

## Time for the GWU to rebrand its tactics

When a commercial company or an organisation feels it needs a boost, it often resorts to rebranding. The General Workers' Union has timed its rebranding with the 66th anniversary of its foundation. Besides refurbishing the entrance to its headquarters in Valletta, it has also changed its logo, membership card and website. More importantly, it is expanding its services to members and their families in a bid to provide a holistic service.

All this is well and good. But there is one particular aspect that needs rebranding most: its attitude. The GWU comes across as acting too aggressive, too politically motivated, when it comes to deal with a Nationalist government. Now, most unions, openly or not, tend to side with one political party or another but in the case of the GWU its alliance with the Labour Party has been generally seen as being far too strong.

Again, such strong alliances may work well in some countries but in such a small, politically-divided and politically-fanatic island, it does not.

This is why so many look at the GWU as a political trade union. This has generally worked against its interests. Which is not to say that the union has not done any good to its members. Of course, it has, in the same way other unions have over the years. But the GWU has not always acted strictly as a trade union because many of its actions were seen to have been politically motivated as was the case, for instance, when it paralysed Malta Drydocks for seven months through an overtime ban.

The history of the times under the socialist Administration of Dom Mintoff, especially during the statutory partnership sealed with the Malta Labour Party in 1978, is replete with

instances when the union stood back as the government fought tooth and nail what were then called the free trade unions (to distinguish them from the GWU).

At one time, the government had even refused to recognise partial industrial action and no fewer than 900 bank employees were suspended. Doctors taking partial industrial action were locked out and workers reporting sick risked having policemen knocking on their doors in no time.

So, when the GWU says it has always striven for unity among trade unions, this past perspective jumps out of history to remind us of times past. The statutory partnership with Labour has long been forgotten, though the union is still regarded as a political trade union. All this will not come as music to the ears of the GWU but if the union wants to be, as it says, credible, it would

need to be more realistic in its attitude and dealings with the Nationalists whenever they are in government, as they are now.

Far too often, the union's voice is strident, sometimes even inflammatory, putting off even those who generally look at the GWU sympathetically. Trade union militancy is par for the course in trade unionism but if the union wants to attract new members it would need to change its tune and rebrand the tactics it uses in the ongoing drive to defend the workers' interests at their place of work and, generally, to help bring about improvement in the conditions of work.

The new initiatives it is taking, including what it is calling as the social tourism project, and the formulation of policy papers, are commendable but what most outside its orbit are expecting now is a rebranding of its tactics.

### Letters to the Editor

#### The guide dog and the bus driver

Before making my very serious complaint, I must emphasise that this concerns an individual and not the public bus service. In fact, as a guide dog owner, with all the independence this gives, I am a heavy user of the public transport system and I have found the vast majority of the bus drivers to be both friendly and helpful.

Now for the facts. On the morning of October 2, at 9 a.m., I waited, with my guide dog, at the bus stop

in Mrabat Street, Sliema, to catch the 42 bus to Mater Dei Hospital for an appointment. The bus came past and did not stop. Fortunately, or so I thought, the bus was held up at the narrow bit of the road. I, therefore, went up to the bus. The bus driver then closed the door and ignored my repeated knocking.

This is not the place to assert the legal right of all guide dogs to travel on every form of public transport

but I do have a message for that "socially conscious" gentleman driving the bus.

I hope you have and will continue to have the eyesight of a hawk because if you ever became visually impaired you might have the misfortune to meet someone who behaves like you.

**Ron Colombo**  
*chairman*  
*Malta Guide Dogs Foundation*  
*Sliema*

#### Giving condoms for free to University students

Please allow me to add my bit to Henry S. Pace's letter Free Condoms On Campus (September 3).

While I agree with views expressed in the letter, it might be well worth suggesting that Vodafone uses its expertise in the field of telephony and such

merchandise only. Personally, I don't think that supplying condoms for free with its new student package on the University campus comes within its parameters.

**Emily Barbaro-Sant**  
*Mosta*

I am absolutely horrified to read about the distribution of condoms on Fresher's Day. Have we no shame? Whatever next? Orgies in the library? Satanic rites in the canteen? Whoever is responsible for

this outrage needs to be dragged forthwith to the Inquisitor's Palace and made to see the error of his ways!

**Phillip Carabot**  
*Sliema*

#### Not all lamps meet European standards

It is incorrect to say that all lamps participating in the scheme to promote the domestic use of compact fluorescent lamps meet the requirements of the latest available European CFL quality charter, as Annette Vella, on behalf of the Malta Resources Authority, wrote (Standards For Energy Saving Bulbs, October 2) in reply to another letter.

If the board selecting the brands had to be consistent, then it would not have approved Osram lamps on the basis of not complying with section 1.4, ignition requirement. If this is checked, one would note the ignition cycles cited on the package is 60 min. on/15 min. off and not five min. on/10 min. off as requested. This is a test that signifies how many times the lamp can be switched on

and off without it being damaged, at the mentioned intervals.

Also, the European CFL quality charter section 1.6 mentions a two-year guarantee. In the MRA requirements, this has been changed to one year. I ask the authorities if this has been done to suit a particular brand.

**Mark Tabone**  
*Ta' Xbiex*

#### Gay rights movement commends MEPs

The Malta Gay Rights Movement would like to applaud all five Maltese members of the European Parliament for their positive vote taken lately on a resolution regarding a discriminatory law proposed in Lithuania. The law sought to render illegal all forms of information regarding sexual diversity, possibly including websites, exhibitions and information booklets.

The ultimate purpose behind this proposed legislation is one which continues to suppress and ignore the dignity of Lithuanian LGBT (Lesbian gay bisexual transgender) peo-

ple by trying to obscure their existence altogether. The proposed legislation is meant to prohibit, for example, any mention of diverse family forms, any discussions about anti-harassment and anti-discrimination policies in schools in public fora, and to outlaw the campaigning for LGBT equality and public demonstrations such as Pride Marches.

Lithuania's answer to sexual diversity is to block it out, refusing to acknowledge the existence of its LGBT citizens and preferring instead to ban all information about an already historically

oppressed minority. We thus commend all five Maltese MEPs on their stand opposing any form of legislation which would further undermine the rights of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people as equal citizens in the communities in which they live.

MGRM looks forward to work more closely with the Maltese MEPs to help ensure a Europe where LGBT people live their lives in dignity - free from discrimination, harassment or violence.

**Bernard Muscat**  
*Malta Gay Rights Movement*  
*Mosta*

#### Criticism of the Church

Before calling others unkindly names (poisonous words of wicked snakes) Fr Mario Attard, in his defence of fellow priests (October 3), would do better to ask himself why criticism of the Church began in the first place.

To remind him, the deeds by his fellow churchmen through the ages include atrocities by the "Holy" Inquisition, the cru-

saders, sexual abuse... I could go on.

Having said that, there are many priests, monks and nuns who work hard in their striving to do good works in their respective parishes. And I am very proud to count many of them among my friends.

**Noel Fabri**  
*Birkirkara*

#### Land of many cultures

On a recent visit to Budapest I came across these words spoken by King (Saint) Istvan (Stephen) of Hungary to his son Prince Imre in 1036: "Make the strangers welcome in this land. Let them keep their languages and their customs. For weak and fragile is the realm which is based on a single

language or on a single set of customs". He could have been addressing people in many countries, including Malta, today. From my experience, Canada is the country that most closely follows this advice.

**Joseph Galea**  
*Sliema*

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