

Malta Labour Party Manifesto, 1998

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1. EUROPEAN AND MEDITERRANEAN

1.1 The value of Neutrality: A Switzerland in the Mediterranean

Within the framework of our Constitutional Neutrality, we believe that Malta's foreign policy should be characterised by two distinct though inseparable dimensions: European and Mediterranean.

The European dimension derives its significance from the important political, commercial and cultural ties that bind us to the European Continent.

The second dimension derives its undeniable logic from our geographic position and by virtue of interests we hold in common with our Mediterranean neighbours in the spheres of environment, security, trade, and economic development.

In this context, and bearing in mind our common concern for ensuring and maintaining peace in the region, Malta should sustain the closest and most positive relations possible with the European Union as long as these ties are conducive to safeguarding the genuine interests of the Maltese people, Europe and all our other neighbouring countries.

The Labour Government will enter into a contractual agreement with the European Union for the creation of a Free Industrial Trade Zone within a reasonable time frame. This would incorporate co-operation agreements and arrangements in the spheres of foreign policy, security, in the fields of technical, economic, financial and social collaboration.

The Labour Party believes that Malta should not consider full membership of the European Union prior to the implementation of the Free Industrial Trade Zone and the achievement of the restructuring process of local industries in such a way that we can consolidate the foundations of our Maltese Home in Europe.

As a full member, Malta would have to accept and implement the entirety of European Union politics and policies. A considerable part of these policies were designed specifically by and for the big nations of the European Continent and in no way accommodate the interests and exigencies of small islands like Malta and

Gozo or their particular economic and social idiosyncracies. Furthermore, full accession to the European Union would, in the present context, undermine Malta's Neutrality.

Labour's New Politics propose energetic initiatives favouring the consolidation of Peace and Partnerships between the countries of the Mediterranean basin and the encouragement and development of cooperation structures between these countries with regard to the political, social and environmental sections.

A Labour Government would actively encourage the setting up of a regional association of Mediterranean states that would facilitate a wider and higher level of cooperation between neighbouring nations and would contribute towards the formulation and adoption of bilateral and multilateral agreements concerning these sectors. Above all, Labour Party foreign policy reiterates that our Neutrality constitutes a wise and useful choice for our country.

Maltese Neutrality facilitates our potential for establishing and strengthening ties and relations with a greater number of countries from within our own region as well as with distant countries. As a consequence, Malta would be able to increase and consolidate its contribution at the United Nations. This same Neutrality precludes Malta's participation in the NATO Partnership for Peace programme from which the Labour Party had promised to withdraw at the earliest possible opportunity and which it did as soon as the 1996 Labour Government was formed.

1.2 The Maltese Road to Europe

The European Commission regards Malta as being "a close partner of the European Union". This is indeed a very clear signal that the New Labour Government's European policy meets with a high degree of respect and esteem on the part of the European Union itself. The European Union has demonstrated in concrete terms how much it appreciates and values the lucid stance of the Labour Government and recognises it as a Government that knows exactly where it is heading and one that unequivocally and consistently considers first and foremost Malta's basic interests.

On the other hand, the New Labour Government appreciates and supports the process of economic, social, and political integration spearheaded by the European Union. It is also aware that this country can only enjoy the concrete benefits of full membership in this Union once we have adequately consolidated the economic foundations of our own home - our Maltese Home in Europe.

Consequently, the New Labour Government promptly honoured its electoral pledge and immediately communicated to the European Union its proposal to form a Free Trade Agreement to be implemented over a period of 5 to 7 years. This liberalisation of our foreign trade vis-a-vis our most important trade partner, The European Union, will promote a great deal of renovation and regeneration of all those industrial sectors which have, for a long time, failed to modernise and upgrade their operations due to a lack of foreign competition.

The New Labour Government, in tandem with the Constituted Bodies that represent the various industries, has drawn up a whole programme of assistance and support for the manufacturing sectors which cater predominantly for the local market, and who will therefore need to embark on a whole modernisation programme if they are to cope with the opportunities and challenges associated with the operation of a Free Trade Zone with the European Union.

This assistance scheme, which shall be administered and managed by the Institute for the Promotion of Small Enterprise (IPSE), will be financed by funds provided by the European Union and by other funds recovered from the partial sale of shares in Maltacom and Malta International Airport.

In direct contrast to the lethargic and unenthusiastic reception it had given the Nationalist application for full membership due to the lack of credibility and concrete substance of the Nationalist policies regarding this sphere, the European Union reacted promptly, positively and constructively to the new proposals submitted by the Labour Government. In fact the Maltese request was formally received and accepted by the Council of Association which convened in Luxembourg in April 1998.

In June 1998 a Technical Delegation arrived in Malta to draw up a report with the aim of obtaining from the Council of the European Union a mandate authorising the Commission to formally initiate negotiations with the Maltese Government regarding the modalities and time frames impinging on a Free Trade Zone agreement and on the various forms of co-operation frameworks contemplated in the fields of politics and diplomacy, culture, science and technology, as well as customs and security.

What are the main advantages of this option compared to that of applying for full membership straightaway?

- * It gives us a breathing space which we need in order to achieve our modernisation programme and to generally put our house in order and strengthen the foundations of this Maltese Home in Europe, through the restructuring of those industries which are primarily dependent on the local market.

- * It allows us to safeguard the advantages which our export industry enjoys in European markets and elsewhere;

- * It gives us the possibility of protecting the interests and livelihood of the Agricultural and Fishing sectors in Malta and Gozo.

- * It helps us to continue to protect the interests of our country's commercial sector, particularly the small businesses and self-employed.

- * It complements our efforts to consolidate the position of our working people because they will not have to compete for the same jobs with citizens of other European states.

- * It will help us to protect the interests of Maltese individuals and firms offering professional services in this country.

- * This agreement will allow us to provide for the interests of the workers in our two dockyards.

- * It permits us to protect the interests of our students, who, while becoming eligible for participation in educational programmes of the European Union will even continue to receive their stipends while studying abroad. Furthermore, they will not be constrained to compete with citizens from other European countries for a study or job opportunity in their own country.

- * It will allow us to enjoy the advantages of full cooperation in the political, diplomatic, cultural, scientific, customs and security spheres without sacrificing an iota of the advantages of Neutrality.

All these advantages have an even greater significance within the context of the very same European Union policy regarding a Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. The Union itself recognises and values this reality and considers our country as "an active participant in the Community's Euro-Mediterranean Partnership". This was the reason why it subsequently chose Malta as the venue for the second Euro-Mediterranean conference (March 1997) and decided that Malta would be the fulcrum of the initiatives aimed at setting up a Pan European Transport Area for the Mediterranean.

This option will additionally give us the elbow space we need to continue to introduce into our economic structures, all the social measures which we may deem necessary in order to sustain all those who may be adversely effected by commercial price structures, such as for example, water and energy services.

Whilst full membership would be practically irreversible, the direction embarked upon by the New Labour Government with the full blessing of the European Union, allows us the closest access to full membership without obliging us to actually take the final plunge.

In these circumstances and considering our country's present condition, this option must be considered as the wisest and most responsible and sensible choice for the foreseeable future.

The Labour Party's European policy is dictated and shaped by a commitment to pursue all that is beneficial for Malta as well as for the European Union whilst, however, simultaneously discarding and repulsing anything that could be harmful to Malta's interests. On the other hand, the option of full membership in the European Union would preclude any possibility for our country to embrace only that which is beneficial to us within the European Union. We would have to swallow every bitter pill - whether we choke on it or not. The European Union no longer concedes to joining member-countries any preferential treatment due to their size or some other factor which renders the applicant country in some way disadvantaged in comparison to fellow members.

On the culmination of the process of full implementation of the Free Trade Zone - five to seven years - a Labour Government would once again consult its citizens and ask them to consider and decide whether they preferred to continue to develop ever closer relations with the European Union according to the same model and parameters adopted by the present Labour Government or whether they would opt for taking a further step towards full European Union.

Such a step could, at that juncture, be contemplated with equanimity because we would have, as a nation and a people, gained from a wide spectrum of experiences and from all the opportunities for developing and maturing made available by the reality of our relationships with the European Union.

At this juncture, this would correspond to a real opportunity for an informed choice because we would be making this very significant decision against a backdrop of our direct experience of all the gradual changes and transformations happening in the social, political, and economic spheres in our own country, in the Mediterranean region and within the European Union itself.

It is at that stage that all Maltese and Gozitans alike would genuinely feel themselves to be, for the very first time in our country's history, in a position to weigh their options and make their choice. A choice which they could serenely make because they would feel assured that the Maltese Home in Europe they were living in was adequately provided with sturdy economic foundations and a sound industrial base which could confidently - and safely - approach all the challenges and opportunities that would, inevitably, accompany full membership of the European Union.

Europe is our Home, insist the Nationalists. On the contrary, the Malta Labour Party is committed to building our Maltese Home in Europe. The Labour Party is designing and developing Malta's relations with the European Union according to the needs and the specific conditions obtaining in Malta and Gozo at this particular stage of their development.

This is the Maltese road towards Europe.

1.3 Better ties and friendship with countries further afield

The foreign policy of the New Labour Government will not only be limited to the prime concerns of moving forward along the Maltese road to Europe and to continue strengthening the value of neutrality as a Switzerland in the Mediterranean. While the foremost interest and duty of any Maltese government, whatever its political persuasion, will always be that of maintaining the best possible friendly relations with our neighbouring countries in the region, given that our geographic position makes us both European and Mediterranean, the New Labour Government will seek to strengthen friendships and ties with countries farther afield from our shores. There are both historic and commercial reasons for this. History shows that there many Maltese living in these far off countries. Commercially, such countries have every interest in fostering the best links with our country once the industrial free trade zone with the EU is completed.

The New Labour Government will, therefore continue to build on the diplomatic groundwork it laid since October, 1996, especially with regard to relations with the United States of America. Friendship with the USA has never been stronger and as good as it is at present; a fact which is reflected in the great interest of American investors are showing in Malta. The New Labour Government will also continue strengthening the diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China, Japan and the Commonwealth of Australia which have already improved considerably in these last twenty-one months.

2. Strengthening our National Identity

The New Labour Politics had proposed that while our country should wean itself from its island mentality by sustaining an active foreign policy and by encouraging every form of economic, social, cultural and technical contact between Maltese citizens and the rest of the world community, we should also, and just as energetically, cultivate and maintain an acute and lively sense of national identity.

It was with this in mind that the October 1996 Electoral Programme moved that our culture, firmly founded on our Maltese Language, and on our people's constantly encouraged talents, together with initiatives in the sports domain, have a fundamental role to play in the creation and development of a modern concept of national identity.

The efforts of the New Labour Government during its first 20 months were directed at initiating this process with the objective of cultivating in earnest this new sense of national identity.

2.1 Achievements

The New Labour Government's efforts to enhance a sense of National identity were based on initiatives in all the cultural spheres and in sport.

The large number and wide variety of achievements in these two sectors served to establish on sound foundations many future activities designed to confirm and consolidate our national identity as a nation and people embarking on the Third Millennium.

Amongst the many initiatives that we have launched, it is useful to mention just a few:

Culture and the Arts

- The launching of the first National Festival of Maltese Folk Song.
- Establishment of the first National Orchestra.
- Inauguration of the new Manoel Theatre museum.

- Re-opening of the National Archaeological Museum following extensive restoration, maintenance and reorganisation.
- Inauguration of St. James Cavalier as an Arts Centre.
- Publication of the Directory of Artists and Protagonists of the Cultural scene.
- Recognition of the Maltese popular song through the organisation, for two years running, of the International Maltese Song Festival in Gozo.
- The purchase of trailers by the Labour Government to be used by Karnival participants for building their floats.

Sport

- Transfer of 25 sport facilities to National and Local Sports Clubs and Associations.
- * Introduction of a new structure for the Maltese Sports Council through the direct elections of representatives from amongst the sports-men and women themselves and by according this Council further executive powers and duties and appointing it to draw up a National Sport Policy.
- * Increasing the number of sport disciplines taught at Skolasport which led to the number of children participating in Skolasport to swell to the record figure of 2800.
- * Registration of sports associations with the Department of Sport.
- The introduction of the Sport for All programme to encourage a greater and wider sports participation by all and sundry.
- Agreement with MFA for the renewal and refurbishment of the National Football Stadium at Ta Qali.
- The rebuilding of the sports facilities at the Salinos Football Ground for Valletta F.C.

3. Guarantee of a Clean Administration

In its Electoral Programme, "Ic-Cittadin L-Ewwel", ("The Citizen First") the Labour Party declared that it was unacceptable that any Government should take important decisions behind closed doors or that it should refuse to provide any explanation about dubious decisions and suspect choices regarding people and public spending.

During its electoral campaign two years ago, New Labour clearly demonstrated how certain huge public contracts had been earmarked for certain members of the inner circle notwithstanding the availability of other offers which appeared to be much more advantageous.

New Labour gave ample proof how corruption had become institutionalised under the Administration of Fenech Adami and his friends. New Labour proved beyond doubt how corruption had become tangibly rampant and how it was all masked by pseudo investigations that were shoddily carried out and were, in fact, intended as mere smoke screens to confuse and obscure the real source of responsibility.

All this served to encourage and spread a climate in which the squandering and misuse of public funds began

to be accepted as the normal state of affairs.

The Labour Party declared that a modern Malta was entitled to a better administration characterised by efficiency and integrity. The Labour Party persists in this vision of a clean, transparent and accountable public administration.

In order to guarantee a correct and serious administration, The New Labour Policy was founded on the three principles of Transparency, Accountability and Justice. These three mainstays of the New Labour Policy are just as applicable today and should apply equally to political parties and state administration alike.

Consequently with regard to the financing of political parties the concrete proposals of the New Labour Policy stated that such financing should be publicly declared.

On the other hand, with regard to public administration, the New Labour Policy based its concrete proposals on the following measures:

- The Auditor General should not only be an officer responsible directly to Parliament, together with all his staff, but should be provided with all the necessary resources to enable him to carry out his duties and responsibilities effectively.
- The magistrature should be by being given investigative powers, including total access to government records, and be endowed with all the necessary resources that would be completely independent of the police force so that it would be able to investigate accusations of corruption or abuse of power.

We can unequivocally boast that throughout these past 21 months the New Labour Government has demonstrated beyond any shadow of doubt that it practises exactly what it preaches where honesty, transparency, accountability and justice in public administration are concerned.

We have implemented our pledge that the Auditor General would become an official directly responsible to Parliament.

The law setting up an enquiring magistrature has been brought to its second reading and it is no fault of the Labour Government that no further progress has been registered in this regard.

During the coming five years, the New Labour Government intends to continue with its efforts to implement all the other proposals it has presented to ensure a greater level of honesty and transparency in public administration. In order to underline its commitment towards ensuring greater transparency and clean standards in public life the New Labour Government will remove the law of prescription for case of corruption involving politicians. In this way those in power will know that will be unable to flee and hide from justice on the excuse that the case in which they are involved is time barred. The New Labour Government can claim this prerogative because it has clearly demonstrated throughout these past 20 months that it is the only party that can offer such a guarantee of a clean, transparent administration.

4. Protection of the Environment and Planning

The experience gained by 21 months of administration confirmed the New Labour Government in its conviction that Development and Environmental protection needed to be awarded primary importance not as two separate elements of its national policy, but as one strategic objective which could not possibly be achieved if any one of these aspects was given more or less importance than the other.

The unfolding and development of this strategic objective requires a very serious realistic policy that would be

implemented steadfastly, efficiently and transparently. In this way, our obligation to protect our environment could be honoured in consonance with the twin responsibility of ensuring a suitable and sustainable level of economic development.

4.1 Achievements

During these last twenty-one months the New Labour Government has shown with deeds that it takes protection of the environment seriously. Proof of this are the many initiatives taken in this regard, foremost amongst which are:

- * The drawing up of a national policy and strategy for the environment which has been presented to Cabinet for approval.
- * A lasting solution to the problem of fumes from the M'Sacla waste recycling plant.
- * Improvement at the Sant' Antnin sewage treatment plant.
- * New hunting and trapping regulations.
- * The drawing up of a new waste management policy and strategy.
- * The drawing up of an environmental protection report by UNDP experts which will serve as the basis of the revised environment protection act.
- * The drawing up of a new and updated protection plan against marine pollution.
- * The drawing up of a restructuring plan for the Department of the Environment.

4.2 New Proposals

During the coming five years the New Labour Government will continue with its efforts to improve the protection of our country's natural environment.

The main initiatives which will be taken will include, amongst other things;

- * The revision of the Environment Protection Act.
- * The restructuring of the Department of the Environment.
- * The implementation of a national environmental policy and strategy.
- * The regular publication of the state of the State of the Environment Report.
- * The setting up of a data bank for disseminating information about both local and foreign environmental parameters.
- * The launching of an Environmental Wardens service.
- * The drawing up of a policy and strategy for the disposal of toxic waste.
- * The implementation of the Action Plan for Protection Against Marine Pollution and the monitoring of water quality along the Maltese coast.

4.3 The Planning Authority

While the New Labour Government will strengthen the legislative and organisational mechanisms required to protect the environment, it is also committed to honour its obligation to enhance the level of development in this country. An institution responsible for Environmental Protection has to assume a pivotal role in the whole process of safeguarding our environmental integrity within the framework of a policy favouring sustainable development. And it is precisely with the objective of enabling such an institution to carry out such duties efficiently and transparently that it has been deemed necessary to draw up and implement a structural reformation of this institution, without any further delay.

All too often The Planning Authority is lambasted by individual citizens, businesses, and even by public corporations for the way it implements the environmental and developmental policies it is responsible for. The Labour Party believes that, even though in many cases such criticism originates from people with vested interests who abhor all forms of planning and control, it feels just as convinced that, in a number of cases, this criticism is amply justified.

With this in mind it is intended to implement a serious reform that would ensure a better level of transparency and accountability, while providing accommodation for the reasonable aspirations of private citizens, the commercial sector and government departments so that submissions of development applications will be dealt with and processed without undue delays or excessive bureaucracy and with a maximum of transparency.

Before this reform can be carried out it is essential that a wide and effective process of consultation is carried out between Government and the Constituted Bodies concerned. These consultations will be similar to those carried out between government and the constituted bodies regarding the restructuring of industry, regarding the Free Trade Zone and regarding the setting up of IPSE.

In order to stimulate an active, serious debate about the proposed reform of the Planning Authority, the Labour Party is proposing the following general provisions for the restructuring of this institution:

- The Structure Plan be immediately reviewed by a group of Planning Experts.
- Various functions and responsibilities which strictly speaking, belong to the sphere of environmental protection, be transferred to the Department of the Environment.
- Work on the local plans be finalised within a time frame indicated by Planning experts.
- All these measures are to be implemented within a six-month deadline along with immediate changes affected to the managerial structure of the Planning Authority.

Three autonomous Planning Directorates, whose function within the framework of the Structure Plan will be that of handling issues about "land use" and permits related to development projects will be established under the Ministry of the Environment. Their responsibilities and functions will be divided into three classifications:

- Directorate responsible for projects submitted by individual citizens regarding personalised development and not related to commercial activity;
- Directorate responsible for applications of a commercial nature including public (and Local Council) projects, which are limited to certain reasonable dimensions;
- Directorate responsible for major commercial and public projects whose dimensions would clearly indicate that they would impact on the national interest because of their strategic, economic and social repercussions.

The Ombudsman will be given new powers to examine and supervise the operations of the Department of the Environment with regard to provisions of the Structure Plan, and those of the three directorates to ensure that all decisions taken will be transparent and fair.

In every case, the enquiring magistrate appointed to investigate a case of alleged corruption or abuse of power, would have the fullest authority to investigate any incident that falls within the framework of the Structure Plan and the Department of the Environment.

The New Labour Government will implement this reform by following the same procedure it applied to remove VAT and replace it with C.E.T. It will allow a time frame of four months during which it will carry out extensive consultations with all parties interested in the Planning Authority. A white paper will be published explaining the full extent of the Government's proposals regarding the changes contemplated. During the following four months, using the same method of widespread consultations and discussions, a new law will be presented and implemented with the objective of introducing new systems of planning and development and a complete change in the management structure of the Planning Authority.

4.4 Hunting and trapping

New Labour has always spoken clearly to the hunting associations in our country.

During these last twenty - one months the New Labour Government has kept the commitments it made in this field prior to the last elections.

For the coming five years the position of the New Labour Government will continue to be based on the principle of not irresponsibly promising everything in the quest for votes. New labour will only promise what's fair in respect of the hunting and trapping traditions of our country on the one hand and the interest of protecting the environment and the right of the public to enjoy the natural environment of our country in all its beauty on the other. The New Labour Government will continue to insist that all this will take place within the framework of international conventions which our country is a party to, such as the Berne Convention, but always with the relevant reservations applicable to Malta.

The foreign policy being adopted by the New labour Government ensures that nobody will either dictate to or force the Maltese Government to change the hunting and trapping regulations and conditions agreed with the local hunting associations as would be the case if Malta were to become a full member of the European Union.

Therefore, the New Labour Government will seek to maintain the conditions and regulations for hunting and trapping, which were drawn up following consultations with the associations representing local enthusiasts, as they are at present. Following further consultations, the New labour Government will be in a position to implement the following proposals:

- * The issuing of a special licence to persons above the age of 18 to be able to practice the sport on clay pigeons in shooting ranges.
- * The distribution of the vote allocated to the sport in a proportional manner to the various associations according to their membership strength.
- * The inclusion of the shelduck (kurvell tas-salib) and the cormorant (margun) in the list of birds which can be hunted or trapped.
- * The reduction of the licence to keep a firearm to Lm 5 on the condition that the shotgun is

fitted with a blocking mechanism whose key is kept by the police.

* The introduction of distinction in licensing procedures between persons who embalm birds for personal use and those who do so commercially.

* The commitment to give importance to the identification of areas for reserves and woodlands like Mizieb in the revised Structure Plan and Local Plans which form part of this exercise.

Finally, the New Labour Government will continue to maintain close contact with the hunting and trapping associations both for the purposes of consultation and the implementation of these pledges.

5. A Bigger Boost to Education

In the Electoral Programme, "Ic-Cittadin l-Ewwel", Labour had pledged to breathe a new life into our Education system by launching a project to improve Public Education through the facilitation of access to more and better options. This would provide fuller and fairer choices for all.

The project was intended to provide special attention to the primary, secondary and technical education sectors and to focus more effort and resources on the needs of children with special needs in such a way that public education would achieve the highest and most positive ratings possible.

The past 21 months has seen the Labour Government doing its utmost to ensure that work on these initiatives was initiated so that the commitments made in October 1996 were fulfilled.

5.1 Achievements

Confirmation of the New Labour Government's determination to carry out its promises to revitalise the Education sector was soon forthcoming. In spite of being confronted by a huge structural deficit in its public finances, it, succeeded in earmarking a significant portion of the limited funds available to be invested in education.

An indication of the significance of this commitment can be elicited by comparing the sum of money voted for capital investment in education in 1996 by the outgoing Nationalist government - Lm3.2 - and the amount voted for the same purpose by the New Labour Government in 1998 - Lm5.5.

On the strength of this financial commitment, the New Labour Government was able to launch a massive restructuring and renovation programme extending all over the national territory and right across the entire network of educational sectors and dimensions.

Other initiatives included:

- An extensive maintenance and structural work programme on 160 government schools all over Malta and Gozo during the 1997 and 1998 summer holidays. It is estimated that for every single Maltese Lira spent by the Nationalist Government on school building maintenance, the New Labour Government has spent 8 Maltese Lira.

- The installation of computers in the Year 2 Primary Classes - a project which was supposed to have been effected by the Nationalist Government back in 1996.

- The launch of a pilot scheme in collaboration with Maltacom, whereby the Internet facility was introduced in all Government schools.

- The appointment of a Statementing Board composed of professionals from the Education Division, from the Ministry for Social Welfare, and from the Eden Foundation. With the setting up of this Board decisions about services provided for children with special needs would no longer be based on ministerial discretion but would depend on a technical professional and independent assessment of the situation.
- The drawing up and finalisation of a new National Curriculum.
- The introduction of new syllabi for Years 4, 5, and 6 at primary level.
- The launching of an Early Literacy Programme.
- The drawing up of a White Paper proposing far reaching reforms and restructuring of the entire Vocational Education set-up about which extensive consultations were held.
- The amendment of the section on the University in the Education Act and the appointment of the University Ombudsman as a result of this.

5.2 Fresh Proposals

Since October 1996, the New Labour Government has consistently and concretely demonstrated its commitment to improve and upgrade every educational sector of these islands. The New Labour Government intends to lend education that extra momentum that will help it make the required leap forward, with the greatest emphasis being placed on state schools. At the same time, it will seek to collaborate fully and inter-relate with Church Schools, Private Schools and other schools operated by Parent Foundations.

The New Labour Government is committed to recognising and upholding the agreement reached by Church and State regarding the management and operation of Church Schools.

A positive new awakening is being felt in the education sector because the New Labour Government has demonstrated with facts that it is a Government for all Maltese and Gozitans alike. This Government has continued to build on the sound structures that it found in place while it insisted on changing and replacing whatever had been left to deteriorate.

There is still much work to be done. Throughout the process of devising and implementing its education policy, the New Labour Government is resolved to work and cooperate with all those individuals and organisations - whatever their political orientation may be - who are prepared to contribute towards a valid education that will help this country confidently confront the economic, cultural, social and technological challenges of the next century.

5.3 Sustaining the Transformational Process Together

Any changes in the primary or secondary education systems will first and foremost have to be discussed with parents and teachers, and will only be introduced at a stage when our organisational structures and human resources are suitably equipped to handle them. We will double our efforts to ensure that state education is only of the best quality by accelerating our drive to improve, embellish and renovate the physical structures and facilities of our schools.

Furthermore, we are committed to providing all our schools with the equipment required to deliver a modern curriculum whilst augmenting the process of on-going training and education of all our teachers in the latest, most up-to-date systems of education.

The first few months of a New Labour Government will see us pursue the wide range of consultations we have already initiated and conclude agreements with parents, educators, and other stakeholders of our society regarding a new curriculum for our kindergartens, the primary, and the secondary sector - a curriculum which will adequately prepare our children for the challenges of the 21st Century.

This new curriculum will be designed to help our students to learn to live in a much more open society, and cope with a far more advanced economy and to enable them to develop the skills and competences they require to participate to the fullest extent in the complex world around them.

We shall proceed with our initiatives aimed at invigorating the organisational and management structures at our schools so that we will be able to introduce a viable system whereby these schools are administered and managed by their heads, assistant heads, teachers and representatives of the parents and the local community. In this context, we shall step up the process already started whereby Heads and Teachers assume responsibility for planning the future of their school.

Consequently, we shall be introducing measures that will define the responsibilities of the Education Division as being those related to support initiatives and evaluation exercises of the various schools' activities and programmes. This contrasts well with the much more controlling and suffocating grip that the Education Division has traditionally maintained over all school administrations until now.

We shall be launching even more projects and schemes in collaboration with various associations and agencies in order to intensify our efforts and initiatives aimed at assisting and supporting those students and families passing through difficult times that could impact negatively on the behaviour of these students at school.

We shall be insisting on further and fresh initiatives aimed at achieving a high level of good behaviour in our schools. A new Code of Discipline shall be introduced which will have, amongst its other objectives, that of reducing bullying in our schools.

A sensitive monitoring system will be introduced which will bolster our capability of preventing and deterring child abuse in our community.

We shall be introducing and encouraging initiatives aimed at disseminating in our schools the sound values of honesty and solidarity amongst the rising generations.

We shall consolidate our drive to convert our schools into community centres of learning and culture which will be used extensively during after-school hours by the whole community. In this respect we shall be supporting all the necessary arrangements that may have to be made between the school administration and the community representatives to regulate such activities.

We shall boost our active participation in international educational projects - in the same way we are doing with E.U. projects such as Comenius - to ensure that our students and educators are fully and receptively aware of all the developments happening around the world. We shall also be taking concrete initiatives to encourage the extension of such projects to our other Mediterranean neighbours.

5.4 More Science & Technology - More Creativity

We shall be sustaining our drive to introduce the teaching of, and familiarisation with, Science and Technology, at every educational level. We shall intensify our efforts to ensure that all school children - irrespective of gender - shall, from the earliest years, become familiar not only with computers and computer technology but also cultivate in them a modern participative orientation designed to help them develop a

problem solving attitude to learning, rather than accepting a spoon-feeding method that expects them to learn by rote.

Every effort will be made to encourage the development of a greater creative engagement on the part of the students in our schools and to incorporate more creativity in the educational programme of each school.

A special boost will be given to our cultural activities in support of a national reading campaign in order to improve mastery of the English and Maltese languages. Poor knowledge of Maltese will result in poor educational and cultural development and a loss of proper identity. An inadequate mastery of English will also flaw our students' development and this country will not be able to exploit opportunities for advancement in relation to the rest of the world around.

5.5 A Commitment to cater for all our children

Right from the beginning of the next scholastic year, we shall be initiating a dynamic training programme designed to enable primary teachers to succeed in meeting the educational needs of all their pupils. Our objective is to eliminate the unacceptable scenario at our primary schools in which a large number of pupils fall back in their basic educational formation at a very early age and end up despairing of our educational system and dropping out altogether.

It is our firm intention to pursue our efforts to consolidate inclusive education which means that our schools will have to transform themselves and become more accessible to children with various degrees and forms of abilities and disabilities, and to educate them all together in the best possible manner.

We shall take care to design a curriculum for special schools which will remain available for those students who, for some reason or other, did not start their education in regular schools and for those students who used to attend our regular schools but could not benefit from an inclusive system of education.

5.6 A modernised renovated secondary education

We shall continue with the work we have already started to transform our secondary and trade schools into learning and training centres that truly cater for the educational needs of our young people. Our plans will include provision for the increase and upgrading of dynamic contacts and interactive activities between the schools, the various working environments and the community to facilitate the acquisition of skills and competences which they will need to be able to live in a modern society and work in an advanced economy.

At the same time, we have to cater for all the young people who have decided to withdraw from formal schooling at an early age and for those who refuse to attend school because they do not feel comfortable in today's school environment or because they regard the whole school set-up as being totally irrelevant to their needs and aspirations.

With this in mind, we shall develop further the schemes we have already launched in collaboration with the industrial sector in order to optimise the encouraging positive results achieved so far in motivating students. These schemes have been welcomed by students who recognise in them a coherent element of applicability and an intrinsic relevance to the working environment and conditions they will have to cope with in the adult working life waiting for them just round the corner.

Fresh initiatives are in the pipeline intended to offer a brand new start for young people who feel that they have failed in their secondary education.

5.7 Vocational education

The White Paper we drew up about Vocational Education and Training stimulated a great deal of interest and discussion amongst the various sectors of the economy, trade unions, educators, government departments and those individuals and institutions who enjoy a developed vision of a modern life-long education.

The many, extensive consultation and brainstorming sessions that were held with all the stakeholders, yielded a wealth of interesting ideas and provocative proposals. In the coming months we shall proceed with the work in hand on this important project and set the process moving to establish vocational education on a sound, modern footing. This project will have established an intimate working relationship with the economic sector and get educators and economic operators to work hand in hand to design the curriculum and organisational structure of this educational sector.

Above all we shall endeavour to develop vocational education into a high profile educational system which will no longer be regarded as being, in any way, inferior to academic education.

We shall continue to strive to make the University much more accessible to all our young people, including to those students hailing from a vocational education institution or background.

This new and completely refurbished vocational education system will also cater for the needs of students with disabilities so that they will be assisted to prepare themselves effectively for their adult working life.

We will also make sure that the system is fully gender-friendly and that full opportunities are made available for women who wish to return to work and who require training in new technologies.

This system will create further opportunities for our young people, including those students who obtain disappointing results in their academic studies. The past few months have seen an increase in the number of youths who have embarked on an apprenticeship scheme. Our new tourism apprenticeship scheme has yielded exceptional results and it is our intention to introduce fresh schemes that will enable more and more young people to obtain the training and education they require in order to meet the challenges of work in an advanced economy.

It would be futile to try to modernise our economy without modernising and upgrading our vocational education.

The transformation required in this sector will be financed partly by the funds received from the European Union in order to restructure our industry along more open and modern lines in consonance with our commitment to create a Free Industrial Trade Zone.

In order to encourage more young people to pursue further education after they have turned 16, we have decided to award a stipend to those students following post-secondary studies and who have so far been left without any form of financial support whatsoever.

5.8 University

A University Ombudsman has been appointed and this office has already started to investigate and decide on complaints of unfair treatment submitted by students, academic staff and non-academic personnel.

During the coming months we shall continue our efforts to translate into practice the various changes we have introduced into the Education Act aimed at hammering out a new contractual agreement with the University which will allow it to plan its operations and programmes well ahead.

These reforms require the University to make a public statement about all its activities and its finances. The

University will also be required to bolster its academic auditing of all its courses and research activities.

We have succeeded in developing a more sustainable stipend system. Within the framework of the relations we are developing with the European Union, our young people will enjoy the opportunity to participate fully in youth and student programmes.

They will be able to travel to other European countries where they may pursue part of their studies obtaining credits which would then be recognised by their respective schools, colleges and University in Malta.

(In particular, we shall be introducing these measures so that more students will be able to avail themselves of the stipend system).

- Students awarded a stipend will continue to receive that stipend even while they are abroad pursuing studies in other countries.

- The stipend will also be awarded to students who have not been awarded a study bursary when they are constrained to travel abroad to further their studies when the Malta University does not offer tuition in their chosen discipline(s).

5.9 Matsec Exams

A New Labour Government will strive to bring about changes in the University structures which will help students receive better treatment and fuller consideration in the course of their studies.

A New Labour Government will also strive to persuade the University to conscientiously and responsibly carry out its duties in connection with the control it exercises over local examinations at ordinary, intermediate and advanced level which have been introduced locally in lieu of examination systems based at foreign universities.

Government will spare no effort to ensure that these exams will be designed, set and corrected in the most conscientious way possible. The New Labour Government has already taken concrete steps to initiate a new framework for full cooperation between the University of London and the Malta University which will guarantee that the MATSEC exams will be recognised for their calibre and their international status.

We shall work unstintingly to ensure that this examination system earns the approval of teachers, parents and students alike. We shall also spare no effort to promote improved relations between the organisation of these examination systems and teachers at secondary and post-secondary levels. We shall encourage and facilitate a better level of collaboration between the Junior College, Sixth Forms at private and Church schools, and the MATSEC Board at the University.

A New Labour Government will consider initiating a process of careful evaluation and reform of the system introduced by the previous Nationalist Government whereby entry to University depended on obtaining good passes in six subjects in the same year in one session and on one certificate.

5.10 Lifelong education

We shall increase our endeavours to promote all forms of lifelong education.

Educational initiatives that can be promulgated via television will be encouraged and consolidated so that they reach more and more adults.

These ventures, together with other initiatives from other sectors of our society, will serve to offer new and

better opportunities for women who work at home and for those who may wish or need to renew and upgrade their skills and knowledge in order to remain abreast of the demands of jobs on offer in an accelerated economy that never ceases to change and transform itself.

We shall also provide innovative educational and cultural programmes and schemes aimed specifically at retired persons who may not have had access to such opportunities when they were younger.

6. Work, employment and training

In its electoral programme *The Citizen First*, the Labour Party said the main aim of its economic policy was to assure the highest possible level of employment.

Labour affirmed this in line with its policy that the private sector should be the driving force behind the economy.

The chaos in public finance left by the Nationalist government meant that in its first months Labour had to put an end to the squandering of public funds. As a result, firms in the private sector that used to depend on government funding, had to, amongst other things, reduce their work force.

This is the main reason why unemployment went up in the first months of a Labour government though it is important to say too that unemployment had begun rising since May, 1996. This fact was hidden by the Nationalist government that did not publish figures of unemployment in its last months in power so as not to tarnish its image before elections.

By contrast, the new Labour government never hid the truth about unemployment and never tried to solve the problem by using the outdated method of employing people in the public sector as previous Nationalist and Labour governments had done. On the contrary, this Labour government was the first government which in its first 20 months in power, implemented a policy curbing and controlling overemployment in the public sector, especially in government departments, in order to bring under control the structural imbalance it had inherited from the Nationalist government.

This was all done in the context of the need to restructure Maltese industry.

6.1 Achievements

After 21 months, Labour's job policy has begun to bear fruit.

In fact after unemployment reached its highest level in December 1997 when it rose to 7,149, unemployment began falling steadily in the first six months of 1998 till it fell to 6,558 at the end of June 1998. At the same time it is worth noting that in 1997 there was a net increase of 1,066 new jobs in the private sector while there was a net drop of 423 persons in the public sector. As a result, the number of gainfully employed rose by 643 persons to 136,788 at the end of 1997. This trend continued throughout the first months of 1998.

This was not a coincidence.

It is a result of the responsible policy that Labour has adopted in the employment, work and training sector.

It is a result of the confidence being shown in Malta by foreign investors who have started choosing Malta again as their operations base. In fact in 1997 the Malta Development Corporation (MDC), approved 49 new projects, 33 of which were direct foreign investment.

It is also a result of the new direction taken by the Employment and Training Corporation which together with other ministries and private sector organisations set up new training courses in tourism, the self employed sector and industry through the setting up of the Night Institute for Further Technical Education with the cooperation of the Israeli organisation for training in industry, ORT.

6.2 New proposals for Employment and Training

Labour plans to increase employment by:

- setting up "welfare to work" schemes on the American and British models whereby employers are given incentives to offer jobs to the long-term unemployed and otherwise disadvantaged people. Thus unemployment benefits will be replaced by subsidies to finance productive work.
- Special importance will be given to the over forties who find it difficult to return to employment.
- Special training schemes will be launched for women returning to work after taking a career break to bring up their children.
- New training schemes will be drawn up for industrial workers whose firm is being restructured to upgrade their skills.
- The Employment and Training Act will be amended to enable greater flexibility for excess workers in the public sector to be transferred to entities where vacancies exist.
- The ETC will work more closely with the citizen by:

opening more Regional Job and Information Centres, on the lines of the one opened in the Administrative Centre in Rabat Gozo, to give a better and quicker service to its clients.

extending registration services for the unemployed to the local council offices following agreement with local councils so as to give those registering for employment a better more personalised service.

7. Social Welfare

The last 21 months have proved, if proof was needed, that New Labour had lost none of the social conscience it has always had.

Despite the financial limitations imposed on it by the waste and carelessness of the previous Nationalist administration, New Labour which came to power with the slogan The Citizen First, still managed to fulfill its social programme. In its 1996 electoral programme Labour based its social proposals on three basic premises which were:

- Social benefits and social security together with policies in work, education and housing, had always been the pillars of the welfare state built by past Labour governments. That is why social policy must be linked to policies in education, health, care of the elderly and housing.
- Labour has always believed that equality of opportunity for all citizens must be the basis of any future political plan.
- At the same time, the social security system was to be linked to the economic potential of the country. It must be tied to the curtailment of abuse and waste of public funds, not least in the payment of social benefits.

And this so that existing social benefit structures would keep up with the changes taking place in society.

The New Labour government has managed to fulfill some of the promises it made in its electoral programme, in the context of these premises.

7.1 Achievements

Amongst its main successes in the Social Security sphere, Labour can count the following:

- It began to fulfill its promise to those entitled to a British Services pension and so far 2,336 of these have begun receiving their pensions at home intact.
- It introduced pensions for widowers with the same rights enjoyed by women.
- It introduced full sickness benefits to married women with the same work conditions.
- It increased the total spending on Social Benefits from Lm136 million in 1996 to Lm153 million in 1997 and Lm170 million in 1998.
- New Labour consulted at length with the social partners about Labour Law reforms which led to a National Conference on CERA and IRA laws, and a decision to amend and improve these laws for the next millennium.
- In the interests of Health and Safety at the place of work, a diploma course for Safety Officers was introduced for the first time in November 1997 in collaboration with the Workers Participation Centre and the Institute of Health Care and seven trainee inspectors were enrolled on the course.
- A Code of Practice for the Building Industry was finalised, and a draft of Regulations on the minimum requirements at the work place was circulated to the social partners and discussed at a meeting of the Parliamentary Committee for Social Affairs.
- The Section on the Protection of Disabled Persons drew up a White Paper which had its first reading in Parliament as part of the new law on Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability), while a Centre for the Training of Adults with Disabilities was opened at Marsascalea.
- In the spheres of Drug and Alcohol Abuse and the Protection of the Family, the Foundation of the Social Security Services was set up to regulate the running of two government agencies, Sedqa and the Social Work and Development Programme (SWDP) and two other Commissions were set up to strengthen cooperation between government agencies and voluntary organisations against drug and alcohol abuse and to help families with social problems.
- 8 new cooperatives were registered, and the cooperative movement now has its own permanent premises in Valletta. Work is also at an advanced stage to reform the 1978 Law of Cooperatives with the financial help and expertise of the ILO.

Thus government continues to build a mosaic of social services where it provides financial support to voluntary agencies to enable them to offer a better service complementing the government services.

7.2 New Social Welfare Proposals

Labour will continue to build on its track record, against the background of the national financial situation, and together with the social partners to widen the social security net.

Social Security

In the next five years anomalies in the Social Security Act will be tackled and work will continue to update the Law, in order that gradual and sustainable improvement in the social security sphere be carried.

- Those entitled to a British Services pension who have not yet been included in the reform, will be.
- The flat rate pension for other pensioners will be increased so that their standard of living will not suffer. The ceiling in the means test for supplementary allowances given to families having a low income will be brought at par with the highest level of non-taxable income of couples and individuals, thus benefiting families with a low income and single parents.
- The Labour Department will be restructured and modernised and the occupational health and safety branch will be strengthened to become real 'One Stop Shops'
- The Customer Care Office will be upgraded to inform the citizen of his social security rights.
- A more effective system to curb social security abuse will be set up, so that the money saved can be better utilised for those truly in need.

Work

In the next five years Labour will take the necessary steps to:

- Push through the amendments to the CERA and IRA labour laws on which there is agreement with the social partners.
- The Labour Board will be strengthened and updated through changes in the law to cushion the procedures of consultance in the issuing of National Standard Orders or Wage Regulation Orders.
- The Department of Work which was left without resources by the Nationalist government will be rebuilt and restructured, in particular through investment in a computerisation system, linking the Department of Work to other departments for work coordination.
- The Protection, Health and Security at the Place of Work sector will continue to be strengthened.

Persons With Special Needs

After the New Labour Government passes the Equal Opportunities Law (People with Special Needs) it:

- will begin to implement the law,
- will entrust the National Commission for People with Disabilities (KNPD) to carry out an independent audit to:

ensure that the law is being enforced,

address the problem of those persons with disabilities needing help once their parents or other

carers die, based on a report the KNPD has been commissioned to draw up on the actual number and conditions they find themselves in.

The Prevention of Drug and Alcohol Abuse

- Preventive education against drug and alcohol abuse will be increased, at school, in the community, at the workplace and in the family, especially through positive messages on the Media. The target will be those who take drugs or alcohol to solve their problems as well as those who take drugs for recreational purposes.
- A stepping up of research on drug consumption especially on alcohol consumption patterns in line with World Health Organisation guidelines.
- More efficient distribution of financial and human resources for the agencies working in the field through:
 - prevention of duplication,
 - the application of the best practice standards,
 - training schemes,
 - legislation for specialised services for children effected by drug and alcohol problems.

Cooperatives

- A Cooperative Bank will be set up to give financial, technical and managerial help and to strengthen the Maltese Cooperative Movement.
- An update of the Law on Cooperatives.
- Particular emphasis will be made on voluntary cooperatives, such as those working for former prisoners and former drug and alcohol abusers, as well as consumer cooperatives.

The Family

- Labour will continue to work for the good of the family. It will legislate for the recognition of:
 - different types of families, especially one-parent families,
 - a Children's Charter.

8. National Debate on the Family

Labour will give all the space for a wide and civil national debate on family problems including the possibility of the introduction of divorce in our country. A Labour government will ensure that a national referendum on divorce will take place before the subject is discussed in Parliament.

It hopes that all the social forces in the country will take a full, genuine and open-minded part in the debate, showing mutual tolerance, for the identification of all the measures necessary to assure a sound future for Maltese and Gozitan families.

9. Housing

In the 1996 Electoral Programme Labour promised to tackle the problem of housing by:

- State intervention to give everyone equal opportunities for suitable housing. This would not exclude private sector participation.

Specifically:

- New schemes would be created for social housing in specific areas, respecting existing regulations for environmental protection.
- Incentives for old, empty and dilapidated buildings to be rehabilitated and reused.
- Subsidies to encourage the renting of private houses and flats.
- Subsidies for the improvement of homes which are either owner-occupied or rented.
- Better interest rates on housing loans for low income families.

New Labour worked hard for these proposals to be fulfilled.

9.1 Achievements

During the first 21 months in office Labour recreated a Ministry of Housing. Total expenditure on housing rose from Lm10.6 million in 1996 to Lm13.3 million in 1998, while capital expenditure by the Housing Authority rose from Lm4.2 million to Lm7 million in the same period.

As a result:

- Labour reduced the waiting list for social accommodation from 5,000 to 3,500.
- Distributed 700 units between 1997 and 1998;
- Began the process for the purchase of 600 empty properties from the private sector;
- Began to build 270 places after approval from Housing Authority.
- Began the building of additional floors on government buildings in Gudja. Removed old housing in Valletta and built new buildings, retaining the old facade;
- Carried out extensive maintenance on old quarters in Hamrun, Cospicua and Valletta.

9.2 New proposals

Labour will continue to build on these foundations so that every Maltese and Gozitan family will have a decent place to live in.

As promised priority will be given to reviewing rates on subsidised loans. This for more families to become home owners whatever their social condition and without penalising young families or single-parent families.

Specifically Labour will:

- Complete the project of the town of Mtarfa;

- Finish off the first phase of 600 new homes in Pembroke;
- Finish the 1200 new homes the applications for which are before the Planning Authority;
- Continue to buy empty buildings from the private sector;
- Create more joint ventures with private enterprise to provide social accomodation.

10. HEALTH

At Election time twenty months ago the Malta Labour Party showed, in its electoral programme, that Nationalist Party promises to improve health cure and services had not been kept.

The Labour Party showed how certain sectors of the health sphere had gone from bad to worse such as:

- the administration of State hospitals,
- the system of primary health care,
- the training and the employment of paramedical staff, and
- the provision of free medicines to people entitled to them under the Social Security system.

Above all the Labour Party showed how these problems had resulted from two major fundamental failings.

These were:

- the uncontrolled spending of State funds and the lack of investment in the public systems of health care.
- the arrogant style of decision making without any consultation with the professional sector and with paramedics who were then expected to implement these decisions. A clear example is that the decision to build a new hospital was taken against the advice of professional experts in the medical field.

The New Labour Government intended to tackle these problems over a five year period fully respecting the right of citizens to decide whether they wanted to use public or private health services by assuring that public medical facilities provided are of the highest standard.

At the same time the New Labour Policy on Health was and still is committed to democracy in this field by consulting and giving a voice to all those professional people who work in health care.

10.1 Achievements

In the past twenty months the New Labour Government albeit with limited finances at its disposal, has embarked on achieving what it had planned in its 1996 October Electoral Programme.

In fact recurrent expenditure on health increased from 40.1 million liri in 1996 to 48.5 million in 1998. At the same time capital investment on Health doubled under the New Labour Government from 6.8 million liri in 1996 to 13.7 million liri in 1998.

This money was used in the following ways:

- a decision to increase the size of the new hospital at Tal- Qroqq for it to become an acute general hospital,
- the Medical Stores and the Pharmacy at St. Luke's Hospital were computerized and as a result the lack of adequate medical supplies and the long waiting time by patients to be served have been greatly reduced.
- The system of Telemedicine was introduced so that the General Hospital in Gozo was electronically connected to St. Luke's Hospital and in turn this latter hospital was electronically connected to Great Ormond Street Hospital in London.
- A Day Surgery Ward was opened at St. Luke's Hospital.
- A Day Rehabilitation Centre was opened at Mount Carmel Hospital.
- The lithotripter system was introduced at St. Luke's Hospital to enable those who have gall stone problems to be cured without having to undergo an operation.
- A Mobile Blood Donor Unit was inaugurated.
- A new Physiotherapy Unit was opened at St.Luke's Hospital.
- Maintenance and refurbishment works were carried out in the Spinal Unit and in the Staff's quarters at Boffa Hospital.
- The first conversion course was introduced enabling enrolled nurses to become staff nurses.
- A customer care service was set up in the Ministry and an Information Department was introduced in the Health Division.

10.2 New proposals on Health

In the last two years the Labour Government has taken important decisions which will bear fruit in the near future.

The New Labour Government wants to consolidate the public health services on these decisions thus ensuring a dignified public health sector giving top class service to the citizens in the new millenium.

While building on what it has done already and continuing to implement proposals outlined in the 1996 Electoral Programme, a New Labour Government will introduce new proposals in public health as listed below.

10.3 A New and Modern Hospital at Tal-Qroqq

After consulting the professional associations and union representatives and all other interested partes, the Labour Government decided, in April 1997, to build one general hospital at Tal-Qroqq. This ensured that the previous Nationalist Plan splitting this hospital's services into two would be eliminated.

The new hospital at Tal-Qroqq will open in 2001 and will have the following facilities:

- It will be a modern 800 bed hospital for the service of all citizens. It will be run on modern lines.

- All equipment will be that of the latest technological development.
- Besides the building of the hospital, a Medical School, the Institute of Health Care and Medical Stores will be built in the same area. These will have all modern facilities and will be able to meet all modern realities.

Meanwhile the modernization of St. Luke's Hospital as well as the introduction of new services there will be continued. More modern technological equipment will be bought to ensure the best possible services.

A new rehabilitation and convalescence service will be introduced, irrespective of the patients' age. This will enable patients to return to the community and to a normal life as soon as possible.

When the Tal-Qroqq Hospital is opened, new facilities will be introduced at St. Luke's Hospital, thus ensuring a strong link in the health sector.

Mount Carmel Hospital will continue to be given more attention to bring it out of the state of abandonment it was in October 1996. A more modern way of allocating patients to wards will be introduced and more will be done to try and remove the stigma from those patients in this hospital.

Boffa Hospital will continue with its modernization programme and specialized treatment offered there will be strengthened.

The auditing process and the better allocation of human resources will be continued.

This process will enable these hospitals to reach full autonomy. A new Labour Government will give space for the participation of workers' representation as well as that of consumers in the management of hospitals. This will help in having an effective management based on modern and transparent lines.

Post graduate studies will be reintroduced to strengthen the ties between medical services in hospitals and doctors in the private sector, including the College of Family Practitioners. This will give specialized training to family doctors and will enable experienced family doctors to collaborate with professional staff in hospitals.

[SECTION 10.4 IS MISSING IN THE ON-LINE VERSION]

10.5 Outpatients Service

After having completed a survey on the improvements necessary in the outpatients service, a New Labour Government will start implementing its results so that every person will be given a specific date and time for his appointment.

A computerised system will be introduced to facilitate appointments for outpatient services. This will enable appointments to be made from the Health Centres. With this system, patients may choose the date and time of appointment.

10.6 Health Centres

A new Labour Government wants to implement a modern concept where in the citizen's health is really placed first.

A programme is to be introduced in Health Centres whereby a patient who has seen a doctor on one day will be assured of seeing the same doctor on his or her next visit. This will ensure continuity.

A New Labour Government will see to it that more tests and medical services are introduced in medical centres.

A New Labour Government will intensify its educational programme so that better use is made of Health Centres and so reduce pressure from the various hospital departments.

Cooperation with the private medical sector will improve. Opportunities will be offered to private doctors to work for periods of time in Health Centres.

A programme will be introduced for the screening for breast cancer and of the uterus.

10.7 Mental Health Reform

A New Labour Government will continue the process of finalizing a White Paper on the reform of Mental Health. This will lead to the introduction of a new law based on modern concepts in mental health.

10.8 Public Health

The on-going process to update and strengthen the laws on Public Health will continue. The Department of Health will continue with its modernization programme.

10.9 Distribution of Free Medicines

A New Labour Government will have discussions with interested associations and unions, to introduce measures for patients entitled to free medicines to collect them

from a private pharmacy of their choice. This will enable patients to collect their medicines in a time convenient to them.

A New Labour Government will continue to develop the pharmaceutical services on modern lines, both those provided by public hospitals as well as by the private ones.

Meanwhile, the computerization of the Medical Stores will be finalized to strengthen the system of buying and distribution of medicines.

10.10 Informatics

A New Labour Government will continue to introduce state of the art informatics systems for the medical sector.

Following the introduction of Telemedicine (whereby Maltese consultants established audio-visual contact with foreign specialists) this initiative will be further expanded and established with various other hospitals and medical centres in countries renowned for the medical progress they have achieved.

A New Labour Government will ensure that, under strict and extensive guarantees of confidentiality, patients' medical histories will be computerised. In this way, upon receiving permission from the patient himself or herself - and only then - a physician in any hospital, medical centre or private clinic will be provided with immediate access to that patient's medical history.

10.11 International Field

Ties with the World Health Organization and with various countries will be strengthened.

This will help the New Labour Government to ensure that the levels of health in Malta are of the highest standards and that Malta will serve as a centre for research which will be of benefit to the international community.

10.12 Service of the Highest Standard

While patients' right to choose the health care they prefer is maintained, a New Labour Government will continue cooperating with the private sector while assuring that the public health facilities in Malta and Gozo provide the best services.

11. Care for Our Senior Citizens

In the October 1996 electoral programme, New Labour recognized that the various complex health-related social problems were due to the fact that by the year 2000, 17% of the population would be over 60.

New Labour, therefore, expressed its belief that society owed our Senior Citizens an improved quality of life with the provision of better services and facilities.

New Labour proposed specific measures to attain these objectives:

- The strengthening of services to ensure that Senior Citizens may live at home comfortably and securely.
- More residential centres for those Senior Citizens who cannot continue living on their own.
- Access to Zammit Clapp Hospital for a greater number of people.
- A policy to provide Senior Citizens with a better quality of life with the participation of their families, voluntary organizations and the private sector.

11.1 Achievements

During the first months of the New Labour Government, initiatives were taken to realize the proposals made in the October 1996 electoral programme.

These initiatives included:

- The building of a Senior Citizens home at Cospicua.
- The opening of Senior Citizens Day Centres at Sliema and Úurrieq.
- The extensions of the Senior Citizens homes at Imtarfa and Floriana.
- The modernization and refurbishment of the Senior Citizens homes at Mosta and Msida.
- The opening of Zammit Clapp Hospital.
- A new office for Telecare Services.
- The opening of a new pharmacy at the St. Vincent de Paule Residence.
- New management for St. Vincent de Paule Residence.

- The recruitment and training of 400 new casual Social Assistants.

11.2 New Proposals

A New Labour Government will recognize that the Maltese population is enjoying a longer life span. Hence all future plans must take into account accessibility needs for the Senior Citizens.

New Labour will implement the following measures in the field of the care for Senior Citizens:

- A New Labour Government will launch an Elderly Health Screening Service. This service will offer the elderly the opportunity to be offered a number of tests by which medical problems related to old age may be identified at an early stage. The service will be managed by a group of doctors and paramedics who specialize in gerontology. This team will be at the elderly's disposal to provide counselling and educational services. This service should give our Senior Citizens more dignity and independence.

- A New Labour Government will keep its promise that our elderly continue to live as an integral part of the community until physically possible.

- For this purpose, the services in the community will be extended and strengthened and facilities will be improved in existing residential Homes by extending the rooms and refurbishing them. Two other Homes will be built - one at Úurrieq and another at Mellie'óa.

- * A quota for people with a disability will be introduced for these Homes so that the principle of the integration of people with a disability into the community will be extended and applied even in this sector. This will enable elderly with a disability to remain living within their community.

- * In conjunction with Local Councils, a programme for the opening of new Day Centres for the Senior Citizens will be launched. These will be run by the Local Councils, by Senior Citizens themselves and members of their families, and voluntary organizations.

- Services will be improved and strengthened along modern lines at the St. Vincent de Paule Residence, Zammit Clapp Hospital and in all existent Homes.

- More Respite Care Centres will be provided so that families who take care of their elderly at home will be helped.

- In conjunction with Local Councils a night warden service will be introduced to protect Senior Citizens during the night.

- The concept of 'fostering families' will be introduced so that elderly's neighbours may look after those Senior Citizens who have no immediate family to look after them.

- Legal and juridical backing will be given to the Kartanzjan.

- A New Labour Government will introduce specialised courses to prepare citizens for retirement.

- A New Labour Government will also assure that with its social policy, the quality

of life of Malta's Senior Citizens will be assured. A programme will be launched so that the experience gained by the elderly will be put into use for the benefit of the rest of the community.

- Continuous training to medical and paramedical staff in this field will be increased and assured while a New Labour Government will also improve the conditions of work of the casual social assistants who visit the elderly at their home.

12. Full and Meaningful Equality between Men and Women

The 'Vision of a Modern Malta' as projected in the electoral programme "The Citizen First", identified three main sectors New Labour proposed to tackle over a five year plan designed to implement its basic commitment in favour of equal rights for men and women.

These three sectors were:

- The participation of women in national decisions.
- Women's rights at their place of work.
- The private and family life of women.

Various measures have been proposed for each of these sectors aimed at strengthening the participation and attaining the rights of women so that our country may truly attain a full and meaningful equality between men and women.

In the first twenty months, New Labour worked hard to reach its objectives in this field.

12.1 Achievements

A New Labour Government immediately started to implement its policy in favour of full and meaningful equality between men and women.

For the first time ever, a Parliamentary Secretariat for Women's Rights in the Office of the Prime Minister was set up. A number of measures were then introduced to implement Labour's declared new policy in favour of women.

- A policy was introduced to ensure that on every Board, Commission and Public Company Board, women would be fairly represented
- A pilot 'child day care centre' was opened at Kalkara.
- Two refuge homes for victims of domestic violence were opened.
- * Work was carried out on the setting up of a Documentation and Research Centre to provide information on women's rights both from a local and an international perspective.
- * New Labour introduced amendments to the Industrial Development Act offering incentives and subsidies to private companies who provide child care services for their staff.
- Work was carried out on regulations covering 'child minding' and the setting up of a register of child minders.

- Work on the improvement of conditions of work for women.
- An information manual was completed for teachers of Personal and Educational Skills which will be used in secondary schools as from October 1998 to create an awareness for equality between men and women.
- 'Mainstreaming' was affected so that government policies as presented in white papers and laws reflect a finer sensitivity to women's needs, thus making official statistics a more reliable source for the factual and actual position of women in Malta and Gozo.

12.2 New Proposals for Women as full members of Maltese Society

During the next five years, New Labour in Government will work towards the continuation of its policy for full and meaningful equality among men and women. However, a New Labour Government will take the measures it is outlining in this programme to ensure that women enjoy full gender equality in our society.

12.3 National Mechanism for Women

The political commitment that has been translated into an upgrading of the mechanism which was put in place with the setting up of the Parliamentary Secretariat, now needs further maintenance by an increase in resources.

12.4 Law against Sexual Discrimination

This law will be mainly based on the following principles:

- The elimination of all kinds of sexual discrimination at the workplace, in the mass media, institutions and other establishments.
- The implementation of a policy of equal opportunities for all spread across all sectors.
- The implementation of equality between men and women that promotes positive action.

The necessary structures will be set up in the form of a Commission empowered to:

- Assure the implementation of the law.
- Investigate cases where sexual discrimination is alleged.

12.5 Mainstreaming

The introduction of a Gender Management System in the public service.

Mainstreaming will continue and will be strengthened by the revision of relevant:

- laws
- white papers
- policies

A feedback process will be set up to ensure the inclusion of the proposals that are put forward.

12.6 The Levels of Decision Making

- House of Representatives: an increase in the number of seats on both sides of the House with a quota to increase the number of women in Parliament.
- Boards and Government Commissions: 30% placement allocation for women.
- Ambassadors and senior posts in embassies: 15% placement allocation for women.
- International Agencies: 15% of nominations for women.
- Public Service senior posts: 20% of available executive posts to be awarded to women.
- Scholarships: 25% for women, 25 % for men and 50% mixed.
- Women returners: will be reintegrated in the same grade/or an equivalent one.

12.7 Women's Health

Breast Screening Programme: The latest medical and technological developments will be examined with a view to commencing a programme with defined objectives within two years.

- In conjunction with the Health Promotion Unit of the Health Department, the programme of information on women's health will be continued.

Domestic Violence

Amendments to the law will be made to give more protection to women who are victims of domestic violence. These amendments will be implemented by:

- The setting up of the necessary structures.
- A programme of information and training to the sectors concerned.
- A programme of information directed at the general public particularly for women by means of
:
- A national programme recognizing the condemnation of domestic violence.
- A rehabilitation programme for the perpetrators of domestic violence.
- A strengthening of legal aid for the victims of domestic violence.
- Shelter homes to provide security for women victims of violence.
- The allocation of housing to help these women reintegrate into the mainstream.

12.8 Work

New Labour will continue to champion a policy of equal opportunity at the workplace that recognizes the skills and experiences particularly of women.

It will be assured that women will be properly prepared for restructuring of the labour force through:

- information
- training at the workplace
- retraining

A process will be created to incorporate women in cooperatives as well as small and medium sized businesses through:

- An information campaign.
- Research about women expectations.
- Training of women in the necessary skills.
- Provision of banking facilities to overcome hidden obstacles.

Amendments to the law regulating conditions of work (CERA) that will include:

For fulltime employees:

- The 13-week maternity leave will increase to 14 to be in conformity with other European countries.
- The introduction of unpaid parental leave in the private sector.
- Protection against sexual harassment by providing effective structures.
- 'Flexy hours' and job sharing as a recognition of family responsibilities particularly of women.

Part time employees:

- Will enjoy all benefits on a pro-rata basis as soon as they commence paying their social security contributions, when they clock up eight hours work.

For workers in the Public Sector:

- Work with less hours.
- Leave without pay to look after dependent elderly parents.

12.9 Child Care Service

A law that regulates childminding and childcare services to ensure a good level of service.

The setting up of childcare services at St. Vincent de Paule and St.Luke's Hospitals.

Where possible, childcare services will be introduced in government departments.

Childcare Centres will be established in other locations.

A service will be provided for the care of children in kindergartens and primary schools to cater for parents' needs during school holidays.

12.10 Education in Effective Equality

The National Minimum Curriculum:

- The continuation of work that has been covered so far towards the implementation of a policy of gender equality and equal opportunities between girls and boys as shown in the National Minimum Curriculum.

Education and Vocational Training

The number of women who make it to the stage of 'vocational education and training' is relatively low. However the need to increase the number of women in the labour force is great. It is, therefore, imperative that, as outlined in the Ramboll Report, and as already proposed in the current White Paper, this policy should:

- Address the issue of separate training for men and women.
- Give special consideration to women's needs, especially of those women without formal training, so that they understand the importance and need of training as well as
- give special attention to women's training in technology.

Tertiary Level

- A degree in Women's Studies at Master's level will be introduced at University as well as
- A compulsory credit in gender issues will be offered in all university courses.

12.11 Elderly Women

A survey will be carried out to project a clear indication of the socio-economic and psychological state of elderly women in society. This survey should serve as a basis for the strengthening of Government policy on elderly women.

To solve the problem of married women who are denied their share of their pension entitlements, there will be the implementation of proposals to issue two separate and equal pension cheques - one in the wife's name and the other in the husband's - if and when the Department of Social Welfare has a specific request from one of the parties.

There will also be the introduction of more effective services in the community designed according to the needs of elderly women to enable them to continue living in their homes and their locality.

12.12 Social Services

There will be a revision of the policy on social welfare to remove all senses of discrimination.

An information service about social benefit will be introduced to empower women to know and ask for their rights.

12.13 The Media

A Code of Ethics will be formulated for the mass media to:

construct a more real and respectable image of women to eradicate stereotyping and discriminatory attitudes

towards women in the media.

12.14 Women's Participation in Society

Women's organizations and/or other groups that work with women in various sectors especially women who are separated, widows, victims of violence, women with drug problems etc, will be given the necessary help to achieve NGO status.

Consultation will take place with these groups and organizations when policies are being formulated.

12.15 Gender Specific Statistics

Statistics will be collated for specific gender representation. This will provide:

- An enhanced visibility for women.
- More accurate data and clearer indicators that will serve as a stronger basis for the design of Government policies.

Statistics on women's issues such as data on women bread-winners, poverty among women, victims of domestic violence and elderly women, will be collated for publication.

12.16 Documentation and Research Centre

A documentation and research centre will be set up to provide a service, not only for internal purposes but also for the use of students and researchers.

An electronic one-stop-shop will be set up for easy public access to information and data about women issues.

13. YOUTH

New Labour's youth policy which the Labour Party was mandated to implement in October 1996, was based on the vision that youth should play an active role in national decision-making processes. The implementation of this policy had to be today rather than later.

The policy proposed that:

- all social discrimination affecting youth should be eliminated;
- on the other hand, youth should assume their responsibilities and live up to them in the context of modern society. From this position, the Labour Party identified five sectors across which it proposed to implement a new policy for youth:
 - Youth in education;
 - Youth at the workplace;
 - Youth's role in the social and political life of their country;
 - Vigilance against all forms of youth exploitation;

- Youth's contribution towards environmental protection.

During the 21 months of Labour Government, these policies have been earnestly put into practice.

13.1 Achievements

Practising these policies meant that New Labour started introducing systems to safeguard youths' rights and protect them against exploitation, especially from drug traffickers, to enable youths to be fully participative in the country's political and social life, particularly in the sphere of environmental issues. In pursuing this line of policy, the Labour Government achieved the following:

- The creation of the "Youth in Society National Award" to celebrate voluntary work performed by youth.
- The commencement of specialised environmental courses and studies at University.
- In conjunction with the Ministry for Housing the holding of a National Conference in Housing Problems with particular reference to youth problems in this area.
- The organisation of a seminar in conjunction with the National Youth Council and the Malta University's Youth Studies Programme to update the national policy for Youth.
- The increase in the number of Youths wishing to continue their studies overseas through the use of subsidised loans.
- The creation of initiatives for cultural and educational cross-fertilisation with Youth sectors outside Malta;
- The introduction of cultural hikes specially designed for young people;
- The commemoration of Youth Day by organising special activities in conjunction with the National Youth Council;
- The upgrading of relations with the National Youth Council;
- The holding of commemorative services for deceased Youths.

13.2 New Proposals

Over the next five years the New Labour Government will continue pursuing these policies together with a number of new initiatives for the greater emancipation and participation of Youth. Amongst other initiatives, the New Labour Government will:

- Create a Department for Youth distinct from the Department for Sport;
- Update and implement the National Policy on Youth;
- Create a Youth Parliament;
- Create cooperatives for Youths who have undergone drug rehabilitation or served prison sentences;
- Work for better housing conditions with special reference to subsidised rents and loans for

purchase.

14. COMPREHENSIVE SECURITY FOR CITIZENS

Labour's proposed new policies were aimed at creating an environment where citizens' safety and security were guaranteed. The implementation of these policies brought about:

- A long-term plan for the generation of trust and respect in the police corps;
- The creation of an authority to monitor Police work;
- The declaration of a relentless and unrelenting war against drug traffickers, and
- The carrying out of prison reforms specifically to eliminate political interference in prison management.

14.1 Achievements

Labour has worked hard to implement the mandate given to it in 1996.

By January 1997 a report regarding police reform and upgrading had been completed. This report identified four specific areas for upgrading:

- The legal structure and accountability;
- Strategic planning;
- The development of Human Resources; · The structure of the Police Force.

Substantial progress was recorded so that Malta and Gozo would have a modern, efficient, effective and honest Police Force. Among other accomplishments, it is worth mentioning:

- The preparation of a new legal framework to include the creation of a Supervisory Board;
- The restructuring of the Police Force which now is made up of four operative divisions:
- The Commissioner's office;
- A Division for Strategic Planning;
- A Division for Field Operations;
- An Administrative Division, as well as an Internal Audit Unit and a Community and Media Relations Unit.

In addition:

- There was an intensification in the war against drug traffickers and operations are now under the responsibility of an Assistant Commissioner;
- The transfer of certain clerical functions performed by Police officers to the Civil Service. The best example of this policy was the release of 26 police corps members from their duties as immigration officers to duties of a purely 'police' nature;

- The deployment of a greater numbers of police officers for beat and traffic patrols;
- The purchase of new equipment, including the acquisition of 40 new vehicles;

Prison reforms included:

- The segregation of young prisoners from hardened and relapsed criminals through the creation of a new correctional facility at Imtaóleb;
- Improvements and reforms at Kordin Prison by:
 - preventing political interference in management;
 - building a section for women prisoners with better facilities;
 - building a new gate house with better facilities;
 - building a new perimeter wall and a new parking area.

14.2 New Proposals

During the coming five years, the New Labour Government will continue pursuing the path of these policies in order to further strengthen national security in our streets and in our homes. The following have been identified as priorities:

- The implementation of a new Police Act;
- Establishing a Supervisory Board;
- Introducing systems to ensure transparency and better communication/information of and about Police decisions;
- Intensifying the war against drug traffickers, involving greater cooperation with overseas police bodies;
- Inducing a more professional and transparent approach in eliminating political interference in prison;
- Strengthening the operations of the Prison Visitors' Board.

15. GREATER EFFICIENCY IN THE ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE

Citizens expect their administration to provide an efficient and just legal system. The 1996 Labour Government promised this after having identified public disillusionment over the way justice had been administered in former years.

The new Labour Government therefore took steps to ensure that all proposed reforms would first be discussed and coordinated with the Judiciary, the legal profession, the Court's administrators and Court officials. Besides this consultation, new Labour proposals also made it clear that the lengthy delays being experienced would have to be reduced through greater efficiency and better administration. In its vision for a more modern Malta, the Labour Government proposed that:

- The Judiciary would be given an upgraded standing with better conditions of work;
- The Advocate General's Office would be given a boost by, among other proposals, the introduction of a system of voluntary housemen from lawyers, very much as in the medical profession.

15.1 Achievements

Concerted action was taken by the Labour Government during the 20 months of tenure to implement the proposals it had made. This included:

- The appointment of new judges and magistrates;
- The appointment of a Judicial Assistant to help judges in their duties;
- Reform so that judges would have a more manageable number of cases to deal with, known as the "Master" system;
- Hearing of cases before the Superior Court in Gozo;
- A project to relocate the Valletta Police Station so that more space would be created for the Law Courts and more Halls created on the upper floor;

In addition to these,

- The Tribunal to investigate Injustices was established;
- The Malta Arbitration Centre was established;
- The process of amalgamation for speedier processing between the Public Registry and the Registry of Lands commenced;
- The Committee for Land Regulation was established; · A Commission was established to make suggestions concerning children giving Court testimony.

15.2 New Proposals

The New Labour Government will continue this policy of efficiency and transparency and will implement further proposals.

The dialogue between the Judiciary, the Legal Profession and Court Administration, together with Government, must continue. It will work for greater efficiency and will continue to concentrate on reducing the time cycle for the hearing of cases.

- The Family Court will be established to deal with cases of separation and annulment. The system of an Assistant Judiciary with special social experience will be introduced for the first time;
- In the civil sector, the efficiency of the "Master" system will be further strengthened;
- The establishment of a domestic and international Arbitration Centre will continue the decentralisation of the Arbitration Institute. The creation of Regional tribunals will take the

weight off the Ordinary Court;

- Assistant Judiciaries will also be appointed to the Tribunal for the Investigation of Injustices to shorten the time cycle of pending cases;
- The Gozo Court will have registries identical to those found in the Malta Courts; this will benefit the citizens of Gozo and their legal representatives;
- The work to amalgamate the Public Registry and the Registry of Lands will continue;
- The new Advocate General's Office will be established and Human Resources will be strengthened;
- The Civil Code will be amended to eliminate discrimination between legitimacy and illegitimacy.

16. A MODERN CIVIL SERVICE

The Labour Party's new policy proposed a Civil Service distinguished by sectors which would be subject to political decisions and a non-political sector to deal impartially with administration, whilst showing loyalty to the Government of the day.

In October 1996, Labour's policies made this clear. The Government wanted a modern Civil Service to best serve the interests of all citizens. To bring this about, various measures were proposed.

- Human Resources in the public service had to be developed;
- A Civil Service Charter had to be introduced;
- The role of the Civil Service Commission had to be strengthened;
- A service policy was needed to avoid piecemeal roles in various entities and agencies;
- The policy of limitless issuing of temporary contracts to foreign consultants had to stop;
- These measures needed to be taken to streamline efficiency, decrease bureaucracy and to provide a service to cater for public needs.

16.1 Achievements

During its 21 months in government, spared no effort to bring about this much needed transition. These included:

- The disciplinary procedure was decentralised from the Public Service Commission and delegated to heads of department for speedier transactions and for greater responsibility and accountability.
- There was a great substantial decrease in contracted foreigners, particularly those who were with the ex-MSU. The same work was delegated to competent Maltese personnel.
- Recruitment was limited to essential needs. This was not a popular measure with a number who were banking on a Government passport to enter the civil service but it showed the

determination of the New Labour Government to be serious and to refrain from putting more burdens on public finance.

- Training programmes were stepped up, including the introduction of a training programme for industrial employees to enable them to become office clerical assistants.
- A contract was signed between the Public Service and the University of Malta for training programmes for those wishing to embark on a professional, administrative career with the Civil Service.
- Intensive discussion-meetings with unions representing civil servants regarding a collective agreement which had been left pending by the former Nationalist administration.
- The promise was kept that wherever possible Gozitan workers would be deployed in Gozo. In fact, a whole section of the Social Services Department was transferred to Gozo and 60 Gozitan employees have been trained to run it.

16.2 New Proposals

The pace of reform will continue over the next five years. The New Labour Government will not change its civil service recruitment policy. New employment will only be undertaken if there is no alternative; New Labour will not take on unnecessary personnel to pander to political pressure. It will not burden the citizen with unnecessary costs.

Over the next five years the Labour Government is proposing:

- The Civil Service Commission will become subject to review by the Courts.
- Civil Service regulations will be reformed and a Charter of rights and duties for civil servants will be established instead of the antiquated Estacode system which currently exists.
- Efforts will continue to ensure that work which can be carried out by Gozitan workers in Gozo will be transferred there.

In addition, the New Labour Government will continue to improve conditions for service employees by:

- Removing the provisions of the Joint Negotiating Council from the Industrial Relations Act because these have proved unworkable and have served against the interests and rights of civil servants who were unable to take their employer to Industrial Tribunal like their counterparts in the private sector.
- Continuing to decentralise more administrative functions so as to benefit citizens who will not have to travel to Valletta for their needs.
- Establishing procedures to make civil servants more accountable in their correct and transparent dealings but also to provide them with a greater bond with the public by increasing more open consultation with their clients.
- The introduction of a system whereby successful private sector managers will take a career break to spend some time in the civil service so that their service counterparts can benefit from the cross-fertilisation.

- Communications improvement that will continue through the establishment of Communications Directories in each Ministry so that the public will familiarise themselves with the functions of the ministries and will also understand their rights and obligations.

17. THE ARMED FORCES - A SYMBOL OF NATIONAL UNITY

Labour's new policy which was acclaimed by an absolute majority in the General Elections of 1996, had declared that the Armed Forces were to be made up of professional volunteers recruited by a well-organised and well-equipped unit.

The 1996 Electoral Programme of the Malta Labour Party therefore defined the role of Malta's Armed Forces as being that of:

- Providing aerial and marine security for the Maltese Islands;
- Operating against contraband, terrorism and the trafficking of drugs;
- Emergency Operations;
- Security of strategic installations.

To achieve these, the Labour Government proposed:

- To restructure the Forces so that the proportion of staff on direct military duties will increase;
- The establishment of a Reserve Corps of retired military personnel so as to form a back-up corps in case of national emergencies;
- The establishment of a corps of part-time volunteers to handle civil defence;
- Upgraded and modern training for military personnel in Malta and overseas;
- The establishment of a cadet system for under 19's who, whilst continuing their studies, will have hands-on experience of military work with a view to future professional duties in the military.

The 1996 Electoral Programme also recognised the right of military personnel to representation for discussions with the authorities over wages and conditions, but keeping in mind that such representation retained uppermost the obligations of military corps, particularly the obligations of acting in emergency situations.

17.1 Achievements

Over 21 months, the Labour Government showed its intentions to back up its proposals. Three White Papers were prepared with public input dealing with military aspects. These dealt with:

- The modernisation of Malta's military forces;
- The creation of a reserve force;

- The establishment of an association for military employees.

These resulted in:

- The creation of a voluntary reserve corps on professional lines;
- The amalgamation of the Air Traffic Control Corps and Airport Company with the Department of Civil Aviation;
- The commencement of an exercise following restructuring for filling in vacancies created by this restructuring;
- Training exercises with OSCE both in Malta and overseas;
- The purchasing of new equipment and the building of a barracks extension at Luqa.

17.2 New Proposals

These improvements will continue over the next five years. The priorities will concentrate on:

- The establishment of a representative association;
- The rationalisation of structural operations and organisation of the Armed Forces for better efficiency and performance;
- An upgrading of operations and modern technology to improve military capability;
- Cooperation for holding reciprocal security operations in the Central Mediterranean region, while Malta's neutrality will be kept uppermost in mind.

These improvements should lead to Malta's Military Forces working for greater national unity within a framework of effectiveness and efficiency and to their serving as defenders of Malta's sovereignty and freedom into the new millennium.

18. NEW HORIZONS FOR GOZO

New Labour policy in 1996 pledged to continue enhancing and increasing the good works carried out in Gozo, irrespective of which administration had carried out these accomplishments. To do this, the Labour Government proposed:

- The decision-making process should be decentralised to give Gozo priority in Gozo-related affairs;
 - A specific development plan for Gozo;
 - The establishment of a Regional Council for Gozo.

18.1 Achievements

With immediate effect, Gozo became the responsibility of the Prime Minister, with a Parliamentary Secretary appointed for Gozo. A White Paper on the establishment of a regional council was drawn up and the Gozo development plan was scheduled as a document additional to Value 2000. This was carried out by the Forum for a Better Economy. As a result of this, the Labour Government will inject Lm50 million in Gozo's

economy.

The New Labour Government:

- Upgraded areas such as Xlendi, Marsalforn, and iz-Zewwieqa;
- Constructed the new Sant Antnin Road at Ghajnsielem.
- Inaugurated a new Emergency Department at the Gozo General Hospital.
- Carried out maintenance work on the Tac-Cawla Housing Estate as well as constructing new dwellings allocated to people with special needs.
- Completed a master plan for drainage works and extended drainage at Victoria, Fontana, Nadur, Qala, Xaghra, Kerzem, Ghajnsielem and Gharb.
- Carried out its promise to allocate civil service work in Gozo when a section of the Social Services was relocated there and 60 Gozitan employees placed there.
- Created a single handling system at the heliport as well as increased facilities with a VIP Lounge and a Conservation Room and constructed facilities for fire engines and firemen. /· Upgraded police stations throughout Gozo.
- Introduced the hearing of Court Procedures in Gozo for criminal appeal cases as well as appeals for rural rents.
- Introduced the process of Planning Authority sessions taking place in Gozo as the result of a Development and Control Commission.
- Opened an ETC Job Centre at the Administrative Centre in Victoria.
- Allocated an area for the dumping of building scrap material.
- Increased the hours of Customs operations in Gozo.
- Introduced two blast freezers at the Government Cold Stores as well as giving aid to Gozitan farmers and fishermen.
- Dredged the Marsalforn boat haven.
- Continued restoration work at ic-Cittadella and gave aid to Gozitan artists to encourage them in the development of art and culture.
- Introduced new subsidy schemes for Gozitan workers and students commuting to Malta.
- Introduced a new scheme for financial aid to voluntary organisations.

18.2 New Proposals

Following the 1998 General Elections, the New Labour Government will continue its modernisation process for Gozo, based on three fundamental principles that will serve as the guiding structure for this project:

- Gozo will continue in its important role of Malta's partner, as a valid contributor to the creation of national

wealth.

- Gozitans will be given priority in the sustained development of their island.
- The promotion process of this economic development will not threaten Gozo's cultural, social and environmental fabric.

A Labour Government will immediately draw up an Action Plan to implement the Gozo Development Plan as outlined in the document Value 2000, within the principles and guidelines of the above principles.

Particularly, a new Labour Government will ensure:

- A Yacht Marina at Hondoq ir-Rummien.
- An estate for small industry at Ta' Xhajma.
- A golf course at a locality where it will not impact negatively on the environment.
- A Casino.

Besides these initiatives designed to project Gozo as a distinct locality for tourism, New Labour Government will continue to implement the October 1996 proposals which remain valid although not completely implemented. These will be complemented by measures of further upgrading including:

- The introduction of complete Customs Services based in Gozo in order to eliminate current disadvantages for Gozitan importers and exporters.
- A transport subsidy on goods so that Gozitan consumers will not be penalised by higher prices than their Maltese counterparts.
- The creation of an industrial zone for small and medium enterprises.

19. LOCAL COUNCILS

The 1996 Electoral Programme recognised society's major challenge of embracing community values. Labour policies expressed confidence in the ability of Local Councils to accept this challenge by:

- Involving citizens in the process of decision-making.
- Citizens should have the right to choose their Councillors on the basis of their ability to serve the community and not of their political allegiance.
- In the coming years a planned, gradual process will enable Local Councils to assume some executive functions for local schools, in conjunction with the competent education authorities. This would also apply to the Police, traffic and public transport and the provision of certain social services.

In order to achieve these objectives, the Labour Party maintained that:

- Council funds should emanate from central sources and not from local taxes.

- Councils should have their own staff working under Council guidance.

Labour's new policies additionally identified a representative and consultative role for Local Councils.

Councils should be accorded a consultative role for projects and initiatives undertaken by central government or its agents, and the private sector, where such projects and initiatives affect their locality. Local Councils should also have a representative role on the boards of State Corporations providing essential services (such as the Planning Authority, Enemalta, Maltacom, etc.) through a director appointed by them. Relevant consultations should be held in cases of permission for commercial buildings and centres, in the construction and extension of roads, and the establishment of monuments and natural reserves.

Additionally, Councils should be enabled to augment the wishes of citizens for the well-being of their locality by supporting the efforts of voluntary organisations and encouraging the propagation of local, cultural talent.

19.1 Achievements

During the last 20 months the Labour Government implemented its new policies for Local Councils by:

- Allocating 100 personnel to Local Councils at central government expense.
- Commencing a free beach-cleaning service at seaside localities.
- Delegating the renewal of commercial licenses to the councils.
- Drawing up a Socio-Economic Development Plan for the south of Malta involving the active participation of Councils in the southern region.
- Initiating the process whereby the principle law regulating Local Councils will be amended for the establishment of local wardens and a Regional Tribunal to be serviced by them.

19.2 New Proposals

Over the next five years, the New Labour Government will continue to pursue these policies and to support Local Councils in order to strengthen them to become a valid link between the central government, the country's statutory institutions and the commonwealth of citizens.

For this to be achieved, the citizen must be assured their Local Council is operating transparent policies and not a political agenda. This would require better auditing as well as benchmarked and measured standards of economic effectiveness and efficiency.

Unfortunately, there have already been some renowned cases of incorrect management and the New Labour Government will take measures to induce accountability and transparency by amending the Local Council Act so that the National Verification Office will exercise appropriate scrutiny. In this manner, effective auditing for the administration of Local Councils will be carried out by an independent body to safeguard the transparency of the government of the day. As a measure of economic effectiveness and efficiency, the New Labour Government will establish a monitoring unit. This will be made up of representatives of officials from the Department for Local Councils, the ministries, as well as residents, with a brief to ensure that Councils are fulfilling the obligations they have undertaken according to standards of performance and ensuring these are giving value for money. There will be a revision of the performance targets established by the MSU so that these will reflect realistic targets and not those established by the MSU i.e. only two sweepers to cover a large area.

Following the positive success of the Socio-Economic Development for the south of Malta, the New Labour Government will extend this to other areas, thus strengthening the bonds between central government and Local Councils.

Finally, to overcome and determine demarcation problems and to determine responsibility issues between central government and Local Councils, a New Labour Government, within the prudent financial constraints under which it has to operate, will increase local funds for specific projects which for reasons of effectiveness and efficiency have specific completion target dates.

20. BROADCASTING FOR ALL MALTESE AND GOZITANS

The mandate gained from a decisive popularity vote by the Labour Party in the 1996 October General Elections clearly entrenched the Labour Government's determination that a modern structure would be created for national broadcasting, enabling the citizen to enjoy the best of recreational, informational and educational broadcasting.

This right had to be guaranteed by the Labour Government in the following manner:

- By guaranteeing the right to pluralistic broadcasting, particularly through the further encouragement of private broadcasting.
- By assuring that public broadcasting obtains the best possible resources.
- By inducing a public culture of greater awareness in the use of modern technological information and communication so that the citizen will have available the best means of information sources.

20.1 Achievements

These tenets of a modern policy for broadcasting embraced by the Labour Government were already being accomplished as a result of:

- The restructuring of PBS Ltd's management accompanied by the capitalisation of one million Liri of debt owed by PBS to Government, a result of the mismanagement of the previous management which had left PBS in a highly vulnerable and fragile financial position;
- The absorption of the Community Channel as another of its broadcasting outlets which is currently in the process of developing a character and an identity for this newly acquired television channel.
- Investment in quality human and technical resources thus enabling the Company to drastically increase its local production output and to produce better quality programming. New Labour Government's policy of being a comprehensive administration for all of Malta and Gozo was particularly visible with the employment of a vast spectrum of programme producers and presenters.

The success of that policy has been visibly measured over the last 21 months by new viewership records achieved by PBS, the highest ever recorded.

- The news centre inaugurated by PBS which has enabled its journalists to exercise their potential and professionalism to the full. The news services provided by PBS improved

professionally and, by vowing to abide by balance and impartiality it strived to become a modern information source for the people of Malta and Gozo as a whole. Above all, this enhanced service has shown and acknowledged its viewers intelligence.

- The physical reshaping and reconstruction of the old PBS core building at Television House so as to give a new heart and spirit to the employees and enable them to acknowledge greater job security and satisfaction.

- A commitment to pluralism was effectively exercised and demonstrated by the Labour Government when new broadcasting frequencies were handed over to the Broadcasting Authority enabling it to grant a licence to the Nationalist Party for them to have their own television station in the shortest time possible;

- Technological state-of-the-art upgrading in telecommunications and access to the information superhighway was expanded through the investment made in Malta by Elsacom. Together with Maltacom, the company Elsacom Malta Limited is using the space available to Malta on the Eutelsat satellite so that Malta is utilising the benefits of this service.

20.2 New Proposals

During the forthcoming legislature, the New Labour Government will continue to augment and upgrade its plans and strategies in the broadcasting sphere. Priorities over the next five years:

- The commitment to set up a Consultative Board will be fulfilled. This Board, made up of various media broadcasters, will supervise public broadcasting and will make recommendations for improvement;

- The House of Representatives will establish and select a committee to monitor public and private broadcasting;

- There will be a continued commitment so that through judicious investment in human resources and new technology, public broadcasting will become a national brand leader by selecting the best talent available in Malta and Gozo, irrespective of their political or religious persuasion;

- PBS will continue to enhance Channel 12 as its second national television channel with terrestrial transmission capabilities;

- Public broadcasting will create new structures for broadcasting from Gozo enabling its enhancement and upgrading and also providing a platform for the further propagation and employment of broadcasting talent from Gozo;

- Public broadcasting will be given the opportunity to operate more extensively in the international Euro-Mediterranean sphere and to participate in audio-visual productions with partners in the Mediterranean region;

- The commitment to the accomplishment of an objective and informative public news service will continue. This will be a balanced and impartial product and will show respect to all viewers and listeners;

The commitment to the further achievement of pluralism and to the creation of greater access to information possibilities for the citizens of Malta and Gozo.

21. ECONOMIC UPGRADING GUIDED BY MODERN AND MOTIVATED PLANNED PARTICIPATION

New Labour has honoured its commitment: it promised to act as a serious and modern guide and catalyst for economic development. It promised to seek :-

- * balanced and sustainable development
- * to acknowledge in fact and not through mere lip service that the private sector becomes the motor of a modern economy
- * the cooperation of all the social partners through effective consultations.

Under a Nationalist Government, the country's economy not only lacked direction but the economic growth being achieved was unsustainable. While incensing the role of the private sector, the Nationalist Government built an economy totally dependent on Public Expenditure and Deficit Budgeting. The imbalance between the private sector - verbally glorified but factually strangled - and the statal and parastatal sector - publicly vilified but factually gorged and nurtured - led to a deep structural imbalance in public finance. The Nationalist Government had so little faith in the private sector's ability to generate growth that it incurred enormous debts to create a high internal demand, spending more money than it could afford.

These debts not only endangered the viability of the public sector, but also tainted the international credit rating of the Maltese Government. This policy, fuelled by uncontrolled spending and employment in the public sector, generated substantial inflationary trends in local wages and salaries. It ended up by eroding the international competitiveness of Maltese Industry. The heavy and uncontrolled borrowing by the public sector from the local banks also starved the private sector from critical financial resources.

The Central Bank repeatedly warned about the perils of such economic policies. Similar concern was also expressed by the constituted bodies. The Nationalist government felt impotent. It lacked the will and the strength to seriously tackle these problems which continued to push the country to the edge of economic disaster.

The Nationalist Government had lost control of the situation. It was in no position to listen and heed the advice of the private sector. All the positive criticism made by the Labour opposition was in vain. Equally useless were the recommendations made by Ramboll. These consultants had emphasised the need for effective social dialogue, for consultations with all the social partners so as to formulate the guidelines of an economic strategy - one that could offer a sense of direction to potential investors; to all the economic players. Regretfully this was just wishful thinking.

New Labour was determined to change all this. It sought to create new dimensions to consultations and consensus building amongst the social partners. The scope and quality of the consultative process in our country were never so good. Today, there exists a health relationship with all the key institutions: the Federation of Industries, Chamber of Commerce, GRTU, MHRA and others.

The best example of how this consultative process was put into practice is offered by the discussions relating to the restructuring of Maltese Industry, in the light of our country's wish to establish a Free Trade Zone with the EU.

The new Labour Government did not stop there. It established the Forum for a Better Economy so as to ensure a continuous structured dialogue. The Malta Council for Economic Development was incorporated

within this new setup. The MCED continued to focus on short term socioeconomic matters such as industrial relationships, inflation, and statutory increases in wages.

The Industrial Relations Unit operating within the Ministry of Finance, also became part of the Forum so as to give it further depth and to strengthen the functions of the MCED and the Forum in general. An Advisory Council was established within the Forum to coordinate a socio-economic plan for the country. This had been promised in New Labour's electoral programme for 1996 "Ic-Cittadin L-Ewwel; Vizjoni ghal Malta Moderna".

"Value 2000 - Focusing Resources for Superior Competition" was published by the Forum for a Better Economy as a White Paper in the beginning of 1998. By the end of the consultative process, Value 2000 will be adopted as a national strategic framework. It will provide the basis for a full programme of strategic planning leading to a number of sectoral, thematic and regional plans. Plans have already been completed for Agriculture and Fisheries, Industrial Restructuring, Vocational Training, Gozo and the South of Malta.

As recommended in Value 2000, the Economic Policy Council was set up within the Forum so as to ensure adequate coordination and the successful implementation of the general policies outlined in the document. This Council has already started to meet and is being chaired by the Minister of Finance. Sitting on this Council are representatives of key sectors and institutions that have a role in the formulation and implementation of Economic Public Policies (such as the Ministry of Finance, the Central Bank, the Malta Development Corporation and the Planning Authority).

The establishment of the Economic Policy Council means a change for the Advisory Council within the Forum. The Advisory Council is being restructured so as to be able to focus on the challenges and opportunities that our country will have to face in the first decade of the new millennium. The Advisory Council will assume the functions of a think tank, will bring together some of the country's best minds and will include entrepreneurs and the intelligentsia.

22. TAXATION AND FISCAL MORALITY

"The New Labour Government will give priority consideration to controlling public expenditure. It shall fight waste, abuse and misappropriation of public resources. It shall ensure that no efforts are spared in collecting the monies due. This is a just and proper manner based on existing Income Tax rates". This is what the 1996 Labour Party electoral programme promised. This is what the Labour Government did and will continue doing. We are increasingly determined about this. Since then, we have come to better realise the pitiful state of public finance which the Nationalist Government left behind it. A Labour Government will continue to emphasise the need, and enforce fiscal morality. This will be done through creative and effective initiatives; and with the assistance of genuine people. Only thus can we ensure that every person carries his fair share.

The New Labour Government kept its promise of replacing VAT with an indirect Tax System which was socially more fair and economically more effective.

* Thousands of service providers, retailers and other small business enterprises have benefitted from the introduction of the new CET Tax System, as their sales were lower than the established thresholds. Under CET these retailers and business enterprises are not obliged to collect revenue on behalf of Government, nor are they burdened with the task of handing over this revenue to Government.

* Larger manufacturing enterprises are benefitting as they no longer have to pay tax, and then wait for long periods to get their refunds. Today, imports of almost all materials and machinery

are tax exempt (free).

* Hoteliers too are benefitting from the new tax system, as not only is the tax rate lower (5%), but also as they do not have to pay tax on most of their purchases.

* Consumers are no longer being cheated, having to pay tax on goods and services, which never ended up in Government's coffers. Also, consumers continued to enjoy not having to pay tax on necessities such as food, medicine, healthcare, education etc.

The replacement of VAT by CET has relieved thousands of small enterprises from the hassle and expense of unnecessary paperwork. Another benefit of the new tax system has been in reducing bureaucracy enabling the department concerned to focus on collecting taxes and thereby giving a greater contribution to enforcing fiscal morality in our country. This is why CET is a simple and fair tax system.

Moreover, through CET the Government is still collecting roughly the same amounts of revenue. The introduction of this tax system has had a positive impact on the sources of Government revenue. Should this additional revenue be taken into consideration, then CET would effectively have generated increased income for Government.

The New Labour Government will continue to strengthen CET according to the country's needs and in line with the requirements of the Free Trade Zone with the European Union.

A New Labour Government will ensure that Parliament will have the necessary mechanisms and resources so as to be able to monitor and effectively control public expenditure. The New Labour Government kept its promise to establish the Commission for Fiscal Morality. For the future it will continue to emphasise the need to curb tax evasion and to ensure a just balance between direct and indirect taxation. Direct taxation should not serve as a disincentive to initiative. Indirect taxation should not impede production or consumption.

Extensive measures will continue to be taken so as to eliminate the waste, unnecessary expenditure and corruption that were the hallmark of the Nationalist Government, and led to structural problems within the country's public finances.

A New Labour Government will continue to strive for greater control of public expenditure through a joint Committee selected by the House of Representatives which will be given all the powers and resources to this effect.

23. SAFEGUARDING THE CITIZENS' RIGHTS IN THE PROVISION OF ESSENTIAL SERVICES

The New Labour policy always held that essential public services, such as electricity, water and telephone should remain under public control. As such, the New Labour Government, while finding the courage to privatise Maltacom plc, a provider of a public service, it still retained majority control through a 60% shareholding in the company. In order to ensure proper control, an independent regulatory body was created so as to supervise the operations of all the players in the telecommunications sector.

During the 90 weeks of New Labour Government, the citizens of Malta had the opportunity to assess that this was indeed a modern way of governing the country. There was no room for "beating around the bush", straight and clear talking became the order of the day. In the 1996 electoral programme, the Labour Government promised public services of good quality and at reasonable prices. After the October 1996 victory, the new Government discovered the disastrous financial position of Enemalta and the Water Services

Corporation. The New Labour Government was left with no alternative but - against its wishes - to implement stern measures to correct this disaster by substantially increasing water and electricity rates.

Government approval was given subject to the following

- * that there should be adequate and effective safeguards for consumers with low income
- * that specific schemes for domestic consumers should be introduced,
- * that there should be specific schemes for industrial users giving special attention to the needs of small enterprises.
- * Enemalta and the Water Services Corporation should constantly strive to improve the quality of their products and services,
- * that these corporations improve their efficiency, lower their operating costs so as to permit an eventual reduction in tariffs,
- * should lower oil prices last long enough, that the resulting windfall profits for both corporations be reflected in revised tariffs.

A New Labour Government will separate the operational from the regulatory functions of Enemalta and the Water Services Corporation. The regulatory function will be taken over by autonomous authorities which will be responsible to:

- * ensure that Consumers' rights to a fair price and an acceptable quality are safeguarded,
- * monitor the commercial viability of the two corporations, emphasising the need for cost-effective management so that production costs will provide an appropriate basis for determining tariffs for both water and electricity. Any benefits arising from this process should be passed on to the consumer.

A Consumers' Charter shall be drawn up so as to inform, and enable consumers to demand their rights. The elected representatives of employees as well as representatives of consumers and Local Councils will be represented on the Boards of Corporations providing essential services.

24. MEASURES TO CONTROL THE COST OF LIVING WILL BE GIVEN PRIORITY

The New Labour Government is committed to controlling and containing inflationary forces. The Nationalist Government was actively fuelling these forces through relentless and uncontrolled borrowing. Whilst the Nationalist Government was claiming internationally to be championing private enterprise, it continued to burden the public sector with more non-productive employees to pander to Nationalist supporters. This double-standard policy affected adversely the labour supply available to the private sector and led to a grave "wage-push inflation" spiral with serious repercussions on the international competitiveness of Maltese industry. A New Labour Government will continue to seek to contain these inflationary trends.

It will strive to create (by not later than March of 1999) an autonomous institution that will report directly to Parliament and which will be responsible for the availability and analysis of statistics on socio-economic matters. The cost-of-living index will be managed by this institution so as to guarantee the objectivity of the data being collected and presented, and thereby minimising controversy over this issue. Statutory wage

increases will continue to be given at the beginning of the year following the recording of a rise in the cost of living. The Government urges employers and unions to negotiate in a responsible manner so that wage increases reflect the financial position of each enterprise and the current market position.

25. PRIVATISATION

The New Labour Government's privatisation policy is based on an objective and realistic appraisal of the state of the Maltese economy, and includes due consideration to the positive contribution that such a policy could have in promoting efficiency and upgrading the quality of the products and services offered by public enterprise.

In a small island economy a number of essential services are inevitably natural monopolies. Government should retain majority control of these monopolies, while ensuring the existence of the necessary regulatory mechanisms, so that these monopolies do not operate to the detriment of the consumer.

Following the 1996 Electoral victory, it soon became evident to the New Labour Government that not only was there a crisis in the Government's deficit, which was three times the projected deficit for the 1996 budget, but also that many public corporations were in a state of virtual bankruptcy. These corporations continued to operate through extensive borrowings from the banks. These borrowings were guaranteed in an irresponsible manner by Government itself. This created a false sense of security within these corporations encouraging waste and inefficiency in their management.

Government's financial deficit, running at approximately 10% of the Gross Domestic Product, can only be adjusted over a relatively longer term period. More drastic short-term measures would provide a severe blow to local economic growth, would penalise low-wage earners and would lead to social upheaval. During the period of readjustment it is important that the New Labour Government will not continue to borrow at the same rate as was necessary to meet the deficits for 1996 and 1997. Were such borrowing to continue the cost of servicing the Public Theft would become unsustainable and would jeopardise the financial flexibility which is required if New Labour is to implement its electoral programme. Over the coming years a New Labour Government will be seeking new creative ways of increasing its financial revenues without resorting to increased taxes.

The New Labour Government policy on privatisation is geared to accomplish two objectives at once. The first is that of improving the efficiency and quality of products and services provided by public entities. The second is to provide extraordinary revenue to the Government so as to enable it to contain and control the national debt during this difficult period of correcting public finance problems.

The privatisation of Maltacom plc (formally Telemalta) is a clear example of this policy. The Government revenue from this sale amounted to Lm 33 million. Government allocated 20

% of this revenue to support the restructuring process that is necessary for our country to overcome the challenges and be able to benefit from the opportunities offered by the Free Trade arrangement with the European Union. The remaining monies were passed on to Government to help reduce the 1998 fiscal deficit. New private ownership led to greater discipline at Maltacom plc thereby driving productivity and improving the quality of service. Maltacom plc too has to produce more with less; rationalising its use of resources so as to create greater value by enhancing productivity and output. The fact that the corporation's employees are now shareholders, both on an individual basis as well as through a workers' foundation (aided by a soft loan from Government) is bound to stimulate their involvement in this change process, in the search for greater productivity and in offering greater value to consumers and shareholders alike.

In the meantime the Government has retained 60% shareholding of Maltacom plc. To ensure more effective control the Government created an autonomous regulatory body to oversee the total operation of the telecommunication sector in our country.

These are the lines on which the New Labour Government will continue to guide its policy on the privatisation of the Malta International Airport and other privatisation opportunities which will occur over the coming years. This is a totally different road to that undertaken by the Nationalist Government between 1987 and 1996. Then, in an entirely irresponsible move, the Government conceded monopolistic rights to cellular and cable television private operators - thereby preventing the people of Malta and Gozo from having a shareholding in these highly profitable ventures.

26. THE LIBERALISATION AND REALISATION OF DOMESTIC COMMERCE

The New Labour Party is highly confident the removal of VAT served to boost the confidence of the commercial sector. This especially in the case of self-employed who suffered considerably during the Nationalist Government years (1987 to 1996).

New Labour's policies promote free enterprise, based on fair and effective competition, thereby enabling consumers to enjoy greater choice.

26.1 The Nurturing of a Truly Free Market

A Labour Government will ensure a truly free market so that private enterprise may flourish for the benefit of all society and not just for the benefit of a select few. This will come about through laws and their enforcement, that will effectively prevent monopolistic and other unacceptable practices.

A New Labour Government will closely monitor developments such as mergers between Maltese enterprises which are primarily domestic-market oriented so as to safeguard the interests of employees and consumers alike. It has to be made clear that when the New Labour Government asserts the need for the restructuring of Maltese Industry and expresses its willingness to assist local companies in this process this should not be interpreted as in any way advocating the loss of jobs that could result from such mergers. All those that present such mergers as an essential part of the restructuring process as promoted by the New Labour Government will be abusing their position and should not look for Government support when confronted with resistance and action by the Trade Unions.

A New Labour Government will ensure there is no conflict between the rights of consumers to enjoy quality products and services at competitive prices and the rights of distributors and retailers to a fair profit margin.

The Labour Party is fully conscious of the cost-of-living problems facing the population of Malta and Gozo and therefore proposes the following measures so as to safeguard the rights of consumers and those of vendors alike.

26.2 Liberal and Fair Competition

The New Labour Government reasserts its commitment to implement its 1996 electoral promise to set up an Authority autonomous from Government that will seek to adopt a holistic view to this matter, combining fair competition considerations with consumer rights. The Authority will hence replace ministerial discretion on such matters.

The primary mission of this Authority will be to ensure a fair deal for consumers while promoting and stimulating fair competition so as to foster the development of the commercial sector. One of the Authority's important briefs will be that of ensuring the availability of adequate information to consumers. The latter have to be educated about the critical issues that influence their purchasing behaviour.

The Authority will be empowered to appoint regulatory agents for key economic sectors. These agents will be responsible to monitor competitiveness within their respective sectors and should publish the results of their work should this be necessary.

26.3 Safeguarding the Citizen as a Consumer

The Authority will be given adequate tools and the necessary resources to be able to fulfill its mission, and be able to effectively enforce the interests of consumers. Regular publicity campaigns will be launched to give information to consumers and entrepreneurs about their rights, duties and obligations according to Law.

The Fair Competition Act will be amended so that a business will no longer need to have at least 40% market share to be considered as being in a dominant position. Lowering of this threshold should help reduce price abuses. The amended Act will regulate the non-competitive prices used by companies that are benefiting from protective levies aimed at protecting them from similar products that are imported from overseas. The viability of extending parallel trading for key imports will be closely studied in favour of the consumer who will gain maximum benefit from price and quality in a competitive environment. The importation of medicine represents a key import and parallel trading will be encouraged so long as recognised international laboratories certify that the imported goods are not of inferior quality and are in any way harmful to the consumer. The authority will also aid the drive for greater efficiency in the public sector.

Other measures which will be introduced by the New Labour Government to safeguard the interests of citizens as consumers include:

- * Government departments, corporations, authorities and public agencies will be subject to regulations designed to safeguard consumers
- * A Consumers' Ombudsman will be appointed by Parliament;
- * Consumer representatives will be appointed on the boards of public corporations;
- * Adequate financial aid will be given to consumer groups enabling them to resort to legal action to safeguard citizens;
- * An extension of the Trades Description Act to include services; * Vendors who make false or untrue claims will be subject to criminal prosecution; * A Price monitoring mechanism so as to gather and publish information on the prices of imported goods which are subsequently sold at higher prices.

26.4 Promotion of Small, non-industrial Enterprises

The need is being felt to establish an organisation which will cater for the specific needs of small enterprises which are not of an industrial nature. This organisation will be established along the same lines as the institute for the promotion of small enterprise (IPSE) which was set up to offer the necessary assistance to small and medium sized industrial enterprises to enable them to restructure and meet the challenge of the liberalisation of the domestic market for European Union imports.

A New Labour Government recognises the need for the modernisation of this sector as an integral part of national economic modernisation.

27. TOURISM: CONTINUING ON THE ROAD TO SUCCESS

What the New Labour promises, it delivers. This is clearly shown by developments in the tourist sector. The promise that Labour would give greater recognition and support to the tourist sector after years of neglect by the Nationalist Government, was kept. New Labour promised the appointment of a Tourism Minister within the Cabinet so that he could dedicate the necessary attention and efforts for the development of the sector. New Labour promised the retention of the Forward Buying Rate and an accompanying strategy to attract middle-income tourism from the United Kingdom, the European continent and other areas. All this was implemented.

Labour also promised to consistently upgrade the infrastructure for tourism to our country on the basis of regular plans and monitoring of their complementation.

We pledged that Air Malta would be considered as an integral part of this infrastructure and that its marketing strategy should actively seek to support the gradual upgrading and diversification of incoming tourists.

We committed ourselves to formulate and implement or apply as possible, action programmes in collaboration with the private sector so that tourist zones (Bugibba, Marsascala, etc) would be upgraded and embellished. This promise too was kept.

The New Labour Government will continue to give due recognition and support to the tourism industry. The fruitful experience of the last 90 weeks encourages the New Labour Government to continue to work on the following lines:

- * The partnership between the Government and the private sector will be strengthened;
- * "Ad hoc" solutions will give way to a structured, planned process;
- * We will continue to upgrade the product offered by Malta and Gozo through clear policies, guidelines and action plans;
- * We will encourage competitive prices, offering "greater value for money";
- * To undertake effective promotion in our traditional markets as well as in new markets;
- * We will target a mix of various types of tourists.

Gozo will have its own specific role and policies within these initiatives. These specific policies form part of the Gozo Development Plan as formulated by the Regional Council.

So that our tourist product will continue to be enhanced:

- * Infrastructural upgrading in zones such as Bugibba will continue;
- * Provisions will be made for the upgrading of standards and services at tourist outlets;
- * A greater sense of responsibility, duty and service will be encouraged in tourist-related sectors, such as the taxi service;

- * More tourist projects will be launched;
- * Further development and upgrading of our shores and bays so that in the near future we will have the first locality recognised as Blue Flag Standard;
- * Greater attention will be given to 3 Star Hotels because, compared to 4 and 5 Star hotels, these have been overlooked and ignored. A system of non-financial incentives will be offered to these outlets;
- * The Directorate responsible for standards and their enforcement within the Tourism Authority will be given all the necessary powers for the upkeep of the Maltese Tourist Industry.

The development of tourism in a sustainable, balanced, and internationally competitive fashion can only be achieved through an effective and a genuine partnership between the Government and the private sector. Accordingly, the New Labour Government will continue to:

- * Ensure greater participation of the private sector in the planning and implementation process;
- * The bill to set up the Malta Tourism Authority will be presented to Parliament;
- * Following the preparation of the first-ever Strategic Plan for Tourism, work is in hand so as to finalise the National Economic Plan which is expected to identify potential new interlinkages between tourism and the other productive sectors of the local economy.

In order that Malta's and Gozo's tourist product be promoted on a cost-effective basis:

- * We will continue to strengthen our overseas promotion, particularly in our "core" markets such as the United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, France and Holland;
- * Greater attention will be given to "niche markets" based on themes, culture, history, sport, conference and groups with specific interests;
- * We will continue meeting on a regular basis foreign tour operators so as to identify further areas of cooperation;
- * Through greater cooperation between the Ministry of Tourism, Air Malta and the Malta Tourism Authority, we will continue to strengthen existing promotion offices and to open new ones as necessary;
- * We will continue to promote Malta and Gozo through innovative channels such as the Internet.

28. INDUSTRY AND THE NEED FOR BALANCE BETWEEN SECTORS OF THE ECONOMY

The Labour Party reaffirms its belief that Maltese Industry will continue to be a key pillar of the Maltese Economy. This is due to the fact that Malta enjoys important competitive advantages as a location for export oriented industrial investment. These advantages should be exploited so that this competitive advantage will help us establish a balanced economy. A balanced and diversified economic structure will lessen our economic vulnerability to international economic forces that constitute a real threat to small island economics.

The Ramboll Report itself, commissioned by the Federation of Industries and the Chamber of Commerce,

and financed by the European Union Commission, stressed the importance of a balanced economy. It is to be noted that this report was only published after the 1996 General Election, months after it had been actually completed. It was the New Labour Government which started to implement some of the recommendations made by Ramboll.

Therefore, a New Labour Government will continue to:

- * Effectively encourage direct investment in export oriented industries, giving special attention to attracting foreign investment. Therefore:
- * The incentives designed to encourage industrial development and investment, both Maltese and foreign, will be refined to enhance their attractiveness;
- * Efforts will continue to be made so as to streamline and strengthen the primary role of the MDC in identifying and encouraging foreign investment in Malta as well as in guiding these investors in their requirements (one stop shop).
- * To encourage the expansion, consolidation and modernisation of existing industries, Maltese and foreign; to extend assistance to those industries seeking new export markets or overseas industrial partners; this by:
- * Strengthening cooperation and coordination between the MDC, METCO (the export agency) and the Institute for the Promotion of Small Enterprises (IPSE) so as to ensure adequate assistance to manufacturing industry: This especially with regards to Maltese Ventures that need to restructure, modernise and find new markets overseas;
- * Implement a policy whereby incentives and assistance to exporting industries, or industries that have the potential to export will not discriminate against Maltese-owned ventures;
- * Continue with a policy to foster consultations and coordination with the constituted bodies (Federation of Industries, Chamber of Commerce, GRTU) so that through IPSe (now a limited liability company which includes Government and MDC representatives as well as those constituted bodies which wanted to be involved) so that those ventures wishing to be restructured can be assisted to meet the challenges and opportunities arising from the Free Trade Zone between Malta and the European Union;
- * Help where ever possible small enterprises producing for the local market. This assistance is to include granting plots of land on specially designed zones on a temporary emphyteusis basis.

Hence,

- a. hastening the upgrading of the Luqa Industrial Zone;
 - b. distributing the remainder of plots at Hal Far and commencing infrastructural work in the locality;
 - c. identifying a suitable locality for the establishment of a small enterprise industrial zone in the north of Malta;
 - d. establishing an estate for a small-sized industrial activity in Gozo in the Ta' Xhajma locality;
- Finalise a programme of aid for Maltese and Gozitan handcrafts by providing an adequate locality and

space (upgrading projects at Ta' Qali and Ta' Dbiegi in Gozo) as well as by providing protection from foreign made goods, this through:-

6. A National Council for Handcrafts which among other things will certify genuine Malta and Gozo craft products,

1. encourage cooperatives,
2. design new schemes in partnership with the private sector to mitigate the problem of restricted industrial space.

28.1 The Docks

New Labour acknowledges the role that the local docks have in the economic development of our country. As has been agreed between Government, the Management of the Drydocks and the General Workers' Union, the Drydocks will continue with its diversification plans seeking to identify commercially viable projects, to further strengthen ship repairs and evaluate further the economic potential of repairing yachts. These efforts have to be considered within the overall need to improve productivity.

Endeavours will also continue towards the restructuring of Malta Shipbuilding so that, while keeping in mind past mistakes, there will be significant improvement in productivity and efficiency. Only thus can this company be competitive and be able to benefit from opportunities for additional work. The necessary structures have to be created to guarantee this improved productivity. These structures are to include the introduction of professional management able to cope with the challenges and to exploit the opportunities within this industry.

29. SAFEGUARDING AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES

Agriculture and fisheries will continue to be given top priority. New Labour Government affirms the importance of these sectors for a balanced socio-economic development of our country. These sectors were left in a pitiful state by the former Nationalist Government. A Primary objective of the New Labour Government is to assure that personnel working in these sectors obtain a just return for their work and relentless endeavour.

Labour's European Policy implies that Agriculture will be excluded from the Free Trade arrangement with the Union. Contrary to what would have happened had Malta become a full member in the European Union, Maltese agricultural products will continue to be protected. The Nationalist Party claim that full EU membership would benefit farmers as they will obtain extensive subsidies will be totally dismissed by developments in the very near future. The World Trade Organisation is in fact insisting that EU Agricultural Subsidies come to a quick end.

However, protection should not lead to stagnation. New Labour Government will continue with its efforts to increase agricultural exports. Exports to traditional markets such as for Maltese Potatoes in Holland will be consolidated. Efforts will also be made to identify new markets as well as to identify new products for export. A case in point is the export of vegetable and pork products to Russia and the United Kingdom. The New Labour Govt. through the Ministry for Agriculture and Fisheries, and in liaison with the Malta Development Corporation, will continue to drive for the expansion of animal husbandry on an industrial scale, as well as for the export of the resulting products.

Agricultural land must be carefully protected and additional initiatives taken to provide water for irrigation purposes. Efforts to move farmers from their lands by speculators should be strongly resisted. The central

Vegetable Market has to be organised on modern lines. Farmers should be enabled to sell directly from the Vegetable Market. Vocation and training programmes for youngsters interested to work in these sectors must be developed further. These programmes should be based on promoting the most appropriate technology for Malta while encouraging modern systems of management.

The Labour Government will continue to upgrade the infrastructure of our country. These improvements need to be professionally planned, and will rely on appropriate methods for the country. All investments have to target an improvement in services while reducing production costs as much as possible. These reductions in production costs have to be reflected in lower consumer prices for the services rendered. (The trend in recent years has been just the opposite. Investments have meant higher prices for consumers).

The infrastructure for fisheries also needs to be upgraded. A fish market equipped with modern freezing facilities shall be built. Our fishing fleet needs to be modernised together with the fisheries cooperative. The New Labour Government will continue to safeguard the rights of Maltese and Gozitan Fishermen. Action speaks louder than words. The New Labour Government has already put this commitment to practice by seeking to check the abuse of foreign fishermen in Maltese territorial waters, by protesting at International Forums as well as through the enforcement of existing laws.

The Government will follow the recommendations being drawn up by the World Food Organisation (FAO) in consultation with Maltese experts. The National Commission for Agriculture and Fisheries will have a strategic role in implementing these recommendations.

In the near future, the department for Veterinary Services, together with voluntary organisations, will establish a 24 hour clinic for the service of citizens requiring its use for their animals.

The Government has already started a programme of Hands On Farming so as to educate students and sensitise them to the need to take proper care of their pets and other animals. Stronger regulations are envisaged to help prevent Cruelty to Animals.

30. FINANCIAL SERVICES

Even in opposition, the Malta Labour Party gave particular attention to the Financial Services Sector. This is a sector which has great potential. When in 1994 the Nationalist Government moved their Financial Services Act in the House of Representatives, the Labour Party gave a valid contribution to help improve this Bill. The MLP voted in favour of this Legislation so that foreign investors would have complete trust in Malta's intentions in this field. This was a clear example of how constructive the Labour Party was as an opposition Party, seeking the best interests of the nation.

Although the Labour Government was in office for less than 2 years, the progress being achieved within this sector is encouraging. This sector provides good employment prospects for Maltese youths graduating in Finance related disciplines such as Banking, Accountancy and Economics as well as those studying Law. By not seeking full EU Membership the New Labour Government created new opportunities for Financial Services in our country. Malta can now offer unique advantages quite distinct from those offered by financial centres within the EU. These centres are increasingly under pressure to adopt similar fiscal incentives so as to have greater parity amongst them. These pressures will increase with the coming into being of the Monetary Union. Malta is also being seen as an ideal locality for "Backroom Operations" because of the high standards of Tertiary Education, Fiscal Incentives, Low Operating Costs and Advanced Telecommunication Systems.

New Labour Government will continue to closely monitor developments in this field so as to guard against possible money laundering or illicit recycling. At the same time it will continue to promote Malta's

advantageous position as a European Country outside of the EU, and which therefore is able to offer its own incentive package as it is not obliged to follow blindly by what is decided by the EU.

The New Labour Government believes fully in the potential of this sector, in its ability to generate quality employment, and the growth of a new niche for financial tourism. All these activities help Malta to earn vital foreign exchange, sustain Economic Growth and create wealth in the country.

31. ENERGY AND INFRASTRUCTURE

31.1 Energy

A New Labour Government will ensure the provision of clean energy that will be adequate to meet National needs without having to suffer regular power cuts. Malta's energy plants must be managed efficiently and must comply to high environmental standards which have been made possible through the use of modern technology.

Efforts will be made to study and evaluate the technology of small and compact Power Stations that are Economical, require limited Capital Expenditure and which are Environmentally Friendly. In this matter, Gozo will be given priority.

31.2 Oil Exploration

A New Labour Government will continue the programme of Oil Exploration. It will ensure that the most advanced technology methods of exploration are used so that in the eventuality of a find of oil deposits these will be commercially exploited in the shortest span of time possible.

31.3 Infrastructure and Communications

A modern and adequate infrastructure is a must to meet the needs of the people of Malta and Gozo as well as those of investors who have located in our country. Topmost priority will be given to the building of a network of good roads. Regretfully Malta lacks sufficient roads of an acceptable standard. The New Labour Government has already started to tackle this problem. An example of this is Zabbar Road at Fgura. This road was regarded as one of the worst in the Southern Part of Malta. New methods have been used for its upgrading and this should guarantee that it will remain adequate for many years to come. During the last two years, a total of 700 roads have been resurfaced and/or upgraded in the Maltese Islands.

The New Labour Government intends to continue with its extensive road upgrading programme. The next large projects are the re-doing of Psaila Street in B'Kara and Mdina Road in Qormi, both of which are considered to be in a pitiful state. The road connecting the airport to the Freeport will also be upgraded and various new roads will be opened within Housing Estates.

The infrastructure will also be strengthened through the continuation of the Bugibba project as well as those at M'Scala, M'Xlokk, B'Bugja. Similar projects will be undertaken at Sliema, Paceville and St Julians. Also, a number of areas for reclamation of land from the sea are being actively considered.

In the meantime the Vehicle Road Worthiness Test (VRT) will be introduced so as to ensure that vehicles are roadworthy and do not constitute a threat to people and property. The VRT will not aim to penalise those unable to buy luxury vehicles but will seek to provide adequate standards for safety and the prevention of traffic accidents. Such standards should include the proper functioning of lights and the brake system. A Regulatory Board will be established to curb abuses by those giving these tests, while fixing a rate for such operators.

The Government will collaborate with the Local Councils with a view to promoting greater efficiency within the Public Transport System. A New Bus Terminus will be constructed at Valletta Gate. This will enhance the organisation of the Bus Service, will provide better facilities for users and will create suitable facilities for Bus Drivers.

Port Management systems will be studied so as to clarify the role and operations of various sectors at both the Grand Harbour and the Freeport.

32. BUDGET 1999: THE WORST IS OVER

32.1 The Financial Situation

The New Labour Government inherited a financial situation far worse than it had ever anticipated. During the last year of Nationalist government, revenue fell by 35 million as compared to the previous year. Additionally, for the first time ever, recurrent expenditure exceeded ordinary income by Lm 50 million.

Between the years 1987 and 1994 the Nationalist Government had continued to rely on the Price Stabilisation Fund which had been introduced by the previous Labour Government. This Fund amounted to 24 million. During its first 3 years of administration, the Nationalist government also utilised Lm 20 million from the prosperity fund which it had also inherited from a Labour Government. In 1987, the National Debt stood at Lm57 million. When the Nationalist Government took over this debt began to increase at a rapid pace, and by 1996 it had reached a Lm 514.5 million including Treasury Bills, Government Stocks and Overseas Borrowing.

Much the same can be said for borrowing by the public corporations. By 1996 these borrowings had reached Lm462.7 million up from Lm 146 million in 1990. In all Government debt between 1990 and 1996 increased threefold, going up from Lm320 million to Lm 977 million. The Government Budget deficit itself tripled from Lm 35.5 million in 1995 to Lm 110.4 million in 1996.

These figures speak for themselves. The financial crisis inherited by the Labour Government was chronic, grave and structural.

32.2 Privatisation

A New Labour Government will continue with the privatisation of parastatal assets. This will enable it to meet the financial deficit until such time that this is corrected through increased income resulting from higher economic activity. Also privatisation will contribute to greater efficiency and enhanced professionalism which is in the best interest of the workers themselves as it will help safeguard their employment and conditions of work. Privatisation, wherever possible, will not exceed 40% so that Government will control shareholding.

32.3 Budget with Greater Social Provisions

In order to continue affirming its social commitment, New Labour in Government through its 1999 Budget will launch new social projects. 20% of the income from privatisation during 1999 will be allocated to finance these new social projects. The 1998 model will be followed whereby 20% of the revenue from the privatisation of Maltacom and the Malta International Airport were allocated for the restructuring of local industry.

These new social projects to be financed from the proceeds of privatisation will address the following:-

* One parent families;

- * Widows;
- * Youngsters who cannot find employment;
- * Workers who are over 40, are unemployed and have few prospects of finding a job;
- * Disabled persons and their families;
- * Families with accommodation problems.

32.4 CET Changes in view of the Free Trade Zone with the EU As was planned the Government will introduce the necessary changes to the CET system in view of its negotiations with the EU for the setting up of a Free Trade Zone. The first changes will start to be implemented by next year.

Conclusion

The proposals which the Malta Labour Party is presenting in this manifesto show in themselves that the party's commitment of putting the citizen first is no empty slogan.

The proposals represent a comprehensive programme for the citizen in every sphere of his life - health, education, housing and security, the economic structures in which people work, the benefits they are entitled to, the taxes they pay to finance government spending, how they keep the government accountable, how members of the political class are kept in check.

What binds these proposals together is on principle - that which considers the human being, collectively with other persons, as the centre of everything. Everything should be done with the human being in mind and people.