



MLP, Greens open broadside on PN

Super irregular: Caqnu's permit



CHARLOT ZAHRA

THE MEPA Internal Audit Office's report on the award of a development permit to Charles Polidano ("Ic-Caqnu") for a Lidl supermarket in Safi outside development zone (ODZ) to construction magnate Charles Polidano known as "Ic-Caqnu" last year declared that there was "a gross irregularity" in the granting of this permit.

The report was published yesterday following pressure by Alternattiva Demokratika (AD), which had made the complaint about

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STOP PRESS: MEPA DCC RESIGNS EN MASSE

MEPA'S Development Control Commission (DCC) Division A submitted its mass resignation yesterday evening after it was revealed that the permit granted to Charles Polidano was issued illegally.

MEPA Chairman Andrew Calleja con-

firmed yesterday night that the DCC interrupted a hearing in the afternoon soon after auditor Joe Falzon released his damning report indicting the whole board with gross irregularities.

"I confirm they have submitted their resignations."

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Healthcare bombshell

MATTHEW VELLA AND DAVID DARMANIN

LABOUR leader Alfred Sant yesterday revealed the contents of a December 2004 health ministry policy paper which had proposed the introduction of payment for health services. Sant said the report had been requested by the Cabinet itself after the issue was discussed the previous July.

"It confirms that the Cabinet had agreed in principle that Maltese and Gozitan citizens should be asked to pay for public healthcare. The report says these payments were not to be introduced during that time due to the political consequences they carried," Sant said.

The report says that health minister Louis Deguara had presented to Cabinet a policy paper in July 2004 recommending a new financing strategy for public healthcare, due to increased costs owing to the ageing population, healthcare manpower costs, the cost of medicines, increased demand for health

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PN winning tax cuts contest

40% say PN has best tax policy
34% favour Labour's tax policy

mt SURVEY

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XUEREB WON'T PAY STATE BACK €3.5m UNLESS MEPA ISSUES PERMITS

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Newspaper post

On the record

James Debono digs into the archives to find what candidates contesting the general election have been saying in the past few years



EDWARD TORPIANO
PN candidate on the 1st district

On being diplomatic
"In view of what is alleged to have taken place in the run-up to the election of Commonwealth Secretary General, allow me to suggest that the Malta Government expel His Excellency Nick Archer (British High Commissioner) from Malta."
9 December 2007 - letter to MaltaToday

On illegal 'invaders'
"Apart from asking this Don Quixote champion of illegal invaders (Fr Paul Pace) whether other neighbouring countries respect their 'obligations' in accordance to international law to which they (themselves) are 'signatories', one can also ask Fr Paul Pace whether Malta is earmarked to become the detention centre for all illegal immigrants coming from North Africa into the European Union."
11 November 2007 - letter to MaltaToday

On MEPA reform
"I disagree with the statement (made by former Minister Michael Falzon) that the Planning Authority is preferable to the PABP (Planning Area Permits Board)."
10 June 2001 - letter to MaltaToday
On the need for change
"Kindly allow me to reply by asking the Leader of Opposition

whether people are looking forward to a change in the Malta Labour Party leadership, should Alfred Sant lose the next General Election."
3 February 2008 - letter to MaltaToday

ROBERT ARRIGO
PN candidate on the 9th and 10th districts

On being available
"I am always available to render any kind of service, not just that of tourism minister. People from the sector had proposed me for the simple reason that I have hands-on experience in tourism."
12 November 2006 - MaltaToday

On conflicts of interest
"By appointing Sam Mifsud as MTA Chairman we have removed this stigma, which we call conflict of interest. There is no conflict of interest as long as you do not use your post to obtain something, which you should not obtain in the first place. No-one should be found guilty because of his success in life."
12 November 2006 - MaltaToday

On Brand Malta
"You should not brand Malta locally, you should brand Malta where your clients are. I agree that a campaign should be conducted to show the importance of the industry in Malta but it should have been focused and not conducted

whether people are looking forward to a change in the Malta Labour Party leadership, should Alfred Sant lose the next General Election."
3 February 2008 - letter to MaltaToday

on such a large scale."
12 November 2006 - MaltaToday

On eco-tourism
"The environment is not as important as we make it out to be. Cyprus this year had more construction than we have and still had more clients. I've been around for 33 years in the industry. We have improved our product and people like us how we are."
12 November 2006 - MaltaToday

JOE SAMMUT
MLP candidate on 4th and 5th districts

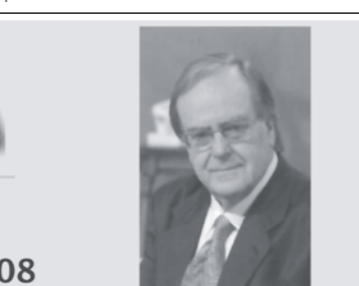
Seeking new pastimes:
"In all European countries, hunters are allowed to shoot all year round for vermin. Why are hunters not allowed to shoot at rats? Why this restriction?"
13 February 2008 - MaltaToday

On construction in Sliema
"I do recommend that, in Sliema at least, but also in other over-developed areas, a moratorium period is introduced, blocking permits for a few years and giving residents a much needed break."
7 May 2007 - The Malta Independent

ARNOLD CASSOLA
AD candidate on the 9th and 12th districts

On scaremongering:
"To scare the people before the 2003 election, Fenech Adami declared that a second preference for AD was a vote for Alfred Sant. A blatant lie. In the European elections for 2004 they tried to scare voters by saying that AD was in favour of abortion. Another blatant lie. Now in 2008, they are scaring people on the dangers of a coalition, as if it was a creature from hell."
24 February 2008 - Illum

On contesting Italian elections
"Luckily Italians are not racists. Dual citizens like me and other citizens in Malta like English-Maltese, Maltese-Germans and other Maltese-Italians are not discriminated against."
9 April 2006 - MaltaToday



NORMAN HAMILTON
with NORMAN HAMILTON
on Saturday 1st March '08
2035 - 2300 on
ONE Television

On Europe's immigration policies
"It is ironic how most European states point their fingers at Malta for not saving lives at sea, when all they do is just sit and watch and do nothing themselves to put into practice a common immigration policy."
10 June 2007 - MaltaToday

On what's left and right
"More than 40 years ago Chinese Communist statesman Deng Xiaoping had already grasped that what mattered for people was not whether their politicians belonged to the orthodoxies of the left or of the right. What really mattered was whether the politicians came up with practical solutions for the everyday problems they met in their lives and whether they were able to bring about the changes that were needed to make things better."
20 January 2008 - MaltaToday

On the EU referendum
"A legal case exists to prove that the referendum was fraudulent... the part of the negotiations dealing with hunting and trapping should be annulled because hunters were given false information by none other than former Prime Minister Eddie Fenech Adami."
13 February 2008 - MaltaToday

On public transport 'apartheid'
"A special bus service should be introduced for immigrants in the Hal Far refugee camp because buses serving route number 13 are always packed with these klandestini..."
Adjourment speech in parliament July 2007

On party financing
"The hands that feed the political parties and individual politicians expect to be rewarded and never bitten. Public funding would mean that the parties would owe their daily bread to the general taxpayers whom they are to represent in the first place. Public funding of parties means less blackmail and more policies in the interest of the public and not of powerful special interests."
27 February 2005 - MaltaToday

On golf courses
"Let's not turn this issue in an ideological one. Believing in golf is not like believing in God."
2 October 2005 - MaltaToday

On the EU referendum
"A legal case exists to prove that the referendum was fraudulent... the part of the negotiations dealing with hunting and trapping should be annulled because hunters were given false information by none other than former Prime Minister Eddie Fenech Adami."
13 February 2008 - MaltaToday

On public transport 'apartheid'
"A special bus service should be introduced for immigrants in the Hal Far refugee camp because buses serving route number 13 are always packed with these klandestini..."
Adjourment speech in parliament July 2007

On the EU referendum
"Bejnietna, nahseb li tlifnieh." ("Between the two of us, I think we had lost it.")
16 December 2007 on Teletubi

On political party stations
"It would make much more sense to have a public broadcasting system reflecting the diversity of political opinions inside and outside parliament... than to have party political stations."
27 February 2005 MaltaToday

On party financing
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27 February 2005 MaltaToday

Xuereb won't pay back State €3.5m unless he gets MEPA permits

MATTHEW VELLA

AZZJONI Nazzjonali deputy leader Anglu Xuereb yesterday accused Investments Minister Austin Gatt of having "got his own back" on him by ordering the chairman of Malta Enterprise to rescind the contract on the Verdala Hotel concession the government sold to Xuereb back in 1994.

In a reaction to MaltaToday's revelations last Sunday that Xuereb owed Malta Enterprise over €3.5 million (Lm1.5m) in outstanding dues over the Verdala Hotel - payments for the concession itself - Xuereb said he would not be paying back any money until the Malta Environment and Planning Authority issues permits sanctioning the Verdala Hotel - a claim which Austin Gatt described as "preposterous".

The case is currently being heard in court.

Xuereb claimed that a former MEPA director Chris Borg, was a former Malta Enterprise employee who knew of the outstanding issue between Xuereb and Malta Enterprise, and therefore "did not want to process the



Anglu Xuereb application."

He said that as PN secretary-general, Austin Gatt had filed a case in court to stop him from contesting the 1994 Naxxar local

elections, given that Xuereb was not resident in Naxxar, and that since then, he had found a way of "getting back" at him.

He said his company wanted to extend the Verdala hotel, and that only a partial permit was issued in 2000 because MEPA had issue with the building's façade. Since then, works have been stopped at the Verdala Hotel, Xuereb said, saying he is still paying for its upkeep and security.

Asked by MaltaToday how he could expect a permit when he had not yet paid his full dues for the concession of the hotel, Xuereb claimed the government had not honoured its obligations.

Pushed on whether this challenge was the lofty claim of a "cowboy contractor", Xuereb turned to the MIDI development at Tigné and Smart City, saying that "they didn't have to suffer the martyrdom I had to endure with the Verdala Hotel."

MaltaToday also asked him whether he had asked for a waiver of the condition binding him to use the property only as a hotel, to instead develop the property into apartments. Xuereb confirmed that there had been plans of this sort, but when

MEPA refused his plans for the apartments, all works were stalled on the remaining part of the property.

Yesterday evening, Investments Minister Austin Gatt said that Xuereb was offered the Grand Hotel Verdala in Rabat in 1994, then state-owned, for Lm2 million following a public tender.

In 1997, the Malta Development Corporation (now Malta Enterprise) entered into a deed of sale with Xuereb, which included the condition that the property will be used as a hotel operation of a standard not below four-star classification.

Austin Gatt said that after being awarded the property, Xuereb changed his mind and decided to interpret the term 'hotel complex' as luxury apartments accompanied by a small hotel.

"MEPA have to date not issued the permits for Mr Xuereb's plans for the replacement of the hotel with the luxury apartments. Mr Xuereb blames the opposition to the development of a golf course in the vicinity of the site as a primary reason for his 'change of mind' after he was awarded the property and after he had actually signed the deed of sale.

"Mr Xuereb has also failed to meet his companies' obligations with respect to the full payment of the amounts due to government on the transfer of the property. The total amount due by Mr Xuereb to government exceeds the sum of €3,500,000."

Gatt said that notwithstanding multiple notices and warnings, Xuereb had not settled this outstanding balance and in 2005, Malta Enterprise instituted legal proceedings against Xuereb's companies over the outstanding dues and the unfulfilled obligation for the development and operation of the hotel complex.

Gatt said Malta Enterprise would keep on pursuing the case in court.

Referring to PN lawyer Joe Zammit Maempel - who had presented the case of the PN against Xuereb's candidature for the Naxxar local council - Xuereb said that in November 2006, during a sitting at the Malta Arbitration Centre, Zammit Maempel made an obscene gesture with his arms, saying: "I am in a position to ensure that Anglu Xuereb will not take an Lm8 million contract in Gozo", as reported in an affidavit by one of Xuereb's representatives.

Karin Grech compensation case: AG's absence postpones hearing until after election

JULIA FARRUGIA

ATTORNEY General Silvio Camilleri yesterday failed to show up in Court to answer questions regarding the compensation request by Karin Grech's family over the murder of their 15-year-old daughter 30 years ago.

Karin Grech was killed on 28 December 1977 by a letter-bomb addressed to her father,

Prof. Edwin Grech, during the tensions surrounding the doctors' strike and subsequent lock-out. The unsolved case remains a matter of intense political controversy to this day.

In a lawsuit filed on 4 January of this year, Prof. Grech, his wife Pearl and their son Kevin requested compensation from the Maltese Government for the loss of their daughter. In the past weeks a meeting was held between the Attorney

General and the family's legal representatives. MaltaToday learnt that during this meeting the Grech family revealed the amount of the financial compensation they are expecting.

However, neither the Attorney General nor a representative from his office turned up for the hearing, which was set for yesterday, 27 February - just 10 days before the general election.

As a result, the hearing has been deferred until 20 May.



Karin Grech compensation case to be heard under new administration



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Reporter

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bla AGENDA

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Special guests:

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NOTARY CHARLES MANGION
DR ALFRED SANT

bla AGENDA

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PN ahead in tax slashing contest

JAMES DEBONO

THE MLP has spent the last five years attacking the PN for increasing the tax burden, but has failed to capitalise on fiscal discontentment at the final hurdle: 40% of survey respondents think that the PN has the best policy on taxation, and only 34% think Labour has the best policy on this topic.

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. This could be an indication that the electorate still associates bread and butter issues with the traditional parties. Yet 25% of respondents could not identify themselves with the tax policies of any party contesting the election.

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

On the other hand the PN is strongest among the younger and older age groups, with the MLP at its weakest among the 18-34 age bracket.

The tax slashing contest

In its electoral programme the PN promised to slash the 35% tax rate by 10% for those declaring an income of less than €60,000. It has also promised to widen the 15% income tax bracket. The PN also promised every mother who re-enters the labour market after five years a tax holiday of one year for each child under the age of 16. Every mother who has been out of work for

less than five years will benefit from a tax holiday of a year for every child born after 2007.

On its part the MLP's major fiscal plank was its proposal to exempt overtime from taxes. With this promise the MLP seeks to give a respite to lower income earners while encouraging them to be more productive.

The PN has launched a two-pronged attack on this measure. In the pre-campaign days it pointed out that such a measure would lead to massive abuse as people shift their income from normal working time to overtime.

As soon as the campaign started the PN found new fuel in an interview in which MLP deputy leader Charles Mangion was "quoted" saying that overtime will be paid hour per hour, instead of the standard overtime rate of one hour and a half for every hour worked. Mangion denied making this proposal in this interview. The MLP's manifesto makes it clear that overtime will be paid at the current rate.

Just a few months before the campaign the PN had costed the MLP's proposals of halving the surcharge, subsidies for first time property buyers and eliminating taxation on overtime at an astronomical at Lm115 million.

But the PN has not made any effort to cost its own proposal to cut taxes.

The MLP has also promised to reconsider the tax bands at a later stage but only after slashing the energy surcharge by half.

Even the smaller parties have joined the tax slashing contest, with AN proposing the most radical tax cuts which takes the form of an income tax flat rate of 18%. It also proposed exempting from taxation those currently paying 15%.

Yet the electorate has so far not reciprocated this gesture of fiscal generosity, with just 0.1% opting for AN's fiscal policy.

AD is also flirting with higher income earners by proposing slashing the income tax for those paying 35% by 5% irrespective of how much they earn. But the proposal has not left even a dent on the electorate's voting intentions.

Despite its shift to the right, AD has been the only party proposing redistributive taxes.

The party proposed a 0.5% tax on the declared value unutilised property to fund social housing and a 40% tax rate for banks and other oligopolies.



mt SURVEY

BEST TAXATION POLICY ACCORDING TO VOTING INTENTIONS

	PN	MLP	AD	AN	None	Don't Know
PN voters	91.2	1	0.3	0.3	2.1	4.9
MLP voters	3.1	82	0	0	2	12.8
Non-committed	33.6	17.3	0.7	0.3	9	39.2

BEST TAXATION POLICY ACCORDING TO AGE

	PN	MLP	AD	AN	None	Don't know
18-34	37	25.3	2.5	0	4.9	30.2
35-54	34.2	34.8	0.9	0.6	7.3	22.2
55+	48.1	35.3	0.2	0	4	12.3

WHICH PARTY HAS THE BEST POLICY ON TAXATION?

PN	39.8
MLP	33.5
AD	1.5
AN	0.1
None	6.1
Don't know	17.2
No reply	1.8

METHODOLOGY

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



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Sant accuses Gonzi of lying over plans to end free health

services, new technology and new services.

Sant said the policy paper specifically refers to the fact that the Cabinet had agreed "in principle" with imposing fees for the provision of healthcare, "but fees for Maltese citizens will not be introduced for the moment due to their political underpinnings. From other countries' experiences, these co-payments amount to between 3% and 5% of public health expenditure."

The policy paper includes Deguara's comments from a Cabinet memo which had discussed the implications of the national health service's burgeoning costs: "Unless there is a strong commitment to resolve the funding problems prevalent in the health sector, there will be curtailment of services, while new services or therapies cannot be introduced. Such an eventuality... will jeopardise the health status of the nation."

Sant yesterday said that Lawrence Gonzi had "in the most clear of manners, lied and kept on lying to the people in these last weeks and the proof of this can be found in black on white."

He said Gonzi had a problem of personal trust, while government wanted to hide away what it intended to do, and that it wanted to fool the people so that after the general elections, it could do what it want.

He presented various excerpts of interviews given by Lawrence Gonzi in which he promises that public healthcare services would remain free for everyone, a claim reiterated to One News journalists and in a PN electoral spot.

Sant said that under another government led by Lawrence Gonzi, payment for public healthcare would be introduced, saying that those already on three and four-year waiting lists, will be faced with having to pay for their operations or consultancy fees they need.

"Government should have never lied to the people in this most barefaced manner on the eve of a general election," Sant said.

He accused Sant of failing in his duty as prime minister to tell the people the truth. "Gonzi has lied to the people. In a serious democracy, things cannot take place in this manner. It is shameful."

The paper discusses the

implications of setting up a health fund that would assign revenues from a tax source, towards the financing of healthcare in the shape of a 'national health contributory scheme'. The paper argues that the fund would establish accountability, encourage people to pay for better services, increase transparency, and demonstrate the real cost of state services to voters.

It also said the health fund would "bring about informed choices and more democracy", allowing taxpayers to "participate separately" in the several public expenditure decisions which may arise. "Thus voters could make 'private' choices on each public service by comparing their costs with their benefits."

The policy paper also includes a discussion on how the government could finance public healthcare by increasing VAT. "No wonder Gonzi has refused to give guarantees on whether he will be increasing VAT," Sant said.

The paper in fact states that VAT could be a possible revenue source for the financing of the NHS, given that direct taxation measures "are most often associated with the financing of public goods and services."

The paper says that "a minimum threshold should also be established and, in the event that the percentage on VAT fails to meet this threshold, then the government will 'top-up' the percentage on VAT revenue by a state grant to meet the minimum threshold level."

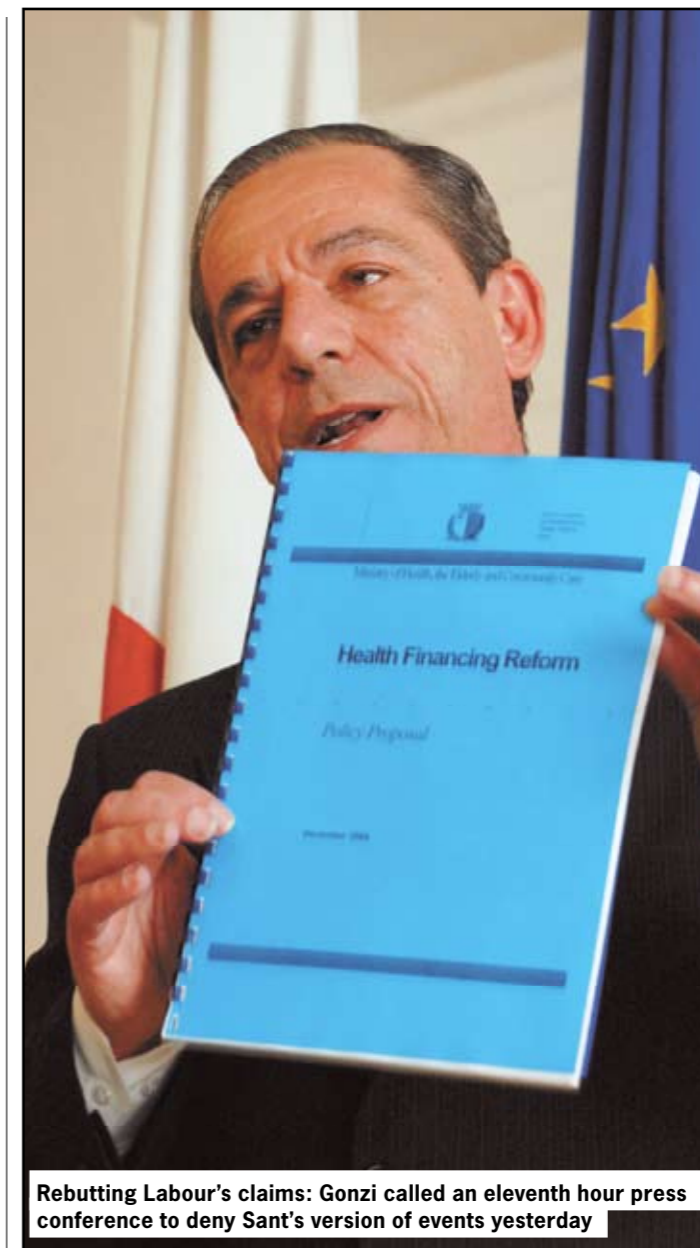
The paper proposes that 14% of the 18% VAT contribution would go towards the financing of a health fund, calculated to amount between Lm108 million and Lm129m, based on 2004 and 2005 projections.

The paper also states that public health expenditure stood at around 10% of total public expenditure between 1991 and 2003, while only 0.06% of government revenue arises from health sources. With a welfare gap of Lm54 million in 2003, which had increased by 61% in ten years, the paper states this discrepancy between social security contributions and payments to contributory social services was being financed by 38% of income tax.

Sant said the Labour Party would guarantee public healthcare would remain free under a new Labour government.

Sant said the Labour Party would guarantee public healthcare would remain free under a new Labour government.

"The idea had been presented for discussion," he added, "and



Rebutting Labour's claims: Gonzi called an eleventh hour press conference to deny Sant's version of events yesterday

Gonzi rebuts: memo was never discussed in Cabinet

Later on in the afternoon, Prime Minister Lawrence Gonzi called a press conference in which he claimed that the Malta Labour Party is "cheating on government's plans for the health sector."

"This is an attempt to misguide (the electorate) by quoting only the convenient parts (of the report)," he said.

Describing his version of facts as "crystal clear and uncontested", Gonzi insisted that, at cabinet level, he never presented any proposal that implies the introduction of fees in the health sector.

He went on to explain that in July 2004, the Health Ministry had presented a memorandum to explain the idea of co-payment for health services.

"The idea had been presented for discussion," he added, "and

policy proposal. The text on the front page and on every other page can vouch for this."

The PM categorically denied that at any point, this Health Ministry report was ever presented to the cabinet as "it had been rejected by the Cabinet Committee for Social Policy."

"Facts confirm that in the four years I've governed, I never introduced fees in relation to health services, in contrast to the decision taken by Alfred Sant in 1997," referring to the prescription tax of 50 cents introduced by the Labour Government on medicinal products.

"We have no intention of proposing any taxes on health," he added. "It was in fact the Nationalist Government that completed Mater Dei, which Alfred Sant now calls 'state-of-the-art'."

By now clearly turning the attack on to Sant, Gonzi said: "It was Sant himself who proposed that Zammit Clapp hospital imposes payments for medicines, social cases, food and transport. The then Labour government had said that unless such fees are introduced, Zammit Clapp would have to resort to redundancies."

"The Labour Party is in a state of panic," he continued, adding that they have made blunders on over-time proposals, education reforms and the re-negotiation of the EU deal, among others.

Asked by one of the journalists present to comment on cabinet minutes mentioning that the cabinet had agreed "in principle" to this process but decided not to implement it "due to political underpinnings", Gonzi's answer was: "You are picking on a paragraph, there was only cabinet agreement on the preparation of the report." He then swiftly moved on to exclaim: "Could I have implemented this measure? Yes. Did I implement this measure? No, and I have no intention to do so because I believe that the health sector should remain free from any taxes."

On an interview featured on The Times in 2003, Health Minister Louis Deguara had been asked about the sustainability of Malta's health sector. His reply was: "One gets what one pays for. On the positive side, we have to remember that once the hospital is completed the deficit will go down by Lm50 million a year. But it never will be sustainable if we retain the existing systems."

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Hold your horses, there could be a 1996 repeat

Lawrence Gonzi warns Gozitans that MLP stand a chance of winning

JULIA FARRUGIA

PRIME Minister Lawrence Gonzi yesterday warned Nationalists in Gozo not to jump to any conclusions about the election result, as it could be that history will soon be repeating itself.

"I'm telling people, hold your horses, there are people who are rushing and already jumping to conclusions," Gonzi told hundreds of housewives at a coffee morning in Marsalforn. "Don't make the same mistake! We already lived through this. In 1996 we said we would win, but then we lost the elections." "We will win if we will fight till the very last day," Gonzi thun-

dered, reiterating his constant plea that "every vote counts."

Gonzi then urged Gozitan housewives to embark on an important mission: "If you meet undecided Gozitans, remind them that every time there was a Labour government, Gozo suffered."

The PN leader then turned to a list of projects attained under his premiership.

"In Gozo we kept on working till the very last minute. A few days ago we inaugurated the Ingarr terminal. It is true that we still need to finish the terminal in Malta but we finished off yours first!" he claimed.

Promising to change Gozo into a "special country in the Mediterranean", Lawrence

Gonzi reminded people that it was under his administration that in 2007 Gozo experienced a 17% growth in tourism.

"My government curtailed the licensing fees for Gozitan businesses by 25% and 10% of the 353 electoral proposals are specifically targeted on Gozo," the Prime Minister maintained.

Lawrence Gonzi insisted on his party's proposal of changing Gozo into an ecological island. "We will be doing something incredible. Instead of receiving electricity bills from the power station, we will be using alternative energy," he said, reminding his audience of proposal number 321 saying that Gozo will generate all its energy through alternative

resources.

"Others only want to halve your surcharge, and we have this ambitious project," the leader declared triumphantly. Then, back in Gonzi directive mode: "It is important that you get out of this hall and each one of you make it a point to find someone that is saying that he or she is not going to vote, and tell them: 'Don't get us in a situation where we lose all this'," claiming that if people stay in and don't cast their vote, this will automatically be a vote in favour of Alfred Sant.

Fitting in a very tight schedule Lawrence Gonzi was then shuttled to Ghajnsielem for the inauguration of the first crafts incubation centre in Gozo.

The project was funded by an €850,000 investment from the 2004-2006 Structural Funds Programme for Malta under the European Regional Development Funds. The remaining 25% of the project was funded through Maltese taxes.

At the end of the inaugural ceremony, the decisive Prime Minister was faced with one of the most daunting decisions of his political career.

"Do I really have to do this? It's a shame... how can I cut this cake? I don't want to do it," Gonzi laughed, at the request to cut a cake artistically moulded in the form of the Ghajnsielem incubation centre.

Needless to add, in the end he cut the cake.

Gonzi prefers education to surcharge subsidy

CHARLOT ZAHRA

PRIME Minister Lawrence Gonzi told a business breakfast yesterday morning that if faced with a choice, he would prefer spending money on education than on subsidising the power surcharge.

"If I had €50 million and I had to choose between subsidising the surcharge and education, I would choose education," he said in clear reference to the Opposition's pledge to halve the fuel surcharge if elected to government.

Gonzi said that upon becoming Prime Minister four and a half years ago, he set out a vision which included EU accession and joining the eurozone.

"1 May 2004, whether you like it or not, was a new beginning for our country. The country had to design a new vision from there onwards to deal with the realities of EU accession," he said.

Gonzi said that the Government's vision aimed at creating a dynamic economy based on high value-added jobs requiring skills and competence in order to achieve a high standard of living.

He said one of the first decisions of his Government was the mac-



roeconomic decision to put public finances on a strong position to enable the country to attract strong FDI from abroad.

Gonzi said the ultimate aim of the Government's three-pronged strategy was the introduction of the euro as soon as 2008, while at the same time keeping inflation at a low rate and achieving sound public finances.

"There were those who said this was an ambitious target. Others advocated a slower adoption of the euro in 2010 and beyond. We took decisions that were sometimes unpopular but were successful," he said with a sense of

pride.

Gonzi mentioned how the Nationalist Government based its economic strategy on three foundations: getting more FDI to Malta, modernising the public sector and privatisation.

He said the government needed to "move out of business" and keep to core activities. "Give to business what business can do better than government," Gonzi said.

At the same time, though, he said that Air Malta should not be privatised as the Government considered it as strategic to the country's business interests.

"Industries depend on Air Mal-

ta's services for their economic survival, therefore you need a consistent airline service. I will not let our country depend on those whose ultimate aim is the bottom line," he insisted.

He said Malta still needed to invest more in Research and Development as Government still does not have an official coordination point for this sector, although there are private companies that are doing quite well in this respect.

Another source of headaches for businesses – regulatory authorities – needed to be "more effective with regards to enforcement,"

Gonzi said.

He added that the Government needed to make an exercise to rationalise the large number of authorities set up by the Nationalist Government to reduce the duplication of roles within these authorities.

Gonzi said the measure of success of a government was the number of jobs it created. During the past four years, 20,000 new jobs were created while absorbing redundancies from the closure of the textile factories. "Thanks to technology, a lot of manufacturing processes have been automated, leading to better jobs," he said.

The PM warned, though, that the future scenario for the next two years held particular challenges in store, including the worsening worldwide financial scenario and the volatile price of oil.

"It would be irresponsible to give a guarantee on the price of oil for the next few weeks, let alone for the next few years," Gonzi warned.

The business breakfast was dominated by Gonzi's speech, which lasted for more than an hour, with only four questions being allowed from the floor.

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Gonzi warns dockyard workers: future in your hands

JULIA FARRUGIA

PRIME Minister Lawrence Gonzi yesterday issued a stark warning to the shipyard workers: that the future of the Malta dockyards lies only in their hands.

Interviewed in Naxxar by former Sunday Times Editor Lawrence Grech, Gonzi pressed home the following message to shipyard workers: "Listen carefully to what we are saying. We believe that the yards have a future. But they will only have a future if we truly have a tête-à-tête togeth-

er: if we increase productivity, if we give value for money for what we're spending, and if we provide a good service."

Lawrence Gonzi repeated his tirade that over the past two years, productivity levels at the shipyards nosedived dramatically. With a clear bullet directed to both workers and the General Workers Union, Lawrence Gonzi recited another warning:

"I tell you this. If there are good intentions, the shipyards will move forward. But if there are no good intentions, or if there's someone whose sole intention is to trip you up ("jaghti l-gambetti") or to draw you

into the political game, the situation will backfire badly and he will be cause more damage."

Addressing the electorate directly, Lawrence Gonzi harked back to what happened five years ago, stating that the shipyards owe their existence to sacrifices made by the Maltese.

"Maltese people, it was you who waived Lm300 million debt by the Shipyards. And this is why our deficit at that time shot up by 10%," said Gonzi.

The PN leader held that there are ways how the European Union could financially aid Malta to train Shipyard work-

ers, enabling them to reach higher productivity levels.

He slammed Opposition leader Alfred Sant, stating that the EU would never accept to open the negotiating process. "This is crystal clear," he said. "And I warn the Opposition Leader. 'Don't deceive people.' Five years ago you tried deceiving people. It was Sant who tried misleading you saying that we join the EU factories such as De La Rue, which Sant himself visited four days ago, will close down."

Gonzi answered questions on privatisation, pledging that neither AirMalta nor Enemalta and Water Services will be

privatised.

"But yes, naturally, there are sections which will be liberalised. No privatising or liberalisation will lead to loss of jobs."

Lawrence Gonzi was quizzed on the fact that a number of proposals in the electoral programme are long-promised projects which never materialised, including the Opera House and City Gate.

The Prime Minister said that the whole project would cost the country Lm20 million. Gonzi revealed his workings saying, "the government, every year for five years, will save Lm4 million."



PHOTOGRAPH BY GILBERT CALLEJA

Sant promises to eradicate MEPA conflicts of interest



PHOTOGRAPHY BY GILBERT CALLEJA

LABOUR leader Alfred Sant yesterday pledged he would review financial packages of architects sitting on MEPA boards so that they would cease doing private practice in a bid to attack the glaring conflicts of interest of board members representing clients.

Speaking during a Broadcasting Authority press conference on TVM yesterday night, Sant said architects on the MEPA boards needed good financial packages that would allow them to focus on their work with the authority.

He added that such a measure would have to go hand in hand with much more accountability. "That's where we have to arrive," he said about raising remuneration for MEPA board members. "To solve the conflicts of interest there needs to be a good package for them. But

they have to be accountable, not behave as if they were above everyone."

Asked whether he would remove the insider networks influencing important appointments under a Labour government, Sant said his priority would be trust and competence.

"I believe that the important criteria for such appointments would be trust and competence. We have to stop this idea that the country is divided as if everything was black and white. Whoever enjoys our trust and is competent will not be removed."

Asked to react to yesterday's edition of sister paper *Business Today* which reported the European Commission's unwillingness to extend the period of subsidies for the shipyards unless there are "exceptional cas-

es", Sant said: "The commission is unaware of the exceptional cases because the government did not keep it informed of the investment that should have happened there but didn't. We'll make the case and relaunch the restructuring process."

About his party's stand on spring hunting, Sant said that although he disagreed with the government's interpretation of the accession treaty, a Labour government would continue making the case being made at present with the EU.

"We will however apply the EU regulations, nothing more, nothing less," he said. "I believe GonziPN deceived the hunters and trappers. We will stand by whatever the European Court decides. We have to conform to EU regulations."

Sant reiterated his latest

pledge not to impose the reception class if there is widespread disagreement from parents and teachers.

"It won't be imposed," Sant said. "There will be full discussion about it, and it will be implemented if there is agreement."

Asked about his stand on corruption in the 80s when he was MLP President, Sant replied that at that time he was holding a party position, not one in government.

"Besides, I was never notified of any corruption cases. If I were I would have acted on them."

Asked what he did about corruption allegations when he was sworn in as prime minister in 1996, Sant claimed that "all traces had been erased" when he went into office.

"We were proposing having

inquiring magistrates, but the Nationalists were against it," he added. "What we need is the Whistleblowers' Act. Having the prime minister send those who report corruption to him to the Police Commissioner is a no deal. Once the case arrives to the commissioner all the alarm bells along the administrative line would have started ringing."

Sant said a new, subsidised helicopter service would be reopened by his government, but it would no longer be operated by Air Malta as it would be an unwanted burden for the national airline.

The Labour leader also reiterated his belief that divorce should be made available, although he would expect civil society to bring it up again before moving on it.

Sant visits Luqa industrial estate



MATTHEW VELLA

OPPOSITION leader Alfred Sant yesterday met workers at the Luqa industrial estate, and pledged a reduction in bureaucracy in a bid to help

small and medium enterprises.

He was warmly welcomed by a group of well-wishers at the Construct Furniture factory, a place he said had benefited from the help of his 1996 government to expand. Today the factory employs close to 100

workers.

He said the furniture manufacturing sector had suffered a contraction of 60% in the past five years after EU membership, but said reducing costs for SMEs was down to reducing bureaucracy and concentrating on the most

competitive sectors of the country. "In all this time, the parliamentary secretary for small businesses Edwin Vassallo has given us just talk and no action," Sant said.

Sant also reiterated his pledge to give SMEs and the self-employed tax credits

to be able to cope with the costs of the energy surcharge, which Labour wants to halve for domestic users.

He again said that Labour's targets for 4-6% economic growth will allow the manufacturing sector and SMEs to expand further.

Mepa Audit officer's report slams permit for Caqnu ODZ supermarket in Safi as 'gross irregularity'

pg 1 the case, to do so in spite of the fact that MEPA Board Chairman Andrew Calleja had not made his comments about the case.

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

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

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

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

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

Falzon did not mince his words about the DCC decision. "...they took the law into their own hands and ignored the provisions of the plan. In this way they acted in a way which is far beyond their powers to do."

"The DCC can only enforce policy; it has no right to make policy. The correct procedure would have been to refuse the application and then express their concerns to the MEPA Board."

"It would have been up to the



MEPA Board, if deemed necessary, to request an amendment to existing policies or the formulation of a new policy.

"Consequently I would recommend strongly that the six members of the DCC who voted in favour of this application should shoulder their responsibility for their error of judgement," the MEPA audit officer insisted in his report.

Falzon said that the situation is a "serious cause of concern".

An application with considerable effect on the environment was approved contrary to policy and no remedial action may be taken to withdraw or modify the permit as the law does not offer that possibility.

"I would recommend that when the Development Planning Act is reviewed, Section 39A is amended to allow for the withdrawal or modification of a permit where an application has been approved contrary to policy."

"The possibility of the withdrawal or modification of permits is particularly important for any development outside build-

ing zones and for any buildings or other structures which have a historical or architectural value," Falzon recommended in his audit report.

In his report, Falzon concluded that "The complaint of the Alternattiva Demokratika that application PA 0554/06 was not assessed according to official policies is sustained."

"The Development Control Commission, Division A, is solely responsible for this gross irregularity in the approval of this planning application."

The Development Control Commission, Division A was "strongly censured" in the report as "they failed to abide by the provisions of the Development Planning Act when they overturned the recommendation of the Planning Directorate without justifying their actions on planning grounds; they permitted a development which manifestly goes against planning policies as established by the MEPA and approved by the Minister responsible and they created a dangerous precedent which would allow development

outside development zones not in accordance with established policies, in particular the provisions of the Structure Plan and the Local Plans."

DCC A was also strongly censured as "they ignored the policy decisions taken by the MEPA in the Local Plans and in other subsidiary regulations for the approval of retail establishments; and they failed to consider the possibility that this type of development needs an environmental impact assessment."

Falzon also advised the MEPA Board "to propose an amendment to the Development Planning Act to allow for the modification or withdrawal of an approved permit if it is shown that a particular development application has been approved contrary to official policies."

In a press conference called shortly after the report was published yesterday afternoon, AD spokesperson for Sustainable Development, Carmel Cacopardo, called on all members of the DCC A to take responsibility of their actions and resign immediately en masse.

He invited Minister for Rural Affairs and the Environment George Pullicino to take action about the matter and remedy the damage that has been made in the few days that he still had left in office.

On his part, AD Chairperson Harry Vassallo said that "the permit that was issued illegally, as in this case, is invalid and MEPA has the duty to take steps to stop works immediately and make good for the damage made."

"AD is ready to take all the legal procedures needed to ensure that the law is respected," he warned.

"Gonzi has to take immediate steps in order to be able to convince anybody that once he is going to take direct responsibility of planning after the next general elections, scandalous cases like those that happened when he had collective responsibility for the entire government are not repeated," Vassallo insisted.

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MEPA's DCC resigns en masse

pg 1 Calleja said. By the time we went to print, only the resignations of six out of seven members had been submitted, given that the seventh member was absent when the decision to grant the permit was taken.

The DCC which has just resigned was entrusted with deciding applications out-

side the development zone. It was chaired by Philip Azzopardi, and includes Carmel J Portelli, Anthony Mifsud, Charles Micallef St John, Charles Calleja and Christopher Spiteri.

Calleja would not confirm which of the above had not yet resigned but added that there might be another resignation soon.



MEPA Chairman Andrew Calleja



Josie calls for privatisation of health, personal insurance policies

DAVID DARMANIN

DESCRIBING the current health system by use of the Maltese slang reference to male genitalia - "zobika" - AN leader Josie Muscat yesterday went into the specifics of the chapter on health featured in

We would ensure that every Maltese citizen would be covered by a health insurance policy

the far-right party's electoral manifesto.

In the proposed reform, one finds: the introduction of a government-financed health insurance policy; the abolition of polyclinics; the farming out of hospital management to the private sector; as well as an upgrade in services provided by general practitioners at community level.

While stating that immigrants are leaving us with "nothing but illnesses and problems," Muscat said that they would be eligible to a free health service anyway.

"We would ensure that every Maltese citizen would be covered by a health insurance policy. This means that those funds received from National Insurance and VAT contributions that are earmarked for health, would be used to provide such insurance policies to the Maltese," he said.

"High-earners would be asked to purchase their own policy," he continued, adding that the expenditure involved would translate into withholding tax credits. "Those making use of a government-financed basic policy would also be entitled to upgrade such policy to a more comprehensive one by paying a small annual fee."

Josie Muscat, who also owns a small chain of private hospitals in Malta and Libya, specified that this system would enable a fair choice between health services provided by the private and those provided by the state.

"Anyone receiving treatment at state-run hospitals costs the taxpayer a certain amount of money," he said. "People don't realise this because they never receive bills for health at home, so they automatically assume that health in Malta is free of charge. AN wants to fix a price to all health services and medical interventions offered at state-run hospitals - in the same way we do at private hospitals."

He went on to explain the workings of how this can be managed by providing the example of a medical intervention that costs the state Lm250. In that case, he said, the insurance fund would tag that same intervention at the fixed cost price. Patients opting to undergo the same intervention privately would only get a refund for the amount tagged, irrespective of the price charged at the private clinic.

On state-run hospitals, Muscat proposed they are passed on to a "corporation that sees

to the running of the facility, accountable to its efficiency and productivity."

Muscat also spoke of the setting up of private clinics in various localities, in which General Practitioners would be grouped. This system is very similar to what is currently available at St James' Hospital. Once such a system is adopted, Muscat said that "we can get polyclinics out of the way."

Although AN has neither worked out costs for such a reform, nor presented a feasibility study, Muscat assured all present that this model would work. "It is feasible and effective, as can be proved by other countries who have adopted it, like Germany."

Asked by this newspaper whether AN would provide a basic insurance policy to asylum seekers placed in detention centres, refugees and prisoners, Muscat said: "Our position has always been very clear. When St Paul came to Malta - who by the way, was not an illegal immigrant - we cared for him and fed him. To the contrary of what these immigrants do, he left after three months. At least he left us Christianity, whereas illegal immigrants are leaving nothing but illnesses and

AN wants to fix a price to all health services and medical interventions offered at state-run hospitals - in the same way we do at private hospitals

problems. Irrespective of this, yes, we will be providing a free health service to anyone who requires it. We are obliged to."

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Ornis chickens out of spring hunting decision

RAPHAEL VASSALLO

THE Ornis Committee yesterday met to discuss the dates of this year's spring hunting season, but for the umpteenth time the only decision taken was to postpone the issue in view of the ongoing case against Malta in the European Courts of Justice.

In a press statement issued late yesterday evening, Ornis said that: "in the light of the fact that the request for interim measures has not yet been decided by the European Court, and that therefore the matter is sub judice, the Committee has resolved not to take any decision about the (spring hunting season dates) recommendation, in accordance

with the legal provisions." The Committee also announced that it will be referring the matter to Attorney General Silvio Camilleri to ask for his advice regarding legal procedures connected with "interim measures". On February 1, the European Commission took Malta to court for allowing hunting in spring

every year for the past four years. Spring hunting is illegal according to European Law, but while Malta argues that it had obtained a special exemption during negotiation stages in 2003, the Commission claims that none of the necessary conditions have been met. The Commission therefore requested the European court

to take interim measures which would force the government to close the spring hunting season should it decide to open it again this year, regardless if the case in the ECJ is ongoing.

Contacted yesterday by Malta-Today, Ornis Committee chairman Louis Cilia had little to add to the committee's statement. "We took our decision in view of the ongoing court procedures," he said. "We also decided to refer the matter to the AG, but no date has yet been fixed for the meeting."

Similarly, a spokesman for the Ministry of Rural Affairs and the Environment was uncommunicative when contacted: "We have no comments to make at this stage," was all the MRAE spokesman would say. On his part, Environment Minister George Pullicino proved to be unreachable by phone.

But Ornis' failure to come to any decision yesterday may have weighty implications for the future of hunting in spring. The "legal provisions" referred to in the Ornis statement specify that the committee is the only entity which can advise the minister on dates for the spring hunting season: failing which, the season cannot legally be opened.

Ornis is legally obliged to issue these recommendations four weeks before the actual commencement of the season. This implies that, for the season to open on 20 March like last year, the recommendation had to be made this week at the latest.

Considering that no subsequent committee meeting has been scheduled – and that in any case it is improbable that a decision will be taken so soon before an election – the outcome of yesterday's meeting strongly suggests that this year's season will either open much later than usual, or not at all.

This uneasy compromise is unlikely to mollify BirdLife Malta, which has long insisted that the Ornis Committee is morally and legally obliged to recommend a total ban on hunting spring once and for all. And while the hunters have so far been cautious in their reactions to one postponement after another, the resulting uncertainty is almost certain to add to the mounting tensions surrounding this intensely controversial issue.

The hunters' and trappers' federation (FKNK) has in fact scheduled two public meetings for this weekend. On Saturday, FKNK will be gathering its members at 3pm at It-Tokk Square in Victoria, Gozo. The following day, hunters will converge upon the old market place in Rabat, Malta, at 10am.

Announcing these meetings, FKNK urged its members to be "prudent" both in their behaviour and in their choice of slogans for placards. "Remember that the eyes of all Europe will be on us. In case of provocation, approach FKNK officials and marshals, or the police."

NATIONAL EURO CHANGEOVER COMMITTEE



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

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

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

107

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

96

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

77

The NECC issued 77 warnings

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

Linja Ewro 154

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OP



Martin Scicluna

The environmental deficit: Judgement Day



“ We cannot turn a blind eye to the crass act of institutionalised vandalism that saw the unnecessary extension of the building development zones in 2006, or the rampant over-development and land-abuse which has marked the last few years

As a detached and apolitical observer of this general election, it is disheartening to witness at first hand the tribal warfare which has ensued and the reckless and largely unaffordable electoral promises being made, encouraged by sycophantic media apologists on both sides of the tribal divide.

“ The Prime Minister now tells us that he will take MEPA personally under his wing. He will reform it and will reduce the environmental deficit as he did, successfully, with the economic deficit

We must each of us make up our own minds on what constitutes the best solution for Malta's future well-being, and vote accordingly. We have a duty and a responsibility to vote, which I am confident we will exercise. My concern is with the environment.

As somebody who has been vocal in his efforts to bring the environment to public notice, it was flattering to find the Prime Minister adopting as his own a phrase I had coined (with some friendly prompting) last November in a series of articles describing Malta's environment: "The environmental deficit".

"In the last three years," I pointed out "the government has most commendably tackled the country's economic deficit." But, on the other hand, "the environmental deficit has remained stubbornly out of control, and is growing. In most major respects the environment has actually become worse, despite the Prime Minister's well-meant promises to make the environment a priority. Rarely has rhetoric exceeded reality more."

The environment has finally come to the forefront of the political agenda. A general election in a parliamentary democracy allows us to judge a party on its record. Every five years we are able to measure performance. We are able to ask ourselves, in the environmental and cultural heritage fields, did this government deliver on its promises? Were our natural landscapes and environment safeguarded and enhanced?

We should try to examine these questions objectively and in an even-handed way. In the environmental and cultural her-

itage fields – which are so vital to our quality of life – individuals should weigh up the answers for themselves and then decide on the way ahead accordingly.

We recognise that on issues of such major national importance, the answer is not always clear-cut. It is a matter of assessing the balance of advantage and deciding whether on environmental grounds Malta would benefit most by voting for the Nationalist Party, the Malta Labour Party, Alternattiva Demokratika or Azzjoni Nazzjonali.

As we look back on the last few years we can, I think, congratulate the government for the launch of the first-ever Nature Park, Il-Majjistral. The waste management strategy has made great strides. The monster of Maghtab has been all but tamed. Wayside monuments and some other historic sites have been conserved. A number of embellishment projects have been completed. The Valletta and Cottonera Waterfront projects and the paving of Mdina have been most successful. The road network is being improved. Some afforestation projects have begun.

On the other hand, we cannot turn a blind eye to the crass act of institutionalised vandalism that saw the unnecessary extension of the building development zones in 2006, or the rampant over-development and land-abuse which has marked the last few years. The progressive destruction of urban conservation areas and village cores. The creeping urbanisation of Gozo. The litter – despite the Prime Minister's worthy vow soon after taking office of 'zero tolerance' on this issue –

our chokingly poor air quality and the threat to our fresh water quality. The uglification of Malta epitomised by Tigne Point and the plans for Fort Cambridge, Pender Place and Mistra Village. The lack of a National Sustainability Plan. The sad state of Valletta.

The stewardship of Minister George Pullicino for the environment will be judged by the people of Sliema, St Julians, Swieqi and Qui-si-sana and it may be that Nationalists there will offer up the minister as the sacrificial lamb for past omissions. The Prime Minister now tells us that he will take MEPA personally under his wing. He will reform it and will reduce the environmental deficit as he did, successfully, with the economic deficit.

The government in power is inevitably an Aunt Sally: there for us to take pot-shots at it. We vent our criticism on it because we expect our legislators – the people we elect to power and responsibility – to deliver efficient administration and governance. They are accountable to us. And every five years we are given the opportunity to pass judgement.

The over-riding question now is: how has the government performed and would the other party – the Opposition – do any better? What is the Labour Party's track record on the environment? What does one make of the MLP's plans for two golf courses – one in Malta and one in Gozo – and its plans for Hondoq ir-Rummien? Has there really been a Pauline conversion on the environmental road to Damascus by the Prime Minister? Are the Opposition to be believed when they say that they

too are putting the environment first?

Or are these simply politicians trying to manoeuvre for political advantage in the face of a resurgent green vote? Is a vote for Alternattiva a "wasted" vote, or should those who hold the environment dear be true to their convictions and take the opportunity to break the mould of Maltese politics? The bottom line is: which party is more likely to deliver on its promises? The acid test is to decide which party has the competence and political will to drag Malta kicking and screaming into the 21st century on the environment.

It pleases me that the environment has finally come of age in Maltese politics. It would be impertinent of me to suggest how people should vote on 8 March. Our individual judgements about which of the political parties is best placed to deliver on its environmental promises will dictate the agenda for reducing the environmental deficit and improving our quality of life for the next five years. With the challenges of climate change and global warming, and a multitude of other environmental shortcomings to tackle, it will be a crucial decision.

OP



Roderick Galdes



The road ahead

All roads lead in the same direction. All indications point to a Labour victory at the forthcoming general election. No matter how this decadent government tries hard to stop the internal haemorrhage of dissent, the cracks on the edifice are more than visible. Even a school child can feel and predict a change in government soon.

After a score of years in power the linen is far from spick and span. In Maltese we have a saying which somehow infers that those who do not change and evolve will eventually be infested with head lice ("min ma jbiddux iqammel") Precisely, that is the state in which our country unfortunately found itself!

No matter how the party in government tries to project an optical illusion that somehow they are one solid party to govern for another term, the writing on the wall spells out another truth. The melting away of voters from the PN folds are accumulating into an avalanche of dissent and swing towards the other parties contesting. Certainly, that the Labour Party has all the credentials to be the net beneficiary of these deserters who are seeking fresh pastures!

Dissent

It is enough to sit down and follow a discussion programme on any of the TV channels or on the airwaves. One peculiarity is the fact that amongst the panel members one finds ex-PN officials who vociferously express their dissent, especially against the arrogance shown by main exponents of the present government.

If the programme includes also phone-ins, then the lines



The purification stage for the PN will start soon by occupying the opposition benches, whilst the country will be experiencing a new way of governance that responds to the peoples' needs and aspirations

are inundated with frustrated people coming from all walks of life expressing their concern and frustration at the way the country is governed at the moment. Similar to a pressure cooker, the people's frustration is building up and needs to be released as else it will result in a bang. And the bang will soon be heard from

all corners of our archipelago.

People like Carmel Cacopardo, Josie Muscat, Ray Bondin, Jo Said and Frank Portelli have publicly shown their dissent, consequently confirming that not all is well within the PN billet. Others, like John Dalli, although is still within the party's flanks, have on various occasions shown his concern and frustration that the PN needs to change its course. Many others have preferred to bear it in the silence of their home and decide to show it when the moment of truth comes.

Final countdown

While the people in their greatest numbers are anxiously waiting for the final countdown, the top brass of this decadent government felt it wise to parade in the city's main roads and shake hands with the hundreds who had to queue to benefit from the BlueSkies broadband offer.

Scenes that remind us of the old Soviet Union whereby everyone somehow should thank his lucky stars and show gratitude to the benevolence shown by the all mighty state! Cheap propaganda of the lowest quality. For those of venerable age it was a reminder of the queues in front of the Victory Kitchens during the Second World War!

It is really a shame for those who think that they are smarter than the rest and firm believers that there is no alternative to their governance; embrace stupid stratagems in a desperate attempt to shoot up their popularity. He who laughs last, laughs best, and definitely that the last laugh is going to be the peoples'. BlueSkies will soon be turning grey for those who believe that they can fool the people

in such a blatant way!

Tantrums of desperation shown by those who couldn't come to terms with the fact that their end is so close!

A fresh leaf

What the people are really interested in include: that their money is administered in the most scrupulous way on effective and worthwhile national and local projects; the concept of value for money; efficient health services; an effective educational system; job mobility and opportunities; higher standard of living; healthier environment; social netting and better rating throughout on international and EU rating agencies.

Lord Acton once stated that "power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." Presently, the general impression is that no one is accountable and that somehow all the ill-doings are in one way or another justifiable. If ever such cases do surface to the media's attention and hit the headlines, then it is followed by beating about the bush instead of nipping it in the bud. Twenty years ago we were promised that corruption will be eradicated from its roots ("Neqirdu l-korrużoni bl-gheruq u x-xniexel"). Was it just another hollow promise from an endless list?

Twenty years in power might tantalise those at the helm of ministries and departments that everything is now permanent, permissible and there is no need to justify anything to anyone.

Arrogance has become a trait. For those who never had it so good, arrogant are those who are questioning their modus operandi! What a cheek! The purification stage for the PN will start

soon by occupying the opposition benches, whilst the country will be experiencing a new way of governance that responds to the peoples' needs and aspirations. We will be experiencing a fresh spring breeze marked by a newly elected peoples' government and the end of an exclusive clique style of government.

Roderick Galdes is Labour's spokesman for the Environment and National Heritage



He who laughs last, laughs best, and definitely that the last laugh is going to be the peoples'. BlueSkies will soon be turning grey for those who believe that they can fool the people in such a blatant way



maltatoday
Editorial

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Informed opinion, not tribal instinct

THIS newspaper has made it its business to give ample space to all shades and colours of political opinion, especially during this election campaign.

We passionately believe that the electorate has a sacrosanct right to an informed opinion and before exercising the right to vote. We have asked our readers to examine the manifesto, the plan of action and statement of ideals being proposed to be adopted by the party, which is to form the new government.

The vote, rather than an exercise in blind loyalty to a particular party, should be seen as an endorsement of the fresh ideas and policies of a particular party, which should be examined dispassionately. What are the policies of the four political parties on a particular issue? And who has the best policies related to particular issues? These are fair questions to be asked during an election campaign. Appreciation of these concerns allows voters to cast their vote armed with an informed opinion. These judgements should be made calmly, far away from the scare-mongering campaigns being run by all

the parties. We appreciate the fanfare and jubilant atmosphere that elections create; however beyond all this hype it's the content that we would direct peoples attention to.

This newspaper's ongoing survey reveals the electorate's pulse on a number of issues amongst which are education, health, environment, taxation, corruption, cost of living, job creation and immigration. We will be publishing the results on a daily basis. We believe that by examining these snapshots of public opinion, voters – be they undecided or as yet unwilling to declare their voting intentions – will find it easier to decide on how to cast their vote. An analysis of survey results on the three issues; immigration, education and environment, make for riveting reading.

Unsurprisingly, the majority of voters does not identify with the immigration policy of the traditional parties – who have throughout this campaign deliberately kept quiet about the issue, leaving AN as the only vocal party on this human tragedy. It is interesting to note that people's concerns are not reflected by any significant support for the

far right alliance.

Our opinion polls clearly show the PN as having the most popular education policies. Regrettably, however, Labour's half-baked proposal on a "reception class", as well as the spin of "repeater class" promptly spun by Nationalist sources, has reduced the education debate into a political football leaving little space for informed debate.

In our surveys, the PN beats Labour on environmental issues in spite of a few of its previous policies: especially the extension of development zones in 2006. It must be said that government's green credentials were given a boost after a number of U-turns on the Xaghra l-Hamra golf course, Ulysses Lodge redevelopment, as well as the Prime Minister's commitment to take MEPA under his own wing... not to mention the importance given in its electoral programme to sustainable development.

It would appear that Labour's credentials were dented by its public commitment not to reverse the legislation applicable to extension of development

zones. Equally damaging have been the contradictory signals in favour of golf courses and a yacht marina in Gozo.

AD's consistency on environmental issue scores highly in our polls especially with their policies on golf courses, spring hunting and mega developments. The survey however shows that the environment is not of primary concern for voters swayed to vote for the bigger parties.

This election campaign will take a turn for the better if all parties concentrate on their own policies, selling their vision for the future wrapped up in concrete proposals put up for acceptance or rejection by the electorate, whose sovereignty reaches its peak during the brief minutes spent in the polling booth. The parties should assume nothing; ultimately, it is the people who will decide, calmly and carefully, in the comfort of their homes as they weigh up their concerns, fears and aspirations for a better tomorrow.

It is in the interests of democracy that their final decision, whatever that may be, is based on informed opinion rather than tribal instinct.

OP **Edward Fenech**

Lower taxes, paid by everyone

It's election time and political parties are prone to start making promises of tax cuts. In our manifesto for a coalition Alternattiva Demokratika is proposing that it will negotiate with its coalition partner, the decrease of the maximum rate of income tax from 35% to 30%. Unlike the proposal made by the PN, ours was not secretly concocted on the eve of the election. We have been making this proposal for almost two years. We just refined the proposal and inserted it into our manifesto.

The logic behind our proposal is simple. The rate of income tax on Maltese companies (35%) is high compared to other European countries (eg. UK 30%, Ireland 12.5%). We believe it is right to lower this rate from 35% to 30%. We are also proposing that the top rate on individuals should be lowered to 30%. This should be combined with better targeted tax compliance rather than the random sampling being carried out at the moment. Government knows who the big tax cheats are - they should go after these first and foremost. We are also proposing that, if government finances do not permit the lowering of taxation all in one go, this may be done gradually, perhaps by first lowering the maximum rate of tax to 32.5%, then to 30%. In order to ensure that this measure is affordable we have also proposed that, only if needs be, government should part finance this tax cut by raising the standard rate of tax on banks to 40%.

On the other hand, the Nationalist Party has announced a rather radical cut in the top rate of income tax to 25% on incomes of individuals up to Eur 60,000. They have also pledged to change the other tax bands. They did this just a few weeks after presenting their last budget and just one day into the election campaign. It did sound like an exercise in tax electioneering. Remember Labour's desperate pledge of "a two month tax holiday" before the 2003 election? The Nationalists are just better marketers.

The Greens have nothing in principle against this tax cut, but we have challenged government to publish its workings on the declared cost of Lm 20 million (Eur 46 million). We believe that the cost is much greater. I stand to be corrected. However if we are right then it would be foolish

for the next government, (red or blue or multi-coloured) to jeopardise the fiscal stability this country has achieved at such great sacrifice. In any coalition negotiations we will welcome any proposal from either party to lower taxes however only after we have established the true cost of any tax cut and determined its sustainability. We must also ensure that tax cuts do not endanger government's ability to finance welfare. That is what good governance is also about.

Taxation will always be a political hot potato. It is an open secret that evasion is still rampant. Tax evasion is never excusable. However one cannot deny the fact that the capricious manner in which government has spent our taxes, particularly on severe cost over-runs on public projects, leaves many tax payers bitter about paying more and more taxes. The long forgotten term "fiscal morality", once so proudly sported by ex-Finance Minister John Dalli, is one that the Greens always believed in. However fiscal morality works both ways - citizens must pay their fair share and government must spend our money wisely. That is one of the most important challenges that will be faced by the next coalition government. The Greens welcome the challenge.



One cannot deny the fact that the capricious manner in which government has spent our taxes, leaves tax payers bitter about paying more taxes



Labour's adding-machine malfunctions.

The last lot of mistakes that Labour made were dismissed as misprints. And when Alfred Sant was asked about all the plans, in his electoral programme, for things that had already been done, he blamed a 'computer malfunction'. Now it looks like Labour's adding-machine needs a good service too.

Labour is promising to generate 6,000 jobs in five years. That's just 1,200 jobs a year. Yet Malta needs 5,000 jobs a year just to make sure that unemployment doesn't rise.

Ah, but that's not all. When the Labour Party was told that around 4,000 new jobs are already in the pipeline. Alfred Sant said that his 6,000 jobs would be over and above them.

So that's a rough estimate of 10,000 jobs in five years, which works out at 2,000 for each year of a Labour administration. Even with so much help from this government, and assuming that those investors are not scared off by something

Sant says or does, Labour's topmost job target will mean 3,000 more unemployed each year.

This means that over five years, the number of unemployed people under Labour will shoot up to a destabilising 15,000. This is seriously bad news for the economy, a tragedy for the faces behind the figures, and a disaster for us all.

It doesn't come as a surprise that Labour's economic wizards don't know what's going on. They've got a track record that Sant calls water under the bridge.

This government has created 20,000 jobs in just four years. It can be relied on to keep up the moment, because it has the track record to prove it.

Sant's Labour Party, sadly, has a track record too: for creating during its two years in government the highest levels of unemployment since the days of Karmenu Mifsud Bonnici, and sending the country sliding into recession.

Think about it. **Better safe than sorry.**

iva, flimkien kollox possibbli
gonzipn

www.lawrencegonzi.info
This is a paid advert by the Nationalist Party.

Checkmate? No, just Check!

A report by the Ministry of Health back in 2004 lamely suggested that one should consider looking at the cost of free health and consider putting a price to certain cost.

The "secret", penned by an overzealous civil servant, has given Sant his biggest weapon so far. It exploded like a bombshell, ripping through the PN trenches, blasting open the sewers and unsettling the troops.

The revelation brought to the forefront that the idea had been floated in the cabinet of ministers. This was hotly denied by Gonzi.

But the report brandished by Sant yesterday said: "The Cabinet has agreed in principle to this concept, but fees for Maltese citizens will not be introduced for the moment..."

It is an embarrassing revelation that should perhaps serve as a warning to politicians you can hide part the truth, but you cannot bury all of it.

Gonzi's solemn oath that he had never discussed the matter was so categorical that Labour led him down the garden path into a field of spiky nettles. They relished every minute of the ambush.

Gonzi could have said earlier on in the campaign, during question time, that many proposals are put forward in Cabinet; but that this does not mean they are accepted. Indeed Sant has also opined in the same way.

But what is good for Sant, is not good for Gonzi.

The report went on: "... but fees for Maltese citizens will not be introduced for the moment due to their political underpinnings. From other countries' experiences, these co-payments amount to between 3% and 5% of public health expenditure."

Now the word "underpinning" is a word only a civil servant could have used; it does not mean what the stuffy civil servant wished it to mean. But we all understood what he meant. He meant, if you introduce a cost, you are basically f*** politically.

Well, only if you do the wrong way! But as things turned out, the whole report has not exactly helped Gonzi, at least for the next 24 hours. And in politics 24 hours is a very long time. Too short, perhaps, for Xarabank to sweep it under the carpet; but anyway, long enough.

There is a little bit of albumin on Gonzi's face. And Alfred Sant is smiling, at least this time.

Gonzi said that the proposal was never discussed in Cabinet, and was refused



Saviour Balzan

sbalzan@mediatoday.com.mt

by the Cabinet Social Committee - then why did the paper refer to the fact that Cabinet had agreed in principle?

This is not good! The biggest mistake in my opinion was the sombre declaration by Lawrence Gonzi, the political leader of a centre right party, to categorically state that there WILL ALWAYS BE FREE health. Sant is saying the same, even though in his short tenure as Prime Minister he introduced

charges for certain services. Charges which were ferociously criticised by the PN when in opposition. A stupid error, in my opinion.

It was a fundamental mistake for the PN to have attacked Sant on this. Now, Sant is dead scared to even suggest putting a price on certain services. At least he is petrified of saying so before an election; afterwards is a completely different matter.

What has happened in the last hours is perhaps bad news for Gonzi but worse for the future of that very famous slogan concocted, or rather copied, by John C. Grech that there is no such thing as a free lunch.

Surely we can all agree, but how can anyone in today's world continue to argue that everything is free forever? Apart from the fact that anyone who experience serious illness knows all too well, that not everything is not for free.

The declaration by Lawrence Gonzi that health will be free, free and free until kingdom come is something that should never have been uttered. Alfred Sant has obviously taken advantage of this.

But really and truly this debate on free health is a sad joke. Our health bill runs into millions of euros a year, and this is one thing that is not EU-funded, but comes directly from tax collected from Maltese citizens and businesses and services working within the Maltese fiscal regime.

And now with this super modern hospital, the bill is set to increment.

We lament over poorly paid medical staff but do not ask about who is footing the bill.

We grumble that we need to have more of an after care medicine approach to things and preventive medicine too, but the funds are simply not there.

And why should everything be for free. It is one great illusion to continue giving the impression that we pay nothing for our health, and both political leaders, if not all four, are unwilling to face the



Gonzi's solemn oath that he had never discussed the matter was so categorical that Labour led him down the garden path into a field of spiky nettles

reality that we cannot offer everything for free to everyone.

But back to the campaign.

This proverbial rabbit out of the Alfred Sant's hat has served to derail Gonzi at least for the moment.

The battle now is not on ideological grounds but on whether we should believe one leader over another. Whether we believe that Sant will never introduce a bill to a service is another thing.

If he does, I will be first one to compliment him on bringing us closer to the real world but not the last one to lambast him on his hypocrisy.

In the last years, attempts to suggest a watertight private health scheme intertwined with the national health bill have simply never got off the ground.

Seminars, conference have produced endless papers with suggestions and the way forward but this has done nothing to convince politicians.

Of course both Sant and Gonzi do not refer to a very important statement in this 'secret report', it says: "Unless there is a strong commitment to resolve the funding problems prevalent in the health sector, there will be curtailment of services, while new services or therapies cannot be introduced. Such an eventuality... will jeopardise the health status of the nation."

So finally someone was talking sense. Well that was four years ago, someone was telling us what we have always believed. The same thing the economists who have disappeared have always believed. And just in case you do not know who I am talking about I am referring to Lino Brigulio, Edward Scicluna, Lino Delia and others, of course.

Very well timed for the Greens, but horribly timed for government. Joe Falzon need not stand for election with the Greens, or even pretend that he is on their side. He has done quite enough.

He says the permits were illegally issued. What happened next is unprecedented. Six out of seven members of MEPAs DCC resigned en masse. Is this checkmate?

What they are trying to say in that report is that if we were to prioritise certain quality medical care we have to find the financing for it, and with the present culture of providing everything for free this kind of reform cannot take place.

The sad part in all this is that the only political party which is saying something sensible about health is Josie, but then Josie has a vested interest in doing away with the present system. Just in case you have not realised it yet, he owns a private hospital.

It appears that in this election, achieving high scores is very much linked to how good one appears on telly or to ability to avoid making gaffes. But close to election day such mistakes can cost you a job.

The more important lesson from this game of ping pong is that when it came to health and free health, Alfred Sant was the first not to believe in offering a free service for everything. Really and truly Sant should have led the Nationalist party. He is closer to being centre right than we think.

There is nothing that would stop any future Prime Minister, including Sant, from introducing a cost to a service. In 1996 Sant did not state that he would add a cost to the collection of medicines from the state pharmacy.

I would find it difficult to believe that he would renege on his electoral commitment to continue offering a free health service, but then I would not be too surprised if he changes his mind or amends the meaning of his promises in much the same way he changed his interpretation of the way the surcharge cuts will work and the reception class will apply.

This campaign was turning out to be one of the most spectacularly boring campaigns. But today is like a Shakespearean play.

This last Act has injected some spice to the whole drama, in the theatre world they would describe it as the greatest tragicomedy of all times.

Check? No, checkmate

Talking about tragicomedy: Joe Falzon, the MEPA auditor responds to a Green party request on permits in the ODZ with an unbelievable conclusion on the permits issued for LIDL supermarkets in the ODZ.

Very well timed for the Greens, but horribly timed for government. Joe Falzon need not stand for election with the Greens, or even pretend that he is on their side. He has done quite enough.

He says the permits were illegally issued. What happened next is unprecedented.

Six out of seven members of MEPAs DCC resigned en masse. Is this checkmate?

ELECTION SPECIAL

maltatoday

ON SALE TOMORROW - DON'T MISS OUT

Football

'Il capitano' Zanetti keeps Inter nine points clear

JAVIER Zanetti may well have handed Inter the Scudetto with a last-gasp equaliser after Francesco Totti had given Roma the lead. This keeps the nine-point gap at the top of the table intact, but Inter were playing with 10 men for 25 minutes due to Maxwell's injury before Philippe Mexes saw red.

The top two came together just as the Nerazzurri seemed to be running out of steam, losing 2-0 to Liverpool in the Champions League and held 1-1 by Sampdoria to cut the gap to nine points. Notably, Inter were undefeated in Serie A since the last time Roma visited on April 18, 2007, coming away with a 3-1 victory. That was the Giallorossi's second straight win here and they were going for the hat-trick despite missing Juan and the suspended Cicinho with Amantino Mancini not 100 per cent fit.

Inter had Ivan Cordoba, Zlatan Ibrahimovic, Julio Cruz, Walter Samuel, Olivier Dacourt and Cesar Aparecido sidelined, so a reshuffle in defence and attack was demanded with a 4-3-2-1 system.

Francesco Totti threaded through for Simone Perrotta and Julio Cesar was alert to smother it. The goalkeeper also blocked a dangerous Marco Cassetti cross and on the counter from that move Hernan Crespo drilled over the bar.

Crespo deserved to open the scoring with an absolutely stunning finish on 18 minutes. His extraordinary scissor-kick with

his back to goal cracked against the inside of the upright and flashed all the way across to go out the other end!

Totti drilled wide from Daniele De Rossi's assist, but the deadlock was broken on 38 minutes in Roma's favour. Marco Tonetto's sweeping cross from the left found Totti for a splendid left-foot volley in at the near post, as he got in front of former teammate Cristian Chivu.

Nicolas Burdisso had the best chance to equalise before half-time, his header from a corner kick skimming the crossbar.

Mancini made a change at the break, introducing striker David Suazo for midfielder Dejan Stankovic, returning to a more typical system. Rodrigo Taddei got the better of Chivu, but couldn't keep his right-foot strike on target.

Luis Figo's volley was ballooned over, so Mancini went for broke with 17-year-old hitman Mario Balotelli making up a trident attack, replacing midfielder Esteban Cambiasso, and Pele' taking over from fellow countryman Figo. It inevitably left them open at the back and Taddei's lob from the D skimmed the upright.

Balotelli's fierce drive was deflected out for a corner, but it was Roma who were dominating now. Perrotta rolled across for the totally unmarked Alberto Aquilani to fire straight at Julio Cesar's legs.

Maxwell was stretched off after falling awkwardly, but as



Inter Milan's Argentine defender and captain Javier Zanetti celebrates after scoring against AS Roma

Mancini had already completed all three substitutions, Inter were left with 10 men for the final 25 minutes.

Roma were dominating as Vucinic did well to pass across to Perrotta, whose angled drive was deflected out for a corner by Burdisso. Aquilani and De Rossi skimmed the woodwork, as the Giallorossi couldn't make their dominance count.

Instead, the tension got to Roma, as Philippe Mexes picked up his second yellow card for going through the back of Crespo and was livid with the referee, but his teammates were more an-

gry at the Frenchman. This left both teams with 10 men for the final six minutes.

The whole momentum of the match changed and Crespo's fantastic looping header was fingertipped out from under the crossbar by an equally stunning Alexandre Doni save.

With two minutes left on the clock, captain Javier Zanetti picked up a poor clearance to the edge of the box and unleashed a right-foot rocket on the bounce that slotted in at the near bottom corner. It was a rare goal for the veteran and San Siro exploded, as this result

could effectively secure the Scudetto.

The game turned nasty in stoppages with a series of scuffles and tough tackles. There were also extra injury minutes added on as Cassetti fell badly on to his left shoulder.

Other results:

- Atalanta - Sampdoria 4-1
- Catania - Milan 1-1
- Fiorentina - Livorno 1-1
- Genoa - Napoli 2-0
- Lazio - Reggina 1-0
- Palermo - Empoli 2-0
- Parma - Udinese 2-0
- Siena - Cagliari 1-0

Rugby

Rugby at Skolasport

"AT first sight one might think that rugby is dangerous and violent but its totally the contrary" said determinedly coach Esther Azzopardi "rugby is a contact game which like all sport disciplines carries its gaming rules but once these are understood, learnt and applied correctly, then it is safe."

Rugby is being practiced for the second year round at Skolasport, which is organised by the Kunsill Malti għall-iSport and partly sponsored by Kellogg's

Rugby is gradually and steadily gaining popularity in SKO-

lasport and also in several schools in Malta. Many active clubs and members are on the increase, and Skolasport, in line with this verve, is presenting rugby sessions every Saturday morning at the Marsa Sports Complex for youngsters aged between 11 and 16 years.

All physical structures and requirements are called for during these sessions which start with warming up and stretching exercises and followed by ball handling and passing skills. After ... it is game time.

Through sports, Skolasport

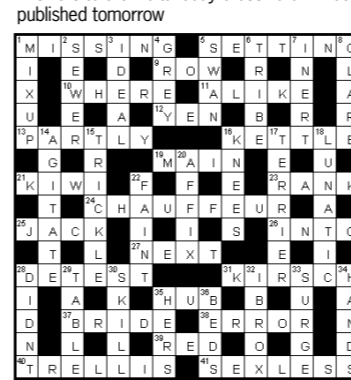
provides physical activity and enjoyable moments among its participants. This is one of the main reasons why Skolasport programme is sponsored by Kellogg's, the world's largest breakfast producer and committed to encourage healthy living and well-being.

For further information kindly contact Head of Programmes Ms Tanya Zahra at the Kunsill Malti għall-iSport, Cottonera Sports Complex, Cottonera on tel 21660658/9, fax 21660652, email programmes@sport-malta.org.mt or visit www.sportmalta.org.mt.



Youngsters at Skolasport are practicing rugby with their coach Esther Azzopardi

Answers to the MaltaToday crossword will be published tomorrow



Yesterday's solution

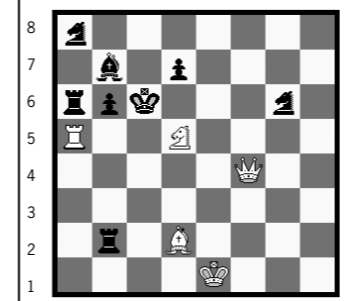
Across

- 1. One who studies the climate (13)
- 8. Pertaining to an orbit (7)
- 10. Inflatable rubber bag (7)
- 12. Glossy (6)
- 13. Altercation (8)
- 15. Rectory (9)
- 18. Capital of France (5)
- 21. Church singers (5)
- 22. Expert in science (9)
- 27. Forebear (8)
- 29. Child who has lost both parents (6)
- 30. Office head (7)
- 31. Chief (4,3)
- 33. Mayonnaise (5,8)

Down

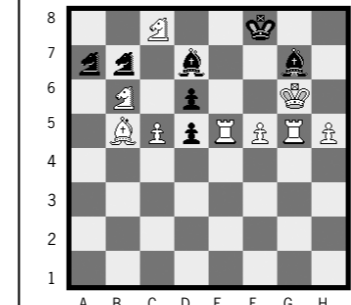
- 2. Marine crustacean (7)
- 3. Encountered (3)
- 4. Encountered (6)
- 5. Rock (5)
- 6. Idle talk (6)
- 7. Combines (6)
- 9. Anybody (6)
- 11. Sharp pain (4)
- 14. Intended (5)
- 16. Exclamation of surprise (3)
- 17. Connected series of rooms (5)
- 19. It is (3)
- 20. Far distant (6)
- 21. Cold and damp (6)
- 23. Maize (4)
- 24. Brutal (7)
- 25. Occupant (6)
- 26. Be present at (6)
- 28. Cuban ballroom dance (5)
- 32. Donkey (3)

Chess



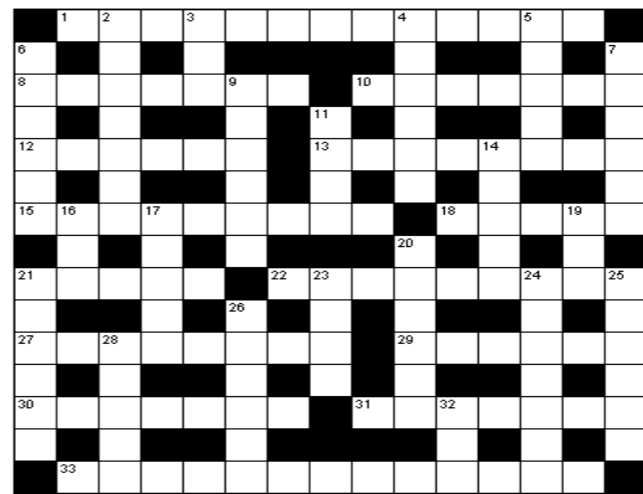
White to play and mate in three moves

Yesterday's solution

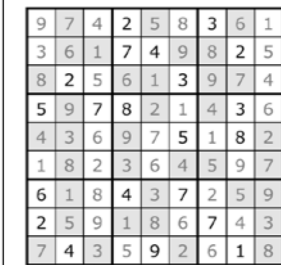


White had play and mate in three moves

- 1. Nxd7+ Kg8
- 2. Re8+ Bf8
- 3. Rxf8#



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.



Yesterday's solution



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Saturday, 1st March 2008
Suncrest Hotel, Qawra, 7.30pm

Entertainment provided by Freddie Portelli, il-Bayzo u I-klikka, and Veronica u Joe (id-Dulli).
Short addresses by Party Leader Dr. Josie Muscat and Deputy Leader Anglu Xuereb.

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VALLETTA - OPPOSITE LAW COURTS
FRIDAY, 29TH FEBRUARY AT 5:00 PM
SPEAKERS - JAMES CAUCHI, EMMY BEZZINA & NORMAN LOWELL

PATH FORGER ALPHA IMPERIUM LIBERALI-DEMOKRATIKU EUROPA

GENERAL ELECTIONS 2008

Today's Weather

WEATHER: Partly cloudy
VISIBILITY: Good
WIND: Light northerly (force 3) becoming light Northeast (force 3)
SEA: Slight
SWELL: Low Easterly becoming low Northwest

'I'm not from Gozo', Georg tells George Pullicino

MATTHEW VELLA

THE Nationalists' new candidate for the ninth district, Georg Sapiano, has found himself having to answer calls from constituents who were mistakenly led to believe Sapiano was actually living in Gozo.

In a letter to the media, Sapiano said the environment min-

ister George Pullicino, a PN candidate on the ninth district, had distributed a mock ballot sheet in which all PN candidates are listed by name and address. He invites voters to cast their second preference in his favour, after Lawrence Gonzi.

"Although my address is in Swieqi and has been so recorded in the electoral register of April 2007 and September

2007, the sheet distributed by George Pullicino places me as resident in Gozo.

"This was my registered address before I moved to Swieqi and I can therefore understand the oversight. Nonetheless, I think it is relevant to point out to my prospective voters on the ninth district that I live in their community – and not on another island!"

Sapiano said his letter would "not succeed in repairing the harm caused to me by this regrettable error", saying residents from Gharghur had called him asking whether it was true that he was from the sister island.

Sapiano told MaltaToday he had spoken to Pullicino about the error and that the mistake was unintended.

AN says no to housing aid for gay couples

MATTHEW VELLA

AZZJONI Nazzjonali leader Josie Muscat yesterday reaffirmed his party's principled stance against gay adoptions, while reminding that AN had been the first party in this election to declare it was in favour of civil partnerships for gay couples.

Muscat was meeting a delegation from the Malta Gay Rights Movement on a petition and electoral memorandum the association had presented to the four political parties.

Muscat, while conceding that same-sex relationships were "natural", said the state was everybody's and not just that of Catholics. "We feel we have no right to interfere in people's personal lives as long as they are not harming others."

He said that although his party recognised civil partnerships, specifically allowing gay partnerships to have joint income tax computation, joint ownership of bank loans and insurance policies, next-of-kin rights and inheritance rights, his party disagreed with proposals advanced by the MGRM.

These were namely the NHS funding of gender reassignment, the adoption of children to a married couple where one spouse had changed its gender, housing aid for gay couples, and the adoption of a child by their gay father or mother.

MGRM coordinator Gaby Calleja said its ideal position was the recognition of gay marriages, saying this position only recognised equality and that there should not be any compromise over equality.

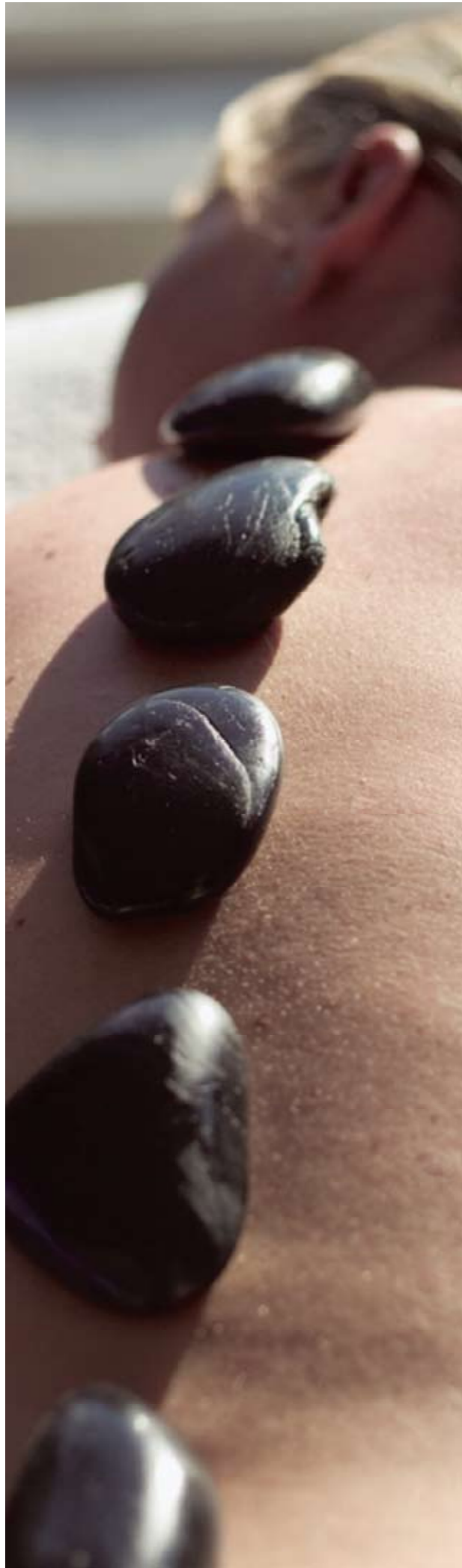
Calleja also said there were studies proving that gay adoptions did not leave any effects on children, while emphasising that the scope of gay adoptions was not to claim benefits from the State.

"It is there because children have a right to be adopted. It is there to protect children if one of their parents dies and it is left up to the other spouse to take the child under their care." She said the European Court of Human Rights had only recently declared that being gay should not preclude anybody from being a parent.

The MGRM also said their proposal for NHS funding of gender reassignment was crucial for the identity of people who wanted to change their sex, and because it was a question of mental health. "It is hard for these people to have a life of dignity."

The MGRM added that despite AN's pronouncements in favour of civil partnerships, a search on their internet website with the word 'gay' brought up six items of negative news reports concerning gay people.

They also protested at AN's policy not to give housing aid to gay couples. "You are creating discrimination within discrimination by excluding gay people who cannot afford housing from claiming State aid."






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