratings don't follow quality. Indeed bad practice and mediocrity has been known to get great ratings," he warned.

Asked by MaltaToday whether, in his view, this decision was a prelude to closing down PBS or not, Fenech said: "It is difficult to say what the PN will do with public broadcasting if re-elected.

"Four years ago the government launched a new broadcasting policy, which downsized PBS with the aim of turning it into a "leaner" company, established a fixed annual government grant to promote programme quality and basically told PBS that it will have to raise its own money to finance its operational expenses.

"Most importantly, it claimed to restore full editorial freedom to the station as far as programme content was concerned, and for this purpose established an Editorial Board.

"This was supposed to be autonomous in its decisions, an autonomy limited only by the company's need to stay financially solvent.

"Since the same new broadcasting policy presumed that the bulk of programming would be outsourced to commercial production houses, this Editorial Board was given the role of



Fr Joe Borg: "I think this should provide us with the occasion to review the National Broadcasting Policy which was published in 2004."

assessor of programme quality, in addition to its other obligations regarding fairness, impartiality, among other things.

"What happened however was that the Editorial Board was doing its job so well that certain quarters became uncomfortable with its independence.

"The Board of Directors started to impose itself whenever it disagreed with decisions of the Editorial Board, making a farce of the so-called new broadcasting policy.

"The politicians who had themselves drawn up the policy repeatedly failed to intervene to stop this abuse of power, thereby encouraging it to go on. So definitely, a returned government by the same party will lead to a revision of public broadcasting policy.

"In that case PBS may continue to exist, but I doubt whether the notion of public interest broadcasting as we know it will really survive," Fenech warned.

On his part, Fr Joe Borg, media analyst and advisor to the Ministry for Culture on Media Policy, welcomed the opportunity to re-discuss the National Broadcasting Policy.

Borg told MaltaToday: "PBS does not take one euro cent from the licence money. As a result it is wrong to imply that removing the licence fee is equivalent to the removal of the source of financing of PBS Ltd."

He said at the moment the EU Commission was studying whether or not to review its 2001 Communication on state aid to public service broadcasters.

"I think this should provide us with the occasion to review the



PBS as we knew it

income from the TV licence to PBS, as used to happen under Dr Alfred Sant. It was more or less another tax, very little of which was forwarded to PBS on a thousand and one conditions," he said.

Questioned as to whether he agreed with the PN's claim that the television licensing system "has now been superseded", when a majority of states in Europe still maintain such a system, or not, Flores

said: "This is complete bullocks. State broadcasting everywhere in Europe and many other places in the world has indeed been rationalised to a great degree, but the new trend is that while there is no way it should go back to the days when State broadcasting was the one and only voice, it should however be able to exist and to compete comfortably with the private stations, obviously retaining an exclusive right to public service programmes."

Asked for his view on how the public broadcaster should be financed in the current scenario, whether through a system of licence fees, a grant or through advertising, Flores told MaltaToday: "The BBC model in the UK offers ample guidance on how we could tackle national broadcasting on this small island. A good licence system and a clearer policy of what PBS should or should not broadcast are prerequisites," he insisted.

"Having already brought the national station to its knees, this could be the coup de grace. It is of course what those who, over the past few years, have usurped PBS that would be jumping for joy.

"One must bear in mind the fact that the Nationalist Government did not automatically transfer its

assessor of programme quality, in addition to its other obligations regarding fairness, impartiality, among other things.

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"I think this should provide us with the occasion to review the

czahra@mediatoday.com mt



Helena Dalli: "We won't sacrifice quality for commercial reasons."

PN leads Labour on healthcare

JAMES DEBONO

THE Nationalist party has been judged to have the best policy on healthcare despite the MLP's revelation of a report issued in 2004 which proposed fees for public health services.

The report claims that the Cabinet had agreed in principle with the report but would not implement it because of its "political underpinnings". The Prime Minister denied that the Cabinet had ever considered charges on health and declared that he would resign if a future PN government were to impose such fees.

Although the report confirms that Gonzi had resisted pressure to introduce charges on health services during his term in office, it made a mockery of Gonzi's earlier claim that the Cabinet had never discussed the imposition of any such fees.

The PN has countered the MLP's campaign by reminding voters that a Sant-led government had imposed a fee on people collecting free medicines.

While 39% favour Labour's health policies, 47% favour the PN's policies. The survey reflects public satisfaction with the new Mater Dei hospital which has been hyped up as one of Lawrence Gonzi's major accomplishments. The Pharmacy Of Your Choice scheme which allows patients to collect medicines from pharmacies was another electoral trump card for the incumbent administration.

The survey shows that PN voters are more enthusiastic on their party's health policy than Labour voters. While 94% of PN voters favour their own party's



health policy 91% of MLP voters favour their party's policy.

In its electoral programme the MLP has committed itself to reduce waiting lists by 15% and to ensure that in the outpatients department the maximum waiting time will be less than a month. The Nationalist Party has also promised to set targets to reduce waiting lists.

Both the PN and MLP has also proposed the introduction of a

breast cancer screening programme.

The PN has also proposed an e-ID card which will include the medical information of each person and the introduction of e-medicine through which private doctors, health centers and hospitals will be able to access information on each particular

patient. Alternattiva Demokratika focuses its attention on health prevention and primary healthcare, insisting that a health centre in each district should be open on a 24-hour basis. AD is the only party to address issues like the impact of electromagnetic pollution from base antennas on

public health. Azzjoni Nazzjonali – a party whose two leaders are involved in private healthcare – is the only party favouring the privatisation of the health system while retaining free healthcare through a national insurance covering everybody's healthcare.

mt SURVEY

WHICH PARTY HAS THE BEST POLICY ON HEALTH CARE BY VOTING INTENTION (%)

	MLP	PN	AD	AN	NONE	NO ANSWER
MLP VOTERS	91.1	1.2	0	0	1.5	6.2
PN VOTERS	0.5	94.2	0.2	0.2	0.7	4.5
NON COMMITTED	25	46.5	0	1.7	4.4	22.4

WHICH PARTY HAS THE BEST POLICY ON HEALTH CARE BY AGE (%)

	MLP	PN	AD	AN	NONE	NO ANSWER
18-34	33.8	46.3	1	1	1.5	16.4
35-54	41.6	42.8	0.5	0.5	2.9	11.7
55	38	51.6	0.3	0.9	2.1	7.1

WHICH PARTY HAS THE BEST POLICY ON HEALTH CARE? (%)

MLP	39.3
PN	46.8
AN	0.8
AD	0.7
NONE	2.3
DON'T KNOW	10.1
NO REPLY	0.3

Methodology

This survey was held between Friday 29th February and Tuesday 4th March. A total of 2,115 persons were contacted, 1,200 of whom accepted to participate in the survey. Respondents were randomly chosen from the telephone directory. The survey results were weighed according to age/sex distribution of the population. The survey's margin of error is +/-2.82%.



Here are some cuttings from Alfred Sant's book of memories.

THE TIMES
Aviation security law to be enacted
Councils friction about trade fair traffic
Seminar to discuss graduating workforce

THE MALTA Independent
Dr Sant blows up at party meeting

THE TIMES
FOI warns of possible catastrophe

THE MALTA Independent
FOI says new taxation system will hit industry

THE TIMES
GRTU warning to government over water, power rates

THE MALTA Independent
No regrets over EU, VAT decisions

THE TIMES
Tourism industry 'cannot shoulder more expenses'

THE MALTA Independent
Sant accuses students of politicising stipends issue

THE TIMES
Hotel owners receive 'exorbitant' water bills

THE MALTA Independent
82% 'blame Sant for rise in prices'

THE TIMES
New water and electricity rates

THE MALTA Independent
'God forbid were Malta to join the EU' - Sant

THE TIMES
CMTU surprised at unilateral decision

THE MALTA Independent
Sant takes hard line against consensus

THE TIMES
Pensioners find water, power bills have at least doubled

THE MALTA Independent
FOI calls for review of water, power rates for industry

THE TIMES
NEW WATER RATES: "BLOW TO BEVERAGE FIRMS" - FOI

These are just some of the newspaper headlines from his days as prime minister, and a couple from his second term as Leader of the Opposition (his third term is drawing to a close). There are many, many more.

When Alfred Sant is asked about his behaviour and decisions, he says that he doesn't talk about the past. He says that it's all water under the bridge. He says that the past is for historians. No wonder. With that kind of baggage, anybody would want to run and hide. And then we ask ourselves: what is he still doing here?

Ah, but he says he has no regrets. No regrets for trying so hard to keep Malta out of Europe. No regrets for sending the country spinning into recession, with soaring unemployment when he was prime minister. No regrets for causing the economy to grind to a halt in just a few months. No regrets for throwing businesses into turmoil by trying to reinvent the wheel called VAT. No regrets for fiddling with education, for increasing taxation and for pushing electricity and water charges to astronomical levels. No regrets for frightening students and trying to silence them into submission.

A whole decade later Alfred Sant is still here, waiting for the moment when he can generate more newspaper headlines like those shown on this page.

Labour. A recipe for chaos.

Think about it. Better safe than sorry.

iva, fliemkien kollox possibbli
gonzipn

History repeating itself



Saviour Balzan

sbalzan@mediatoday.com.mt

It's been an eventful week for the PN, first with Jeffrey Pullicino Orlando and the confusion at Mistra, and now this: two days before an election, Harry Vassallo, leader of the Greens, is asked to report to a police station to commence a two-year imprisonment term for not paying two court fines related to VAT fines.

The decision to send him packing to Kordin was taken in October, but implemented now on the eve of an election.

It gives more ammunition to the Labour party and Alfred Sant. If no one realised, this is kind of action can only work against the Nationalist party, and work wonders for the opposition parties, namely Alternattiva Demokratika. So really, if someone wants to blame anyone if AD wins anymore votes... they should point their artillery at the bravery that planned this suicide mission.

And then I was reminded by a good friend of the decision taken some years back by a select few not to allow an electoral contest to take place in the Marsa and Zejtun local councils by retiring enough candidates as required to render a no contest. It was an awful mistake.

This one is worse

Last night I spoke to some bigwigs from the PN and they were shocked to hear that someone had decided to make a martyr of Harry Vassallo. They knew all too well that the last thing they need is a sympathy vote for Vassallo.

But yesterday's action will only work to inflate the sympathy for the Greens, who whether you like it or not have policies which should be welcomed.

It is difficult for me to believe that no one in the PN did not know what was happening. When four hours before the police came knocking on Vassallo's door, NET TV journalists were asking Harry Vassallo about the case?

Not without his consent

Nothing at the Stamperija takes place without a green light. Even the flies have to ask for permission to suck on the toast in the canteen. Mr Joe Saliba has told this news-

paper that this is a frame-up. In the sense that the arrest warrant for Harry Vassallo was ill-timed and meant to harm the PN.

So who organised the frame-up? Surely it was not the Commissioner of Police.

Or was there some secret subversive unit of the Labour party that infiltrated the police force to destabilise the Republic of Malta? Please, come on... pull my other

one. But if this was the case, why did NET TV rush four hours before the police, to ask Vassallo for his comments about the case?

And if Saliba was so concerned about this volatile incident which, as he says is a frame-up, could he not have pulled a few strings to ensure that the arrest warrant is postponed to another day?

I nearly forgot that Joe Saliba never phones ministers to complain about the way things are happening.

But AD's campaign has been completely organised and financed by the PN with the generous intervention from hysterical women who eat and sleep before their PCs.

Harry and home economics

Harry Vassallo is, as all those of us who know him, a rather disorganised person when it comes to his personal home economics. I know him as a person who is forgetful and inept at caring about his personal finances.

But he is not a tax evader or a fraudster. And yes, he should have declared openly his problem with the courts before the campaign.

But that is beside the point now. If the political parties want to take on the Greens and convince the electorate that they are not fit to be in the milieu of politics, this is not the way to do it.

But Vassallo's case is months old, and the ugliest part of the story is that the two sentences which were converted to two years' imprisonment led Vassallo to make a plea to the President Edward Fenech Adami. The plea made was a direct request to the President for a presidential pardon.

Now from an article penned in this newspaper, it is clear Edward Fenech Adami has granted 141 presidential pardons since 2004 and the over-



So here we are, hours before an election, and this happens. If this isn't arrogance, and a well thought out suicide plan by someone with a mission, then what is?

whelming majority (132) of granted presidential pardons concern pardons or reductions in prison sentences for VAT-related offences. Why Harry Vassallo's request was denied is unclear.

People with serious crimes have been granted presidential pardons. But then I guess Harry Vassallo is not Zeppi I-Hafi.

I could of course speculate, but I will leave this to our readers who have enough imagination and paranoia to imagine why some people are more equal than others.

If the Nationalists had any sense they would have revealed Harry Vassallo's two-year prison term at the very beginning of this campaign. Now, Harry Vassallo has become a martyr and if history repeats itself, then it is clear that martyrs get remembered... most especially in elections.

Is this the end?

The Nationalists launched a campaign based on the premise that Sant and his policies do not lead to good governance, and that the PN policies can take this country forward. In many respects that might be very true.

And Gonzi launched an offensive on many of the MLP's flimsy ideas and yes, many of the MLP's ideas are bound to have problems when it comes to implementation. The tax on overtime and halving the surcharge are two examples.

But Labour has had a great advantage. In the last week, it literally set the agenda and landed behind enemy lines, creating havoc. Instead of continuing with the attack, the PN decided to defend, and worst of all, put JPO as their frontman.

They landed themselves in a minefield with Alfred Sant launching his corruption grenade at everyone.

This last opinion before the election was meant to be a sober assessment of these last four weeks. The Vassallo affair has clouded my vision. In my DNA I still cannot fathom a dirty tricks campaign. My DNA tells me to stand up and talk about the underdog.

But it does not change the fact that at the end of the day, the next five years cannot be decided on the whims of a select few who planned such a stupid suicide mission.

Yet I am afraid what happened today may have mutated the DNA of other people who cannot understand how this could have taken place. Someone will have to do a lot of explaining after next Sunday!

ELECTION SPECIAL

maltatoday

WILL BE BACK NEXT MONDAY - DON'T MISS OUT



Joseph Muscat

Depletion and restructuring

Value-for-money is the name of the game when it comes to the use of public funds, which is to say taxpayers' hard-earned cash.

Thus the issue of subsidies – or rather, incentives – should ideally be tackled within this wider context. This would include notions that are relatively new to our society, such as the cost of not providing subsidised services or even the cost of politics and politicians.

But that would take too much time and space!

Labour's policy is that of ensuring that all those services that are essential for the economic and social wellbeing of the country, but which might not be viable without the necessary subsidies, are maintained.

In EU talk, these are called Services of General (Economic) Interest (SGI). Public transport and health are two SGI-packed

sectors. There is huge pressure from the Socialists in the European Parliament to have a fully-fledged Framework Directive to safeguard such services.

Labour will fund incentives for other services which would produce value-added to our economy. The helicopter service between Gozo and Malta is a case in point. The public money invested in such an operation would have an exponentially positive ripple effect in the local economy and is fully justifiable. Moreover, it conforms to EU rules.

It is interesting to note that over the past few years, the European Commission has been reviewing state aid rules in a way that makes it easier and less bureaucratic to help these services. The number of cases where the assent of the Commission is needed has been reduced, with the rule of

thumb being that little or no EU involvement is needed if the service being subsidised does not have an impact on the internal market.

What Labour will refrain from doing is intrude in the market in such a way that the subsidised services compete with those offered by the private sector. The time for such interference is long gone by.

On the other hand, Labour does not want to cut subsidies just for the sake of doing so. Take the Malta Shipyards. It is evident that unless a major breakthrough is achieved in the next few months, the targets of the restructuring plan negotiated between the Nationalist Government and the European Commission will not be met by year-end.

The PN is non-committal on what it will do in such a situation, even though the closing

down of the yard might be its preferred option. It might also be an option favoured by a substantial part of the population. I beg to differ.

The real choice is between trying to get more time to really restructure the yards, as Labour is proposing, or a hotchpotch restructuring à la PN.

In 1997, Labour took the bold step of drastically changing the management structure at the Malta Shipyards. It did so while paying a high political price since its traditional base was adverse to such a change. Nevertheless, it was something that needed to be done – and it was done. The only thing that stopped this thorough restructuring was the sudden change of government in 1998. Thus, Labour can and knows how to really restructure.

On the other hand, every time

the Nationalist Government mentioned the word "restructuring", it only meant relocation of workers from publicly-owned enterprises to other parts of the public sector and early retirement. "Depletion" would have been a better term.

Take Public Broadcasting Services and the Malta Shipyards itself. The restructuring only deprived the enterprises of some of their best human resources and left them in a more difficult position to compete. Furthermore, while the relocated workers are still on the public payroll (courtesy of the taxpayers), these enterprises are recruiting more workers to manage their operations.

This is nothing but shoddy window-dressing. Labour wants real restructuring.

Joseph Muscat is a Labour MEP

Jose Herrera 1st District



G. Mangia

Valletta

Hamrun

Pieta

Floriana

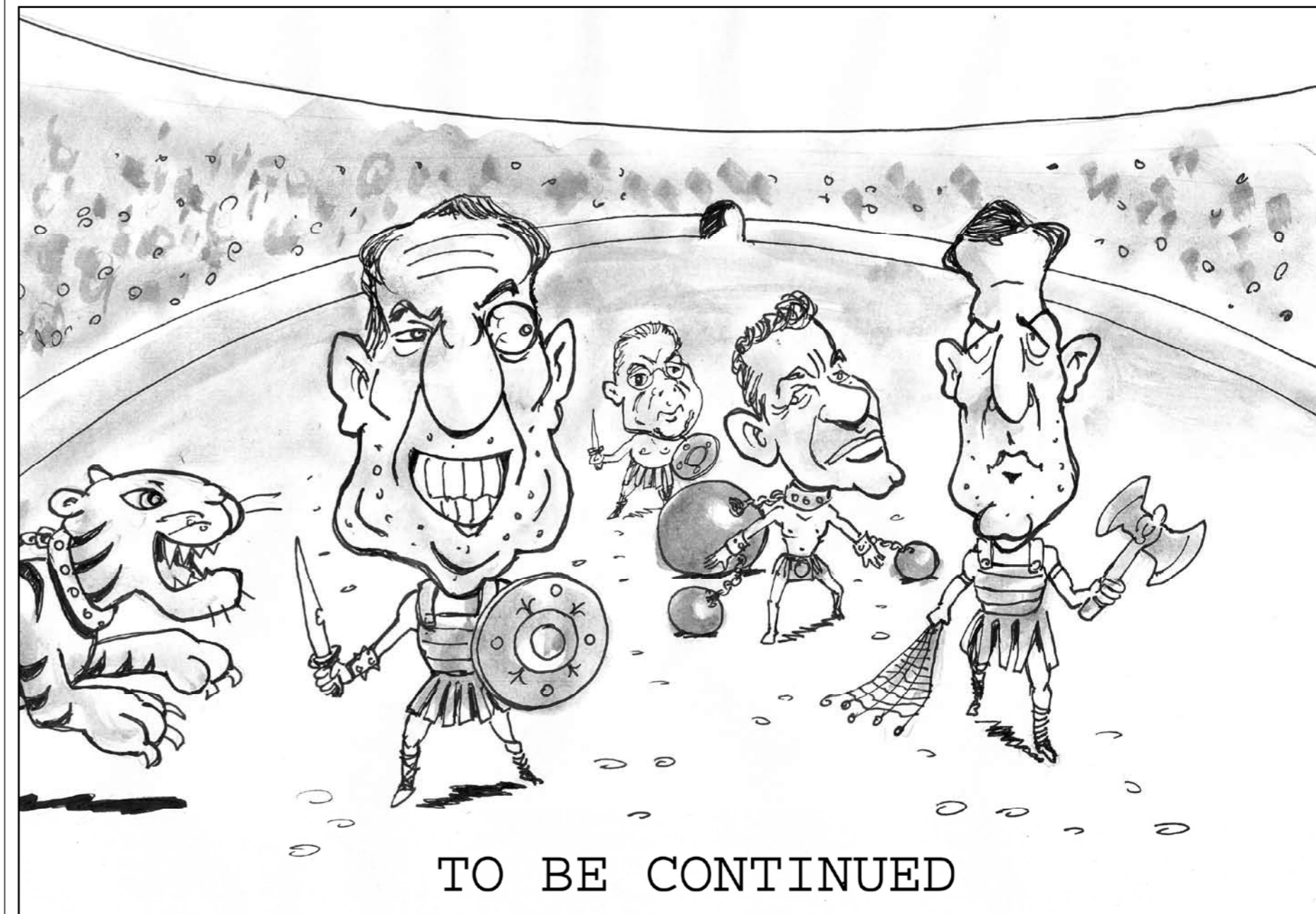
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TO BE CONTINUED

maltatoday Editorial

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The decision is in your hands

GENERAL elections are moments of significant importance in our lives and in the destiny of a democratic nation. Unlike local elections or elections for the European Parliament, the elected party's manifesto charts the direction that the country will take for the ensuing five years.

Accordingly, casting one's vote goes far beyond pencilling in a personal preference for a party and particular candidates. It is a statement on where one's interests lie, together with an appreciation of the country's interests; it is a preference for a particular vision of society which the parties are projecting. Since although the two main parties are fighting to capture the centre ground of local politics, they do not share the same vision, priorities, targets and political programmes, nor do the two party leaders have a common style of leadership.

Over the last days this newspaper has attempted to provide an informed opinion to our readers highlighting the respective programmes, the highs and lows of this campaign. Yet it is clear that when the cookie crumbles it will very probably be one of the two main parties that will assume office. With this in mind,

a value judgment on whether Lawrence Gonzi or Alfred Sant is the better person to lead the country in the next five years needs to be taken.

That is if none of the smaller parties manages to get a seat in parliament.

When casting one's vote we are effectively placing our future and that of our families in the hands of a preferred choice.

This choice is made on the basis of an informed opinion, an open mind and a dispassionate value judgment on the record of the men in office and also of the political programmes being presented to the electorate.

The two-year stint as Prime Minister of Alfred Sant is not a matter for historians but a fresh memory to be factored in before casting one's vote.

Equally, the four-year Gonzi administration needs to be looked at closely; after all we are probably voting to give a second administration to one of the two party leaders.

Their records should be based on their performances on the management of the economy, job creation, social commitment and general administration of the country.

Their respective programmes also need to be analysed.

The highlights of the Nationalist programme include tax cuts, reform of MEPA, anchored under the prime minister, sustainable development, surplus budget projected, reformed car registration tax, increased transparency in appointments and an eco-Gozo.

The Labour programme includes a reduction in the surcharge, no tax on overtime, the immediate introduction of a Whistleblower Act, reduction of bureaucratic red tape, a grant to first time home buyers, strengthening of the legal mechanism controlling cost of living and scrutiny of public regulatory authorities.

We attach particular importance to the management of the European project and to an appraisal of whom of the two leaders can make a better success of our place in Europe.

This involves management of the European funds and how best they are to be allocated; with the Nationalist party having clear targets on how to utilise these funds – mainly to upgrade the environment, while the Labour party has been less forthright to date on how the funds will be used.

Equally important are the social, economic, cultural and political reforms required to making our country a modern liberal democracy where diversity, tolerance, accountability, and transparency are the order of the day.

We encourage the incoming government, four years since our entry into the European Union, to cement a European way of doing politics high on its agenda list.

While appreciating fully the need for the government on joining Europe to have an economic focus to reduce the deficit and to qualify for the Eurozone, the incoming government will have to place on its agenda social and political issues which have been surfacing for years including party financing, electoral reform, increased accountability, transparency and acceptance of diversity in lifestyles. These issues will not go away and are to be placed on the political agenda if we are to be at the heart of Europe.

After days of high tension and unspoken mud slinging on all sides, the electorate is being asked to decide. Whoever is elected must continue to work to take this country forward.

OP



Victor Galea

Breaking the wasted vote myth

Have you received an email about what they're up to? Listened in to the whispering campaign? Sat in on the spin? Well here's to putting the record straight and stopping the spin and scaremongering. Here, we try and clarify the situation so you may vote freely for the political party of your choice having all the facts at your disposal. We do facts not fiction, sincerity not spin.

They say that a vote for AD is a vote for the MLP. Is this true? Incorrect. This statement is based on the assumption that all the people who vote for AD have previously voted for PN. This is very far from the truth. AD's potential voting pool comes from a wide variety of sources. There is a core Green vote consisting of people who have always voted for the Greens, new voters (over 17,000), people who have voted for the MLP and people who would not cast their vote if the Green Party was not contesting. By no stretch of the imagination can it be stated that every person who votes for AD intended to vote for the Nationalist party. In any case votes do not "belong" to any political party but to the voter who may use it as s/he pleases at different times.

They say that a vote for AD is a wasted vote. Our voting system allows voters to ensure that their vote is not lost or wasted. By voting for AD and then continuing to vote for other candidates from

other parties, one ensures that if the AD candidate is not elected, the second preference candidate will "inherit" his vote and has a chance of being elected. AD welcomes cross-party voting and encourages voters to give their 2nd or any subsequent preference to other favoured political parties. This would ensure that no vote is wasted.

They say that people vote AD to teach the PN a lesson. Is this true? Voters vote the way they do for a variety of reasons. They vote for a party such as AD which has been consistent and honest regarding a number of issues such as its pro-EU stance, need for a culture change, environmental and economical improvements, civil rights and integrity in public dealings. If another party has not been consistent or credible about these issues it is natural that voters will not be inclined to vote for it. After all votes have to be earned and no party is automatically entitled to votes regardless of its performance in the 5 years between elections.

They say that it is impossible for AD to be elected to Parliament. If approximately 2500 in one district vote for AD then it is very likely that AD will elect a member to Parliament. Considering that AD has been working very hard to explain and promote its vision for a coalition government for all the Maltese people, the prospects of this happening are very good.

They say that a coalition is impossible because of the recent changes to the electoral law. A coalition government is possible when either of the major parties does not obtain an absolute majority (50% plus 1). In this case, and with AD having elected a representative/s, the party having a relative majority may link up with AD to form a coalition government.

They say that AD wants to form a coalition with the MLP? AD will form a coalition with the major political party which agrees with its priorities for the country as published in AD's manifesto. These points have been made public for the sake of transparency and public scrutiny and may be viewed on www.alternattiva.org.mt.

They say that a coalition can't be formed because Gonzi is not keen on the idea. It is the electorate which decides whether a coalition should be formed. Politicians cannot ignore the sovereign wish of the people. If people have voted for AD to form a coalition government, dismissing this possibility is rather arrogant. If the people want an AD-PN coalition, then it would be very strange for a PN politician to discard this unique opportunity, preferring to have the MLP governing instead.

They say that AD criticises the PN only. Over the years AD has criticised both the PN and the MLP if the major parties policies and actions are

questionable. AD's criticism of the MLP's surcharge proposal is a case in point. Criticism should not be perceived as an attack and is necessary in a democratic society. Only despots try to crush out criticism. The PN has been in government for 21 years. It cannot expect to be above criticism and scrutiny.

They say that if AD is a coalition partner it will have a disproportionate amount of power and will render the government unstable. It would be self-defeating for AD to hold its coalition partner to ransom and act unreasonably as this would translate into a certain defeat at the polls the next time round.

There are many countries such as Ireland and Germany where coalition governments ensure representation of a greater part of the electorate and which are stable and efficient.

They say that it is better to try and effect change by working within a major party. This has been proved incorrect throughout the last 20 years where a major party has refused to fall in line with EU standards, has refused to budge regarding spring hunting, has retained its discriminatory position on divorce for the rich, has refused to amend the unjust rent laws, has ignored questionable conduct by ministers and has condoned disastrous land use planning policies. There has been no impetus for change and there will be no incentive for major party reform

if it is aware that you will vote for it again out of fear.

They say that a vote for the new candidates of either major party will bring about change anyway. This is based on the shaky presumption that all the present underperforming ministers lose their seat and are replaced by newcomers. This is a highly improbable scenario. Voting for the same party which has allowed these ministers to get out of hand means that you are allowing it to happen again. A political party apologizing for its inaction or inability to change on the eve of the election is an admission of failure and a gimmick.

They are saying that a change of government might bring about withdrawal from the EU. AD in a coalition government will resist all moves which are intended to undermine the electorate's European aspirations.

Who are "they"? You will notice that the anti-coalition brigade is mostly made up of persons who are linked to a major political party such as ex-ministers and chairmen of public corporation. Other commentators have business connections with major political parties and have a lot to lose if "their" party is not elected. These considerations should be kept in mind when weighing the credibility (or lack of it) of the obsessed anti-coalition brigade.

Victor Galea is an Alternattiva Demokratika candidate for Gozo

OP



Charles Attard

Reforming taxation

The runaway cost of living is a hot election issue. Malta is no exception and the rise in the cost of living is a problem which needs to be tackled urgently and efficiently. It is no secret that many people are finding it hard to make ends meet till payday. Voters have to make a decision and chose a party which can deliver prosperity, has a vision and proudly puts the national interest before all else.

There are various factors which influence the rise in cost of living. AN knows that price increases cannot realistically all be blamed on the government. It is AD and MLP that are using this cheap election tactic. AN acknowledges that the major cause of price increases is the spiraling cost of oil and cereal products, something which Malta has no control over.

However we do have control over some other causes of inflation and we can limit their effect. This can be achieved

through better productivity, less bureaucracy and better use of public funds, all areas where this government has proved its incompetence.

AN feels that overspending and deadline over-runs in capital projects cannot be tolerated any longer. AN cannot digest the fact that public project costs are overrun by millions. These extra costs are borne by the tax payers. These extra costs can be saved through better management resulting in lower taxes and more money in people's pockets.

AN is proposing a complete change in the tax system. A flat tax rate system will be introduced. The first Lm6,000 will be tax free, because today nobody can live decently on Lm6,000. Over Lm6,000 income, a flat tax rate of 18% will be introduced, encouraging those who are willing to work, and will not end up paying out almost half of their earning in taxes. This will be done gradually so that there is a smooth transition which will

“

AN feels that overspending and deadline over-runs in capital projects cannot be tolerated any longer

cushion the economy from any shocks.

Due to the sharp increase in oil prices it is imperative that we start seriously considering alternative energy sources because the rise in the price of electricity is making our industries uncompetitive. Families also experience further reduction in their purchasing power. MLP promises of a 50% cut in surcharge and AD's proposed different rates system might be contrary to EU law. Even the present government subsidies to Enemalta with the aim of keeping the surcharge low are subject to EU investigation. There is a strong possibility that the ruling will be that just as we cannot subsidize the shipyards, then the same will apply to Enemalta. AN proposes that a dual tariff is introduced, and during the night different electricity rates apply. Also tax on oil should be reduced so that the burden on consumers is lowered. Subsidies are not the solution in year 2008. They might have

worked during the Mintoffian era, but definitely not today.

Unfortunately today we have three political parties who are promising more and more benefits before the election. What nobody is telling the citizens is that benefits are paid from our taxes and not from the fund raising of the political parties. AN is not promising heaven on earth like the other parties. We are telling the electorate, that we have to work together to really improve our standard of living.

AN was formed because we have different ideas of how a country should run. We believe that competition is healthy and that it results in lower prices for consumers. Subsidies, on the other hand, increase the current public expenditure on unproductive work, resulting in lower competitiveness with a consequent drop in the citizens' purchasing power.

Charles Attard is AN candidate and president

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Football

Roma stun Real Madrid

ROMA have eliminated Real Madrid to reach the Champions League quarter-finals by winning 2-1 in Spain with Rodrigo Tadei and Mirko Vucinic.

The Giallorossi travelled to Madrid with a 2-1 first leg lead to protect and managed to recover Juan from injury, but David Pizarro was on the bench for Alberto Aquilani. Cicinho got the nod ahead of Christian Panucci to face his former club. Real had many fitness concerns, as they were without Ruud Van Nistelrooy, Arjen Robben, Christoph Metzelder, Pep Saviola, Wesley Sneijder and the suspended Sergio Ramos, but Robinho was back.

Aquilani had the first chance after seven minutes when a corner was rolled out to the D, but he lost his footing. Francesco Totti also failed to make contact from the edge of the box, but there were nervous moments at the other end when Alexander Doni missed Guti's free kick and Amantino Mancini had to clear the danger.

Doni did rather better soon after, getting down well to palm a deflected Julio Baptista free kick

round the base of the upright.

However, Roma went even closer with two stunning efforts from Aquilani on 18 minutes. Aquilani pulled a right-foot snapshot out of nowhere to cannon on to the woodwork from 20 metres. The move continued and Aquilani had another strike pushed out for a corner one-handed by a desperate Iker Casillas.

A mistaken De Rossi clearance sent Baptista clear, but he fired over from eight yards under pressure from Philippe Mexes.

Mancini's solo effort was deflected over the bar and Aquilani hit another long-range low drive just wide, while Doni comfortably smothered Baptista's attempt.

Straight after the restart Baptista curled a free kick from 25 metres over the wall and down on to the top of the crossbar with Doni rooted to the spot.

Roma threatened too with a great opportunity. Cicinho was in acres of space down the right and his cutback found Perrotta, but Casillas nd his defenders did



just enough to clear the danger from six yards.

Perrotta nodded a Cicinho cross off target, but Doni had his palms stung by a swerving Mahamadou Diarra attempt from distance. Diarra went off for attacking winger Royston Drenthe, as Real had 30 minutes left and needed to run more risks.

Raul's header from a Guti free kick was over, the Doni did well to anticipate Drenthe on a ball over the defence. Miguel Torres replaced the injured Michel Salgado, while striker Mirko Vucinic came on for an unhappy-looking Mancini.

Yet the Giallorossi hit the bar for the second time in the match with the substitute. Max Tonetto combined with Vucinic, whose first time left-foot shot cracked against the woodwork.

Robinho had a free header at the back post, but Drenthe's cross was too weak and he nodded wide.

Pepe hauled down Vucinic as he tried to run into the box from the byeline and it was his second bookable offence, so Real Madrid were reduced to 10 men for the final 20 minutes.

Roma took immediate advantage and took the lead at the Bernabeu. Tonetto whipped in a brilliant cross and Rodrigo Tadei got in front of Heinze for a powerful header into the far top



Roma's Francesco Totti of Italy, right, celebrates with Simone Perrotta

corner.

Real would not be beaten and fought back within a minute in controversial circumstances. Raul was clearly offside when he gathered from Robinho and placed an angled drive past Doni.

Pizarro replaced Perrotta, but the Spaniards were pouring forward in desperation now and a deflected Drenthe cross settled on to the roof of the net.

Cicinho wasted a golden opportunity on the counter with three Romanisti against as many Real defenders, as he attempted an audacious chip from 25 metres.

The former Madrid full-back made way for another Bernabeu habitue', Christian Panucci.

Moments later De Rossi was flagged offside when he almost

got a decisive touch to a header back across the face of goal, but he was behind the ball.

Roma put the fixture beyond doubt in stoppages with another away goal. Panucci thumped a free kick between Casillas and Fabio Cannavaro for Vucinic's header from six yards to silence the Bernabeu.

In other games Chelsea cruised into the quarter-finals of the Champions League with a comprehensive 3-0 victory over Olympiacos at Stamford Bridge and Manuel Neuer was FC Schalke 04's hero, capping an outstanding performance with two penalty saves, as the Bundesliga side won through to the UEFA Champions League quarter-finals at the expense of ten-man Porto.

Football

Juventus keen on Lampard

JUVENTUS look set to make an approach for Chelsea midfielder Frank Lampard after admitting they will be able to buy players of his class' this summer.

Lampard has 14 months remaining on his Blues contract but has long been linked with a move abroad.

Juve boss Claudio Ranieri signed Lampard from West Ham during his time in charge at Stamford Bridge. Ranieri is now looking to assemble a squad at Juventus capable of challenging for domestic



Frank Lampard

and European success.

Juve director Gianluca Pessotto has admitted the Serie A giants are monitoring Lampard, and has hinted they are lining up a swoop for the England international at the end of the season.

"He is an excellent player," Pessotto said. I feel we will be able to buy players of his class in the summer."

Lampard could leave for as little as £6million in the summer if Chelsea cannot tie him to a new contract.

Milan prepare summer changes

MILAN President Silvio Berlusconi is set to open his wallet this summer after what looks likely to be a season of disappointment at San Siro.

The Rossoneri went out of Europe's premier club competition last night following a 2-0 aggregate defeat to Arsenal in the second round.

The Champions League and Club World Cup holders have also disappointed domestically - the Diavoli are currently fifth - and need fresh investment if they are to challenge for honours next term.

To stop the decline, Milan's director general Ariedo Braida

is targeting three players, most notably Chelsea striker Didier Drogba.

The Ivorian has interested the Via Turati club for some time and a bid is being prepared to entice the unsettled hitman away from Stamford Bridge.

Earlier this season DD revealed the Rossoneri had made an offer for him in the past. "Milan came in for me last summer and it was very tempting," remarked the 29-year-old.

The Diavoli have struggled for goals this season - Ricky Kaka is the club's top scorer with eight in Serie A - and

need a prolific target man. Drogba has netted 14 times so far in 2007-08.

Another contender to partner Alexandre Pato is Lyon sensation Karim Benzema, but he has seemingly ruled out a move to San Siro.

Azzurri star Gianluca Zambrotta has also been linked with a switch to the club, as Milan are looking to sturdy their defence in view of Paolo Maldini's retirement in May.

The Rossoneri have also highlighted Fiorentina goalkeeper Sebastian Frey as a replacement for the out-of-favour Nelson Dida.

Formula One

Massa happier with Alonso at Renault

FELIPE Massa says he is feeling much happier that Fernando Alonso has moved to Renault rather than continued at McLaren and expects the championship this year to be a three-way fight between himself, Kimi Raikkonen and Lewis Hamilton.

"My main rivals will be Kimi and Lewis," he said. "It's a lot better that Alonso is driving for Renault than McLaren, because they aren't on the same level and that should make him less of a rival."

MITLUFA!!



Jisimha: SOPHIE

Cemplu: 21674042
79290766
99852531



Yesterday's Results	First Leg	Agg.	Second Leg
Schalke - Porto	1-0	(1-1)	0-1
(Schalke advance on penalties 4-1)			
Roma - Real Madrid	2-1	(4-2)	2-1
Olympiacos - Chelsea	0-0	(0-3)	0-3
March 11 2008			
Liverpool - Internazionale	2-0	(2-0)	11/03

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8 ta' Marzu 2008

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TAHLIX IL-VOT.....

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Elezżjoni Kunsill Lokali Valletta

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ivvota Emmy Bezzina
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Tista oċempel ukoli fuq 99493404

-Le-elezżjoni, kemm dik Generali, kif ukoli dik tal-Kunsill Lokali se jkun is-Sibt, 8 ta' Marzu 2008, bejn is-7 ta' filgħodu u is-7 ta' filgħaxija;

-Kull votant irid jleghu jew ikun gab id-dokument tal-vot;

-Fil-kaz ta' le-well distrett, kull votant irid jleghu żewġ dokumenti tal-vot, wiehed għall-Elezżjoni Generali u l-iehor għall-Elezżjoni tal-Kunsill Lokali.

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Pursuits

Sudoku

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

Yesterday's solution

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

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

Yesterday's solution
White had play and mate in three moves

1. Ne4+ Kg2 (Kh3)
2. Rf2+ Kg1 (Kh3)
3. Qh2#

or
1. Kh3
2. Qg8 Kh2
3. Rxh4#

White to play and mate in three moves

Across

- Wonderful (8)
- Trademark (5)
- Affirmative vote (3)
- Haul (3)
- Coins of small denomination (5,6)
- Semisynthetic textile (5)
- Radiograph (1-3)
- Precipitous (5)
- Leased (6)
- Nevertheless (3)
- Person who operates a farm (6)
- Tawdry (5)
- Possesses (4)
- Fabric of jeans (5)
- Painting executed in oil (3,8)
- Adult males (3)
- Very small (3)
- Entrances (5)
- Diamond (8)

Down

- Mountains (4)
- Puncture (7)
- Like a mother (8)
- Emaciated (6)
- Cut off (9)
- Ungainly (5)
- Start (5)
- Property debt (8)
- Capsize (8)
- Inflammation of the lungs (9)
- Feeler (8)
- Smokers receptacle (7)
- By the clock (6)
- Destroy by immersion (5)
- Titles (5)
- Sudden blast of wind (4)

Answers to the MaltaToday crossword will be published in the next issue

Today's Weather

MOSTLY CLOUDY
19°C / 14°C
UV INDEX: 4

WARNINGS: Nil

WEATHER: Partly cloudy becoming rather cloudy in the afternoon

VISIBILITY: Good

WIND: Light to moderate Southwest (force 3 to 4) becoming light Northwest (force 3)

SEA: Slight to moderate becoming light

Yesterday's solution

First count votes not to be counted before late Sunday morning

CHARLOT ZAHRA

CHIEF Electoral Commissioner Edward Gatt said at a press briefing yesterday that the counting of the first count preferences for the next general elections will not be held until 10.30 am on Sunday morning.

However, the process might be further delayed if voters mix up the local council with the general election ballot boxes.

This would mean that the local council boxes where the voters mixed up the votes would have to be opened and the general election votes would have to be sepa-

rated from those boxes.

If the timings of the 2003 general elections are followed, an indication of the first count vote is expected in the afternoon. Five years ago, the sorting of the first count votes started at 10 am.

By one and a half hours later, the party agents had a clear indication that the election had gone the PN way, and party supporters rushed into the streets to celebrate.

But if none of the parties obtains a 50% majority, the country will be on tenterhooks till the last count to see whether AD or AN would elect a candidate, as that would change the whole scenario as the Constitutional amendments agreed to between the two main parties last year would not enter into force.

If only the two main parties are elected to Parliament, then the Constitutional amendments would ensure that there is a proportional result even if none of the parties obtained a 50% majority.

The whole electoral process for the general elections should be concluded till Tuesday evening, save any last-minute hitches.

The votes for the Local Council Elections, which



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will take place in 23 localities in Malta and Gozo, will be counted next Saturday week, 15 March.

The Electoral Commission is currently distributing voting documents to those voters with mobility problems, such as elderly persons, who have still not collected their votes.

The documents have to be collected personally by eligible voters from the Commission's offices at Evans Building, Valletta, up to midnight.

Gatt insisted that under the terms of the General Elections Act, no voting documents can be handed out after that date, even in the case of voters arriving from abroad.

At this stage, voting documents can only be collected by the voter whose particulars appear on the document.

Gatt said some 7,500 voting documents had still to be collected from the offices of the Electoral Commission by Tues-

day evening.

At the 2003 elections, 2,377 voting documents remained uncollected, when there were 294,106 eligible voters.

This time there are 314,358 eligible voters, of which 993 were withdrawn by the Electoral Commission because the voters had died or for some other ineligibility.

Of these, 285,205 were delivered by the police, of which 29,159 remained undistributed.

Louis Fsadni, manager at the Naxxar Counting Hall, said ballot boxes will be opened immediately on arrival at the Naxxar counting hall.

There will be 591 boxes, plus an additional 13 boxes-for St Vincent de Paule Residence (one for each electoral district), and another 13 boxes to receive the votes of the Assistant Electoral Commissioners, who will vote at Naxxar tomorrow.

The Commission will be doing its best so that no one minute is wasted in the whole process leading to the official results.

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