

LETTERS

Barking up the wrong tree

The recent inconclusive outcome of the social pact talks comes as no surprise at all, particularly in view of the questionable lopsided regressive proposals agreed beforehand between the government and the employers' organisations.

In the circumstances, I feel it is inappropriate to blame the unions for not taking bold decisions on such "short-term marginal sacrifices" and for "fighting for one's own little patch" as the rest of the social partners put it (November 18). Frankly, isn't it just that what all the social partners did? Do the social partners really believe it is wise to base Malta's competitiveness strategy on such marginal regressive measures?

I bet that the social partners remember very well that, when marginal regressive measures were adopted, they hardly proved to be successful. A case in point is the local textile industry.

I am confident that the social partners know better as they

realise that the real strategic issues to enhance our competitiveness and economic development need to be addressed otherwise.

Regrettably, it is clearly evident that we have had too much political rhetoric for too long, inducing us towards unsustainable development and unsustainable affluence. This, while the structural deficit, the welfare gap and the economic problems, including our competitiveness issue, prevailed. The causes for this unhappy situation are numerous and long standing. It is clearly evident that successive governments and the social partners have repeatedly failed to address it adequately.

In the circumstances I humbly submit that, by eroding the workers' conditions of employment, we would not be solving our competitiveness problem but rather prolonging our economic agony.

JOE MORANA,
Sliema.

Social pact talks

During an afternoon programme on Super 1 television, Felix Agius, editor of *KullHadd* as guest, together with the programme presenter Alfred Zammit discussed the reasons why the GWU called it a day and abandoned the discussions on the social pact for Malta within the Malta Council for Economic and Social Development, the MCESD.

Unfortunately, both Mr Agius and Mr Zammit conveyed the wrong information to their viewers, particularly on the following two items.

They gave the impression that the *Union Haddiema Maghqudin* was somehow in favour and agreed that the Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA), which in 2005 will be Lm1.75 per week, should be given only to minimum wage earners. They also insinuated that the UHM was in some way in favour of and agreed that workers should have their vacation leave deducted by seven days per year.

The truth is that the UHM was always and still is against the proposal regarding COLA. Subsequently this proposal was dropped and all the social partners agreed that workers will get

an increase of Lm1.75 per week as from January 1, 2005 irrespective of their present salaries.

Regarding the deduction of vacation leave entitlement, the UHM was always against and is still not agreeing with this proposal. This proposal, which is still being discussed, recommends that public holidays which fall on Saturdays, 2006 and 2007, that is, seven days over three years and not seven days in one year, as was said during the programme, should not be added to the other vacation leave.

The UHM still has a lot of reservations about the MCESD's chairman report but it will never abandon or refuse to sit around the negotiating table, which is the only place where solutions are to be found.

In the beginning of this year, two demonstrations against unemployment were held by the GWU. How many jobs were created as a direct or indirect result of those demonstrations?

LINO VASSALLO,
Secretary,
Hotel, Food and Beverages,
Union Haddiema Maghqudin.

Tolerance lost?

In his letter (November 11) John Grech seems to feel that young people standing outside on public property need an excuse. Surely, there being a police station not 100 metres down the road, if indeed "drinking and chatting" are such grave crimes something would have been done.

Or is something else irking our friendly contributor?

Extending Paceville indeed! What are the youth of today to him? Livestock to be farmed and kept corralled in the confines of one of the cheesiest locals on the island?

Anti-social behaviour should and is more often than not chastised but I doubt anybody would consider chatting as anti-social.

I have never come across one of his letters deploring the pagan *fešta* celebrations when one and all are kept awake not to "chat-

ting" but to a full barrage of fireworks strong enough to crack swimming pools and rattle windows kilometres away!

At the risk of generalising I would dare say we have indeed become an isle festering with intolerance! St Paul did indeed visit us at a better time. Should we not ask the question: Where he to dare breach our shores today would we welcome him or lock him up?

Much has been said and based on our hospitality and the welcoming manner with which we treat visitors. Look around. Are we a tolerant nation?

While not wanting to sound too negative it is a reality that we are no longer a friendly people. Not unless there is something in it for us!

SIMON ELLUL SULLIVAN,
St Julians.



In simple words

In a recent reply to a parliamentary question by a Labour deputy, Deputy Prime Minister and Justice and Home Affairs Minister Tonio Borg said that 441 illegal immigrants applied for a refugee status in Malta in 2004 but only three applications were accepted and during the first eight months this year another 303 illegal immigrants were given humanitarian protection. In 2003, of the 519 migrants who applied for a refugee status, 50 were accepted while 321 were given humanitarian protection.

If I got my maths right, this means that within a short span of one-and-a-half years, 677 illegal immigrants have been given the free run of our country (I leave it in the hands of the readers' calculations to imagine what this figure will rise to in, say, 10 or 20 years' time), let alone mentioning the fact that the country's people have had to incur the costs of providing everything for these illegal immigrants through their taxes.

Now, according to another parliamentary question, each one of these individuals is given gross benefits of Lm80 a week; so we end up with a total expense of Lm2,816,320 for one year alone. Will Prime Minister Lawrence Gonzi confirm if this sum is "included" in the Lm2.5 million for 2004 alone as per his recent statement?

I have also been given an understanding by people close to the party in government that if the truth were to be exposed via their media sources, they fear a mass racist/xenophobic backlash by the Maltese.

Such a reaction would be understandable if people were to know the truth about expenses involved, national security implications, experiences of our security services, illegal employment and so many other issues.

WILLIAM ATTARD MCCARTHY,
Ta' Xbiex.

Missing the train... or not?

This year I will look out for Budget Day like no other year before. I will anxiously look out for those words in the Finance Minister's speech that talk about the long-awaited financial incentives for the film industry. I am given to understand that there "might" be some good news.

Over the past years I have sat on boards, committees and seminar panels explaining among other matters the importance of financial incentives. This subject has been equally emphasised upon by foreign reputable institutions as well as local entities like the government's own Film Commission. I have no doubt that the middle management, so to speak, of this government understands the needs of the film industry. However, I have reason to doubt what the higher levels of government think about this matter.

Not too long ago I had one high-level government meeting together with one of the world's most influential producers to discuss incentives for a particular project intended for Malta. We were not offered any real incentives but, to add insult to injury, we were offered a gimmick incentive which amounted

to nothing more than a rebate of a mere \$10,000. Boy, what an incentive for a production planning an expenditure in Malta of \$5 million! And the suggested bureaucracy attached to this \$10,000 was unbelievable.

False hopes had followed in other areas which make people like me feel almost ashamed of being Maltese and makes me question why my country is being represented in such a foolish and arrogant manner.

However, time has passed, portfolios have changed and people have come and gone. Also I have no doubt that our Prime Minister is striving hard to move ahead as efficiently and transparently as possible to the best of his abilities.

There are many countries around us which, despite having a filming activity far better than ours, have nevertheless not failed to recognise the need of offering financial incentives to visiting productions. For example, Hungary offers no less than a 20 per cent rebate on total expenditure. Serbia and Montenegro are also planning to jump onto the bandwagon before it is too late. The UK, even with its own busy film industry, still

feels the need to offer incentives ranging between 13-20 per cent. Many countries also offer other serious incentives for local producers and investors, aiming to foster their indigenous film industry (which Malta does not have).

I am optimistic in believing that this government will be wise in recognising the impact the film servicing industry has on Malta's economy, not to talk about the cultural and economic importance of an indigenous film industry, which also helps promote the nation's identity abroad. But I urge the ministers responsible to also introduce incentives that are intelligent and not insulting gimmicks which are insignificant when taken account of and which bear absolutely no weight on the realisation of the project concerned.

With minimal pessimism I shall say that, considering the current international film climate, Malta's film servicing industry stands to become even more unpredictable and volatile if serious incentives are not introduced this time around.

MALCOLM SCERRI-FERRANTE,
Mosta.