



COLLABORATING PARTNER OF

THE MALTA FINANCIAL & BUSINESS TIMES

ISSUE NO. 305

www.business-times.com.mt

Three-horse race likely for MLP secretary general post

By Kurt Sansone

It was October 1989 when Wenzu Mintoff was elected chairperson of *Alternattiva Demokratika* after being unceremoniously dumped by the Labour Party for criticising the violent and corrupt elements that militated within.

14 years later and almost to the day, Dr Mintoff is back in Labour's fold and vying for the post of secretary general. The former MLP whip and parliamentarian threw in his nomination at the last minute on Monday evening, a move that caught

other contenders by surprise.

Dr Mintoff is the dark horse in the race for the post of secretary general and little is known about the support he enjoys among party delegates.

Dr Mintoff's past and political weight are expected to make him one of the main contenders, along with veteran labour candidate Alfred Grixti and former deputy secretary general Keith Grech.

With a month to go before the MLP's general conference, the race for the party's top administrative post will be an interesting one to

watch as the prospective candidates warm up to party delegates.

Both Alfred Grixti and Keith Grech have been meeting delegates over the past few weeks, contrary to Dr Mintoff who maintained a low profile to the very last day.

The battle for the hearts and minds of party delegates will see reformers cross swords with others, who are entrenched in Alfred Sant's camp.

Mr Grixti, a former administration official, has strong roots among delegates and the odds on him winning the race are high. But victory is not a foregone conclusion. Mr Grixti is a

Sant loyalist and if delegates are in the mood of continuing the reform started when Michael Falzon and Charles Mangion were elected deputy leaders, he may find the going very tough.

On the other hand, Keith Grech has publicly declared his position in favour of further reform, clearly aligning himself to the Falzon-Mangion reformist movement. Mr Grech's biggest drawback is his young age, which may distance party delegates.

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MLP national executive gives Cuschieri radio go-ahead

The Labour Party national executive on Monday decided that Manwel Cuschieri may continue with his twice-weekly radio programme, despite him contesting the post of party president.

The decision is also expected to benefit secretary general contender, Wenzu Mintoff, who also has a daily half-hour programme on Super One radio. The move has irked other contenders, who maintain that the decision gives Mr Cuschieri and Dr Mintoff an unfair advantage over their competitors.

Candidates who threw their nominations for the various administrative posts were asked to leave Monday's national executive meeting, *The Malta Financial and Business Times* was told.

Mr Cuschieri returned to the airwaves, after an absence of more than three months, last Monday with a 45-minute programme. He will also conduct another 45-minute programme on Fridays.

The decision to allow Manwel Cuschieri to return to Super One Radio is a compromise reached between the MLP reformers and Sant loyalists, *The Malta Financial and Business Times* was told by party delegates.

FOI industry trends survey - EU-phoria is over, business optimism is down

By Matthew Vella

The Federation of Industry's 42nd edition of its half-yearly industry trends survey (ITS) has revealed findings "not as upbeat" as those in the preceding edition. Respondents to the survey, 85 in all, employing a total of 12,960 workers, have registered claims of insufficient demand, especially amongst locally-oriented business firms.

FOI President Anton Borg said Malta's competitiveness was being

eroded at a regular pace. He lamented that while the manufacturing sector's contribution to the GDP had decreased, employment income was on the increase, urging a review of the costs which firms are incurring due to labour, and also freight costs.

Clearly over the euphoria that characterised the thirty days following the EU referendum-elections, Maltese manufacturing firms today have registered drops in business optimism as the FOI's ITS has revealed. Both locally-oriented

firms and the larger exporters have seen a general drop in business optimism that was more negative than the preceding survey. The smaller export-oriented firms' business optimism remains positive, although less than six months ago.

All manufacturing firms have expressed 'uncertainty over political issues' as having decreased in importance, with both referendum and elections having determined the agenda from April thereon.

The forecasts of the larger, main-

ly export-oriented respondents are all more negative or less positive than six months earlier, as shown in figures relating to export order books, business optimism, profitability, production volumes and capital expenditure on land and building. Likewise, the smaller locally-oriented firms have registered negative trends in terms of local order books, business optimism, profitability, production volumes and general capital expenditure

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MSE Index: 2,095.381 0.321%
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World indices

Index	Value	Change
S&P	1031.71	-0.26%
DJIA	9588.09	-0.07%
NASDAQ	1890.64	-0.15%
FTSE	4272	0.04%
CAC 40	3254.75	-0.81%
DAX	3363.66	-1.21%
H. SENG	11723.92	-0.09%

Rates of exchange

EURO	2.3344
US DOLLAR	2.7340
UK STERLING	1.6332
SWISS FRANC	3.6088
JAPANESE YEN	303.4373
CANADIAN DOLLAR	3.6633
GOLD US Dollars	373.0750
SILVER US Cents	480.0000

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