

Nationalist Party Program, 1998

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AS THE WORLD awaits the start of the new millennium, there is particular optimism in Europe, where the divisions and confrontations of history have been laid to rest. Though there are many problems and set-backs, these are outweighed by much that is positive. One has only to consider the huge progress that has taken place in a relatively short period of time. Countries which were poor, like Ireland, have succeeded, with the help of the European Union, in taking giant strides forward.

We Maltese now have the perfect opportunity to haul ourselves out of the trough into which we have subsided over the last two years. The Nationalist Party has had the chance to revise, to correct where necessary, and to update its goals. You now have a fresh programme before you, based upon the thoughts of many people from all sectors of our society. Now, the choice is yours. You may choose to continue dragging along in uncertainty, dogged by political and economic confusion and needless battles. Or you may choose to take the road fashioned by this programme: one of well-being, of trust, and of certainty. This is a programme with a sense of direction.

We have had to consider the tremendous changes which are taking place the world over, changes which bring with them both risks and opportunities. Then there are the changes which have taken place in our own country. We have had to think up new ways of implementing our commitment towards a health programme for all, after the unbelievable confusion which has taken over our hospitals and the distribution of medicinals.

We have had to devise a new programme for our schools. We want everybody, without exception, to have the best education possible, with the optimum means offered by state-of-the-art technology. Time and experience have shown that only a Nationalist government is capable of ensuring that our children receive the best.

There is much else that is fresh in our vision. We have not repeated all the proposals laid out in our programme of 1996, though much of it still holds true. Yet we have had to find solutions to the fresh problems created since that date - the result of incompetence and presumption. Within this programme, you will find the means of putting an end to the unjust and foolish taxes and bills of the last two years. Above all, you will find your way back to the straight and level road of well-being.

The cultivation of the common good is the aim of the Nationalist Party's policies. Our goal is to improve the standard of living of each and every one of you, and to make possible the full development of the individual. We believe that this will happen, because we know where we are going.

Eddie Fenech Adami
Leader of the Nationalist Party

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I. The initiative is yours: we will listen, cater for your needs _ efficiently

WE HAVE NOT wasted the past two years in Opposition. We have listened to you, and have heard much grumbling against Alfred Sant and his government. But we have also heard much grumbling against ourselves, when we occupied the same seats. We have listened to all the suggestions made, and this electoral programme is proof positive that we have acted on them.

The people of Malta and Gozo are naturally industrious, and want to be given the space in which to work and to create prosperity. For all our faults, during nine-and-a-half years of government, we showed that we were capable of making this happen. Today, we are capable of generating an even greater sense of stability and confidence, and of creating an environment conducive to investment and the flourishing of commerce. Under a new Nationalist government, young people will no longer regard the future without hope, but will feel encouraged to further their studies. Tertiary education will no longer be seen as a 'stop-gap solution' in the absence of anything else, but will be a definite step in the light of a bright future packed with opportunity. The old and the disabled will not be sidelined, because we believe that each and every individual has a positive contribution to make to society.

During the last two years, the PN formed issue groups dealing with various sectors of life to discuss the way forward to the next millennium.

Now the choice is yours. You can opt for those who prefer to bluff their way through government, using buzz-words to replace action, and to cover up their lack of competence. Or you can choose to allow us to form a government - a government which will deliver exactly what it promises, without going back on its word.

We will ensure that the government remains close to the people.

1. Public access to government ministers will be ensured, by putting in place the necessary structures, in all ministerial offices.

2. Anybody registering a complaint or request will receive a reply in the shortest time possible, and will regularly be kept informed as to any action taken and the reasons for it.

3. The law on Abrogative Referenda will come into effect thereby obliging government to strike off certain laws should the majority of the people vote in favour of such removal. Consultative

Referenda will provide government with the means to seek the advice of the people on matters of importance.

We will ensure that the government will be at the service of the people.

4. Information technology is a powerful tool when it comes to efficient service. We will work wholeheartedly with MITTS, the unions, and the private sector, to develop and implement IT systems which will benefit all kinds of people. Businessmen will save time because of greatly reduced bureaucracy. Government will receive information on which decisions can be based much more rapidly. There will be more open access for the people. We will provide a computer on-line government service to people within their own homes and in the community. Civil servants will have more time for face-to-face service to the clients who prefer it. This will bring government departments right up-to-date in terms of efficiency.

5. Bureaucracy will be reduced by the creation of 'one-stop shops', allowing people to go to a single place for all their government-related business. This will put an end to the time-consuming and irritating task of racing from one government department to another.

6. Each department will have a Charter, which will list the services people have a right to expect there.

7. With the cooperation of the trade unions, civil servants will be offered a system of performance-related incentives, which will encourage better service.

We will do everything we can to make sure that the greatest possible number of people have access to modern means of communication. We do not want to be modern only in word, but in deed. We do not want anybody to be left behind in the rapidly changing world of information technology.

8. In consultation with the local councils, we will put forward a teaching programme in computer use, for older people, so that those who missed out need not feel left out.

9. We intend to give everyone an e-mail address, so that even if they do not have a computer at home, they can pick up their e-mail at public centres with access to Internet. We will use the schools for this purpose, and also make them centres of training in information technology.

We will ensure that a new Nationalist government recognises the requirements of Maltese ex-patriates.

10. We will review the law on Dual Citizenship which was introduced by the previous PN government, so that more people of Maltese origin can qualify for it, and we will rectify any anomalies which may have arisen since this law has been in force.

We will see that government employees are satisfied with their conditions of employment.

11. We will rapidly conclude the Collective Agreement negotiations which have dragged on for the past two years.

12. The system of flexitime will be developed further, so that women who want to combine a family and a career may do so with fewer problems. Maternity leave will be lengthened, and may be taken in conjunction with the three-year career break, by right.

13. Anomalies in the employment conditions of certain categories of government employees will be removed. For example, casually-employed social assistants will become part-time employees and will no longer be considered as self-employed. This will give them access to the associated benefits. Impressed drivers with the government and with public corporations will become permanent employees, as will workers who have been working as casuals for many years.

We believe in the principle of subsidiarity which means that no decision should be taken at a high level, if it can be taken at a lower one. That is why we established local councils, which have now become part of our way of life. Alfred Sant has cut the budgets of local councils, instead of increasing their competence, because it is clear that he is not happy about the possibility of the decentralisation of power. He does not want to see power decentralised, distributed among many, and wrested from his direct control.

14. A new Nationalist government will broaden the competence of local councils, and increase their financing, so that they are better equipped to serve the needs of those who live in the locality.

15. We will change the Local Councils Act, so that those who stand for local council elections need not reside in that particular locality.

16. We will also determine more precisely the manner of electing the mayor, after serious and broad consultation with all concerned.

Gozo's importance will be recognised.

17. A new Nationalist government will give Gozo a voice at the highest decision-making level: in the Cabinet. There will once again be a Minister for Gozo, who will be in regular consultation with the Committee of Gozo Local Councils, to ensure that there is maximum cooperation with them.

18. There will be extensive revision of the system of government services, to ensure that what can be done in Gozo itself will actually be done there. In that way, there will be more possibilities for Gozitan government employees to work in Gozo.

19. Gozo will be promoted as a separate tourist destination. This will make the island known to tourists in the higher income bracket. The Institute of Tourism Studies will implement a training programme of full-time and part-time courses in Gozo to cater for this type of tourist with the required level of service.

20. The Gozo ferry fares will be revised bearing social requirements in mind, so that the Gozo Channel can fulfil its function instead of constituting a barrier between the two islands. Those who live in Malta, but whose parents reside in Gozo, will once again have a special pass entitling them to reduced fares. The construction of three new ferries will be completed and Sea Passenger Terminals will be built in Mgarr and Cirkewwa. The Gozo ferry service will benefit from specialised assistance given by the European Union in this and other areas.

21. The University Centre in Gozo will continue to expand its services in the fields of education and research, and will place more emphasis on the staging of international conferences and on looking after the interests of Gozitan students at tertiary level in Malta.

22. Financial and other assistance will be offered to voluntary organisations working in Gozo in the fields of culture and education.

A new Nationalist government will confirm its high esteem of the ARMED FORCES OF MALTA in practical ways.

23. The AFM will continue to benefit from the conditions of work obtained under the previous PN government.

24. Before the rule establishing the age of retirement from the army at 55 is implemented in any particular instance we will ascertain that there is advance notice of some years, so that nobody will end up without gainful employment at an age when finding a new job is difficult.

II. We will repair the damage of the past two years

A NEW NATIONALIST government will reduce water and electricity rates.

25. We will once again heavily subsidise the first 20 gallons of water (up on the original 18) consumed daily per person. The cost of an essential commodity like water, should not be a burden to families.

26. We will remove the exaggeratedly high increase in the meter charge, which the Labour government raised to Lm24 a year.

27. The Lm24 drainage tax will go.

28. We will subsidise the minimum amount of electricity consumed daily by an average person and thus considerably reduce electricity bills.

29. We will have discussions with the business sector, to establish reasonable water and electricity rates which do not stunt economic growth.

30. We will make sure that water and electricity producers will cut down on the waste that Alfred Sant made the consumer pay for.

31. Consumers will be given a clear indication of what quality of service they should expect from the producers of water and electricity.

A new Nationalist government will work together with all the social partners to reach consensus on the mode of collection of indirect taxation. This is essential, so as to reassure people that they will not have to endure more of the uncertainty of the past two years. The taxes concocted by the Labour government have to be made more efficient, so as to yield the amount required for the smooth running of the country. We want a just system of indirect taxation, which will not tax essential products or force small businesses to collect tax. Only in this way can we reverse the acceleration of the cost of living and ensure that our tourist industry remains competitive.

For this purpose the present excise law, which is not very different from its predecessor, will be amended.

32. We aim to reduce the excessive bureaucracy and form-filling, which cause worry and anxiety to businessmen and others.

33. Refunds will be re-introduced.

34. Tourists will also be able to obtain refunds on objects purchased locally, when they take these back home with them.

35. Refunds will be paid on time.

36. We will establish thresholds in the different sectors of the business world which will in no case be lower than they are today. Small businesses may choose to stay out of the system, or join it, and obtain refunds.

37. There will be a significant reduction in the rate of tax on imported products, which Alfred Sant's government established at 21%-28%. He has already bound himself over to slap the same rate of tax on locally-manufactured items.

38. The rate of tax on services will be established in consultation with commercial, trade and workers' unions, in the light of the financial situation facing the new Nationalist government and the savings for business due to refunds.

39. Essential products and services like food, medicines and education will not be taxed.

Alfred Sant has single-handedly raised the cost of living, with his confused and confusing tax system, the expenses he has heaped upon businesses, and his removal of the refunds system.

40. Improving the tax system will remove the upward pressure on the cost of living. We will also make sure that there is fair competition, without monopolies, as competition is a good tool in the fight against price increases.

41. We will ensure that the instruments by which the cost of living is measured are acknowledged to be accurate in the judgement of all sectors of society. We do not want a means of measurement that conceals the truth, like those used by Alfred Sant. An autonomous institute will be entrusted with the task.

A new Nationalist government will take immediate steps to cut down the massive debts entered into by Alfred Sant, who in two years has amassed more debt than the Nationalist government did in nine-and-a-half years. We borrowed with restraint and mainly for capital investment, which renders a return, while Alfred Sant has borrowed for recurrent expenditure.

42. We will ensure that government debt is not more than 60% of the Gross National Product.

43. The deficit will not be higher than 3% of the Gross National Product.

This will be possible by:

44. Intensifying activity in the economic sector because the more economic activity there is, the more income there will be for the government. If the economy stagnates, as happens when the government sows uncertainty, there will be less income for the government. The impetus which a Nationalist government can give to the economy will save us from becoming increasingly submerged in debt.

45. There will be better control of government expenditure, to curb waste.

46. The privatisation process, started by the Nationalist government and continued by the Labour government, will continue. Shares in Government companies will be sold, in recognition

of the fact that certain business is best left in the hands of the private sector. The income from the sale of these shares will be used to pay some of the debts which have accumulated mainly over the last two years and which will not be repeated by a PN government. The interests of the employees of these companies and corporations will be safeguarded.

47. Negotiations with the European Union will secure funds for the development of the infrastructure, including roads and similar projects, for which the European Union makes specific allocations to member states,

A Nationalist Government will complete large projects started by the PN which Alfred Sant, who is difficult to work with, has not succeeded in bringing to fruition.

48. The Cottonera Waterfront - this project will be given priority. The people will continue to enjoy the use of the wharf. There will be a restoration programme for public buildings, from Senglea to Kalkara. The Cottonera project will be undertaken by the private sector, but the tender will be awarded after a serious process of open consultation with the people of Cottonera. Dock No.1 at the Malta Drydocks will be turned into an attraction. There will be incentives for the opening of hotels and restaurants in the area, and more activities, like Birgufest, will take place.

49. The Valletta Arts Centre, on the site of the old Opera House (further explanation under the sub-heading Culture).

50. The Cruise Liner Terminal (further explanation under the sub-heading Tourism).

51. Manoel Island and Tigne.

52. The link between the two harbours on either side of Valletta, which is one of the ideas of the architect Renzo Piano, put before the previous Nationalist government.

53. The development of Fort St. Angelo.

54. The development of yacht marinas in Malta and Gozo.

55. The complete rehabilitation of the roads of Malta and Gozo, which can be easily financed by the European Union.

III. Education for a new world

THE RELATIONSHIPS between men and women, parents and children, are changing all the time. In the work-place, technology changes rapidly. Education is more essential than ever before, and it has to be the best. Our system of education has to aim for the development of the whole person, including development of civic, human and spiritual values and the recognition of fundamental rights and liberties.

A new Nationalist government will have before it a new phase of development, but it will build on the firm foundation stones laid between 1987 and 1996 and upon anything of value that took place during the past two years.

We are aware that education is a primary instrument in the thorough development of our people, in the economic, social, cultural, and political sectors. It is our aim to reach the widest consensus possible, where

education is concerned, with real dialogue with all those involved.

In previous years, we introduced the idea that children must learn how to teach themselves, so that they will keep learning all their lives (lifelong education). In the years to come we want to implement the idea that schools must equip pupils with skills in sorting out critically all the information deluged upon them in newspapers, through the Internet, and by all of today's other means of communication. The role of the educator will be to train children how to make use of this information, and how to sift through it.

We have to ensure that all our schools - state, church and independent - will have their own character, autonomy, and identity. We will ensure that all state schools have, at both primary and secondary level, the investment and administrative tools to make this possible. We want parents and local councils to cooperate further with the teachers who run the state schools.

Nobody should drop out of the education process. To this end, there will be greater cooperation between the schools and the social services, because children's problems at school are mainly the result of family and social difficulties.

The education system must develop all talents and native skills and strengthen our Maltese, Mediterranean and European identity.

To achieve all this, we are proposing these measures, among others:

56. We will speed up and complete the process of decentralisation of state school administration. This will require the strengthening of existing support structures and the introduction of needed new ones to enable heads of schools to achieve the goals of autonomy for each school. A new, more participatory management has to be evolved between teachers, parents, pupils, and the local community. Each school will tailor-make its own development plan. This will mean a different role for the Department of Education, which will be to support, encourage, and monitor developments.

57. A revision of the National Minimum Curriculum, at all levels, will take place in cooperation with teachers, parents, and others. This revision needs to be done at all levels - kindergarten, primary, secondary, technical and special. This task is quite other than that of a plan for the total restructuring of, say, the whole secondary school system. This second task, although necessary, must not be confused with the revision of a National Minimum Curriculum or be disguised under that label as, unfortunately, happened later.

58. The introduction of computers in all schools will continue. This process began under the previous Nationalist government, but became clogged under Alfred Sant's government. We will also adopt the best means of introducing the Internet in all schools.

59. Nobody will be allowed to leave school without knowing how to read and write in Maltese. Our language is one of the main sources of our identity. We will also work hard to regain the excellent knowledge of English for which we were once renowned. The English language is essential for the participation of our people in today's world.

60. We will evaluate the teaching of science and technology. Pupils must attain sufficient levels for the nation to be able to exploit advances in S and T for both personal and economic development.

61. Training programmes for teachers will ensure they keep up to date, in order to reduce the

drop-out rate to the maximum extent possible.

62. Discipline will be given particular attention, to guard against all forms of abuse, including bullying and child-abuse. For this purpose a code of discipline will be adopted after wide consultation.

63. We embrace the ideal that children with special needs should be educated, with the proper support system in place, in ordinary schools. But we will ensure that such inclusive programmes are implemented with the consent of all those involved, so that they are not counter-productive. The best alternatives will continue to be provided while this ideal is being achieved.

64. We will strengthen the means by which assistance is given to pupils and their families, who may have social, emotional, psychological, and behavioural problems. We will see that pupils have effective counselling and guidance, so that any problems are detected at an early stage. This will require cooperation with various sectors of the social services and voluntary organisations who work in this field.

65. We will review the teaching of technical and other skills, so that they are made more relevant to the contemporary world, allowing trainees to achieve internationally-recognised qualifications.

66. In consultation with all those involved, we will set up an Institute of Technology and Applied Science, which will gather together various sectors of post-secondary education. Thus, vocational and technological training will be given the same status as academic education. These students will also receive a stipend.

67. We will strengthen the contact between the worlds of education and of work: industry, agriculture, fisheries, tourism, and others.

68. We will work closely with the Employment and Training Corporation (ETC) to provide new training opportunities as well as retraining for those who wish to return to work after a break of some years, as married women often do. Special attention will be given to disabled persons.

69. Major efforts will be made in the field of adult education, with special emphasis on those who left school early. This will be incorporated into the concept of lifelong education. Wider use will be also be made of distance learning by radio, TV and computer.

70. There will be centres in schools where professionally trained carers look after children outside school hours, for a reasonable and socially just fee. We will also establish other means by which the school may serve the community.

71. We will improve the Education Act to strengthen the autonomy of the University and for Parliament to specify the directions in which the University should develop in the best interests of the country, especially as regards areas of specialisation. We will strengthen the mechanism of financial and academic auditing.

72. In consultation with all those concerned, we will establish the most appropriate improvements of the stipend system for students, including those who wish to conduct research locally or overseas.

73. We will re-examine the MATSEC system, after the publication of a serious analysis of what

occurred in the most recent examinations, to bolster confidence in the system. We will implement those recommendations which ensure the highest level of trust in the system and recognition of Maltese standards and certificates. For this purpose, there will be genuine cooperation between the University, the Junior College, sixth forms of church and independent schools, the secondary level of all schools and the MATSEC Board.

74. The University of the Third Age will be strengthened, so as to encourage more elderly people to participate.

75. While children attending Church Schools now do not pay fees, we feel that the time has come to exempt from income tax a maximum amount per child attending fee-charging private schools.

The word "culture" is understood by many to mean elitist forms of art, but in reality it means all the customs and products that differentiate us from other peoples.

76. A new Nationalist government will give new life to the organisation of festivals, with a double aim to consolidate a sense of national identity and to display the best Malta has to offer to visitors to our islands. Better cooperation between the ministries responsible for culture and for tourism will be established.

77. We will ensure that financing of cultural activities (which is currently based mainly on the profits of gaming organised by the Lotto Department) is given a firmer foundation. Our aim is that budgets for this sector, including sport, amount to 1% of government expenditure.

78. We will implement the project for an Arts Centre, which will include facilities for the staging of opera, on the site of the former Royal Opera House. We will make sure that the National Orchestra is worthy of its name, in size, quality and in the working conditions of its members.

79. We will continue with the modernisation of museums. We aim for "smart partnerships" between public and private sectors in the safeguarding and promotion of historical and cultural sites, as well as in other initiatives aimed at ensuring a more creative popular sharing in the enjoyment of our culture and the appreciation of other, especially neighbouring, cultures.

80. The PN recognises the fact that the Maltese language gives us our national identity body. In order to strengthen it, we will establish a Body, including representatives from the University and from leading Maltese language groups, to tailor-make policies which will strengthen the teaching of Maltese in state, church and independent schools. In liaison with this Body a Language Commission made up of experts in linguistics will bring Maltese orthography up to date when necessary in the light of developments in the language itself. The Commission, together with the University, will also be charged with the promotion of scientific research into the Maltese language.

A new Nationalist government will introduce fresh incentives in the field of sport.

81. We will set up a specialised school for youngsters with exceptional promise in sport. We will also give bursaries for training overseas. Special assistance will be given to Nurseries in various disciplines of sport.

82. A Sports complex will be built in each of the three main segments of Malta, along the lines of that built in Gozo.

83. Assistance will be provided to those committed to develop any particular sport (horse, car, or cycle racing, etc) and to sporting organisations in search of suitable premises. In particular, incentives will be offered to clay-pigeon and target shooting enthusiasts.

84. While recognising the Malta Olympic Committee as the country's highest sport authority, we will support the staging of the Small Nations Games again in our country. Besides a new Nationalist Government will enact a law aimed at encouraging the growth of sport.

85. We will help national sporting organisations to regularly conduct anti-doping tests. To reduce the cost, means will be found to carry out these tests locally, in laboratories to be recognised by international sporting fora.

Hunting and trapping:

86. No changes which negatively affect hunters and trappers will be made to the current regulations on hunting and trapping.

87. During negotiations with the European Union, representatives of hunters and trappers will be included. We will insist on favourable conditions in this area as were granted to other countries for their national pastimes.

88. License fees will not be considered a tax to generate income, but only a way of covering related expenses. We will reduce the fees accordingly, and differentiate between different types of gun licence, eg. to carry/to keep.

IV. Work is best guaranteed by a Nationalist government

WE BELIEVE that every person finds fulfilment by maximising his or her talents through work which offers satisfaction and the highest standard of living possible. A main aim of the PN remains the creation of job opportunities for all those who wish to work and share in the generation of wealth.

To create new work opportunities once again, we have to foster an environment wide open to growth, which will attract new foreign and local investment and inspire confidence.

89. We will safeguard the stability required by local and foreign investors and the security provided by clear policies and credible national leadership.

90. We will cut down the overheads of industry and commerce, to enable them to compete not only locally but also in overseas markets. Among other incentives, refunds will be reintroduced in the taxation system.

91. We will invest more resources in the sale of services to other countries, particularly through the use information technology and telecommunications.

92. We will strengthen the corporations which serve to attract investment and new business to Malta, like the Malta Development Corporation (MDC), the Malta Export Trade Corporation (METCO), and the Institute for Small Enterprises (IPSE).

93. These corporations will encourage Maltese businesses to enter into partnership with overseas enterprises, open up new markets and overcome the disadvantages of small size

94. We will set up and finance an Institute for Private Enterprise, which will be run by a board including representatives of all the social partners, and the Parliamentary Opposition. The aim will be to foster a culture and values of private enterprise. The Institute will be a government agency which will oversee the privatisation process of certain state-owned corporations. The Institute will continuously evaluate potential openings for private enterprise and devise schemes to encourage more people to set up their own small business. It will also subsidise the Malta Business Bureau, which was set up in Brussels by the Federation of Industry (FOI) and the Chamber of Commerce.

The Nationalist Party believes in the dignity of the worker. It will make certain that working conditions are acceptable and help develop the worker's full potential as a person.

95. We will strengthen the Employment and Training Corporation (ETC), so that it is able to cope with the needs of all those who are registering for work, particularly those who are over 45, those who have been registering for a long time, and those with special needs. The ETC will be given the tools with which to strengthen its training programmes, so that those who wish to acquire new skills can do so.

96. We will implement policies to improve the system by which employees who have suffered injustice or vindictive transfers obtain just redress in the shortest possible time.

97. We will introduce a system of National Occupational Qualifications, which will recognise experience gained in the work-place.

98. In consultation with all the social partners, we will revise the main laws which regulate work, working conditions and industrial relations. A new Nationalist government will see that workers are protected at law should an employer deduct payments for national insurance and income tax, and fail to pass them on to the Department of Inland Revenue. We aim to put an end to abuses perpetrated by means of fixed-period contracts of work. A fresh model for collective agreements is also essential, as the last one was made in 1967.

99. We will do everything necessary to implement and enforce the law on Health and Security in the work place. With this aim in mind and in consultation with the social partners, we will set up an Authority to set out the regulations and to establish National Minimum Standards in all those sectors where the need is felt.

100. We commit ourselves to create and maintain a better environment in all our industrial estates in particular, those at Luqa, Hal-Far, Ta'Qali Crafts Village and Ta' Dbiegi in Gozo.

101. We will give a fresh impetus to the formation of cooperatives and to the strengthening of those already existing. There will be a unit to help in the setting up of new cooperatives and to give greater assistance to those which are already active. Special encouragement will be given in support of consumer and small-business coops.

102. Together with the Unions themselves, we will see that the role of the Unions is relevant to a modern society. We will have discussions with them about those sectors where they can give an important contribution - for example, as regards pensions. We will offer help through scholarships and training, so that union leaders can perform their role better in both the generation and the distribution of wealth.

V. A return to prosperity

THE NATIONALIST PARTY will re-inject a sense of dynamism and life into our country's economy, after the suffocation, stagnation and uncertainty caused by the incompetence of the present government. Moral and material encouragement will be given to all those who have ability and initiative.

The main effort of a Nationalist government will be in helping people towards prosperity and growth. Such economic growth will increase government revenue through just and fair taxation, and in this way the safety-net of social services will be maintained.

Unfortunately, despite Alfred Sant's talk about modernity - talk which he borrowed from us - he has retained practically the same mentality as that of his young socialist days. He thinks, first and foremost, about what the government will collect from each and every commercial operation it enters into - and the country ends up losing out.

We consider small businesses to be the backbone of the country, in the creation of wealth and prosperity.

103. A new Nationalist government will cut down on expenses incurred by them in dealing with government departments.

104. They will have the choice whether to enter into the refunds system or not.

105. Their water and electricity charges will be reduced.

106. Bureaucracy and red-tape will be whittled down, especially toing-and froing between government departments and multiple form filling.

107. There will be regular consultation with associations of small businesses.

108. We will enact legislation to help small businesses secure finance, obtain access to modern technology, find partners to develop export markets, and enable them to defend their interests through their unions.

109. With the introduction of the Vehicle Roadworthiness Test, we will give assistance to those self-employed who have had old vehicles for a specified number of years and which fail the VRT. In such cases, their owners will be able to buy new replacements without having to pay Registration Tax.

110. The Institute of Small Businesses (IPSE) will once again operate along the lines originally intended by the previous PN government. The present government has twisted these intentions, and the real small businesses are not being given priority.

111. We will secure European Union assistance, so that small businesses can find their feet, seek out investment and new markets, and receive training. Representatives of small businesses will be involved in negotiations with the European Union.

Tourism needs a new image.

112. We will give increased importance to special-interest travel (cultural, sport, religious etc). This would be fruitless without the devotion of particular care and attention to our cultural and historical heritage. Special-interest travel will ensure that tourist arrivals are spread throughout the year.

113. A new Nationalist government will again put before parliament the Bill for the setting up of a Tourism Authority, with amendments which will give the private sector a greater say in how things are done.

114. We will revive studies and training in the tourism and catering sectors, after their collapse under Alfred Sant's administration, as had happened under his predecessors Karmenu Mifsud Bonnici and Dom Mintoff. The Institute of Tourism Studies will be further strengthened through closer association with the University.

115. An incentives package will encourage the development of the tourism product.

116. A Maritime Terminal, where cruises could start and end, will be built. We will discuss, with the private sector, the possibility of investment in cruise-liners.

117. A complementary project will be the development of the entire Cottonera sea-front. There will be other projects for the four main tourism zones.

a. Bugibba/Qawra/St. Paul's Bay - the work there will continue, and those parts which were hastily and badly cobbled together, by Sant's government, will be redone properly and soundly.

b. Paceville, St. Julian's, Sliema - the environment will be embellished and the last section of the Sliema Seafront promenade completed.

c. Marsascala/Birzebbuga/Marsaxlokk - the work will continue, and the embellishment project will be extended further.

d. Gozo - a plan for Gozo will be drawn up with the cooperation of all interested parties.

118. Cooperation with other Mediterranean countries will lead to the development of tourism packages, allowing people coming from great distances to visit several Mediterranean and European countries from or together with Malta during their long holiday period.

119. A roots programme will reach out to the descendants of Maltese people who emigrated many years ago, to encourage them to take an interest in their origins and to visit their ancestors' birth-place.

120. In cooperation with the Local Councils, there will be an information office in each zone, run by a manager.

121. We will return to our policy of not undertaking any but the most urgent repair works in the summer months, in tourism zones, so as not to cause disruption and inconvenience.

122. The Tour Operators' Support Scheme (TOSS) will gradually become applicable to all tourist markets.

123. With full membership of the European Union, we will no longer be burdened by the high tax which tourists coming from EU countries have to pay in their own country when they visit a non-EU country. To give but one example, British tourists pay their government the equivalent of Lm14 when visiting Malta. We will also receive assistance from the EU, as did our competitors

- Spain, Portugal, and Greece - for the upgrading of beaches, means of transport (like the Gozo ferries), the reduction of pollution, the preservation and maintenance of historical and cultural sites, and other tourism-related services.

The Malta Drydocks needs to be brought back to its feet, but not with the methods chosen by Alfred Sant, who has created even more problems. We are convinced that the Drydocks can be turned into a profitable business, by:

- 124. Diversifying products and services;
- 125. Removing duplication of work among the shipyards;
- 126. Introducing more training for employees;
- 127. Improving efficiency of management;
- 128. Upgrading equipment as necessary.

Time and attention will be dedicated to agriculture and fisheries, to ascertain that Maltese consumers receive a variety of fruit, vegetables and fish, at a reasonable price, while guaranteeing a stable and adequate income to those who provide them.

129. Agriculture will be considered to be an industry for the purposes of the Industrial Development Act. Farmers will thus be able to take advantage of the benefits offered under this law.

130. We will set up a fund to assist farmers (both crop-growers and animal-breeders) and fishermen to find new export markets.

131. There will be full consultation with representatives of farmers' organisations and cooperatives, to enact legislation for the setting up of an Agricultural Export Marketing Board. This will be autonomous, and will negotiate on behalf of local farmers, for the best export prices and purchase prices for seed.

132. A new Nationalist government will engage the services of experts to give advice to farmers in the planning of their crops according to the demands of the market, so that they may maximise their profits.

133. Country roads will be resurfaced well.

134. The development of the pitkali will continue, for it to cope with the total production of our farmers, and that of the slaughter-house and the fish-market, so that meat and fish products are offered to the consumer with the highest standards and lowest cost possible.

135. Moorings for fishermen will be increased.

136. Slipway facilities will be improved.

137. Fishermen will be given assistance to buy new and modern equipment.

138. We will give assistance in the development of fish farms, and for the formation of cooperatives in this field.

139. Farmers and fishermen will benefit from EU funds and programmes when we become full members. These benefits include: guaranteed prices for a large number of products, a guaranteed income for various types of farmer, assistance where agriculture contributes towards the development of better watering systems and for the purchase of new equipment and machinery, assistance where agriculture contributes towards a better environment and the development of agri-tourism.

A new Nationalist government will ensure that farmers and fishermen are involved in negotiations with the European Union, and this will enable them to vote in the referendum on membership with full information to hand.

There are great opportunities in the communications sector. The efforts of the Nationalist government bore fruit at Maltacom, when Alfred Sant's government sold a large percentage of its shares, the company was estimated to have a market value of more than Lm100 million.

140. Under the previous Nationalist government, Maltacom benefitted from massive investment - but developments in this field, on the international scene, are racing ahead. A new Nationalist government will ensure that Maltacom keeps up the pace, and that it remains at the forefront of developments.

141. A new Nationalist government will continue to liberalise telecommunications gradually, to improve the service offered to the consumer. The jobs of Maltacom employees will be safeguarded.

142. A new Nationalist government will ensure that the Regulator, in the field of telecommunications, functions seriously and efficiently, and that it will not be effectively or even perceived to be an extension of government. The Regulator must have the up-to-date technological skills to safeguard the rights of operators and consumers, while serving as a stimulus for the exploitation of new opportunities.

The transport service must be improved. The reforms begun by the Nationalist government must continue, with full dialogue that includes all transport operators.

143. We will bring in new buses, and offer incentives to frequent users of the bus service. We will implement the changes planned by the previous Nationalist government, for the Valletta terminus. Better services will be introduced to serve historic centres.

144. A new Nationalist government will implement a road-improvement programme, with the setting up of junctions at main arterial roads. A number of important roads will be rebuilt.

145. A new Nationalist government will ensure that buses are kept in good condition. But the priority is that the roads themselves are maintained, so that the benefits of the Vehicle Roadworthiness Test are not lost as a result of the bad state of our roads. Road tests will not be allowed to create unnecessary costs for drivers.

VI. A war against crime

A NEW NATIONALIST government will crack down hard on crime, particularly drug-related crime including violence against the elderly and theft, and will take measures to prevent youngsters from falling into

the clutches of drug-traffickers.

We commit ourselves to supporting the victims of crime.

146. We will amend the law so that victims of crime are no longer considered as no more than witnesses in criminal proceedings. They will have the right, bar certain exceptional cases, to be present throughout the court proceedings.

147. The Police, together with the Social Policy Division, will look after the interests and see to the needs of traumatised victims of crime.

The Police Force will be strengthened in the fight against crime.

148. We will reach agreement with the Police Association, so that after the stinginess and false economy of the past two years, the Police Corps will benefit from better conditions of work.

149. We will bring training and equipment up to date, particularly that required to clamp down on drug-dealing.

150. We will spare no effort in attracting the best people towards a career in the police force.

There will be a new phase in prison reform.

151. The project begun in 1996 will be completed.

152. We will use the services of specially-trained people to help the reintegration into society of those who have spent time in prison.

153. We will look into the possibility of introducing a parole system, to ascertain that there has truly been a change in the prisoner's mentality, when he is being assessed for remission according to the present system.

The Courts will be made more efficient.

154. The options for arbitration and mediation will be increased.

155. The Family Court will function as it should.

156. The procedures for dealing with minor offences will be less complicated, possibly being undertaken at local level.

Drugs: prevention, treatment, and a fiercer war against dealers and traffickers.

157. A new Nationalist government will intensify the war against drugs, by strengthening the Drugs Intelligence Unit so that the police have more information about those involved in drug-dealing. Programmes to protect witnesses who testify against drug dealers will be put in place.

158. A new Nationalist government will implement preventive programmes from early schooldays, with special attention to those most at risk. The work of SEDQA will be more widespread, and cooperation with voluntary organisations will increase. There will also be an increase in support services for the families of those with drug problems.

159. We will intensify our efforts in the struggle against alcoholism and gambling, which are well-rooted in our society. A new Nationalist government will develop programmes of prevention, treatment and support for the families of victims.

VII. Health and Environment

HEALTH is among our highest priorities. We were not always able to deliver what we hoped, but we recognise that we have to work harder for cooperation with the medical sector. In order to achieve excellence in this sphere. Dialogue with all the health and caring professions will be pursued.

160. Prevention is better than cure. We will undertake a re-invigating campaign of education and information, aimed at preventing illness and disease, and at promoting health and well-being. Investing in this will cut down drastically on the pain of disease, and on the costs of curing or treating it. Alfred Sant's government has failed to develop a programme of disease prevention to which we had given an initial impetus.

161. We commit ourselves to the betterment of primary health care in the community. This means the service provided by family doctors, health centres, pharmacists, nurses and paramedics, team-working at the local level. Reform here is essential. The biggest setback is that patients do not always meet the same doctor when visiting healthcare centres, and so continuity and the personal touch are lost. We will work at finding ways of promoting cooperation between the private health sector and that of the state, to the greater satisfaction of doctors and patients.

162. We will move towards giving each hospital autonomy. Sant's government has destroyed all that was achieved at Zammit Clapp Hospital. The principal hospital, St. Luke's, has deteriorated. Problems related to the shortage of staff and medicinals, and ineffective management, have grown. A new Nationalist government will intensify efforts to modernise the hospitals, a process abandoned by Sant's 'modern' government.

163. The new hospital at Tal-Qroqq was originally intended as a highly specialised research centre, devoted to chronic illnesses common in Malta and the rest of the Mediterranean. Had this idea been realised, with assistance from overseas hospitals, local and foreign patients would have received the very best, state-of-the-art treatment. Sant's government destroyed all this, by senselessly and uselessly changing the hospital's design, to keep the builders in business. To add insult to injury, construction now appears to have slowed down. Given this situation, a new Nationalist government is practically bound to use it as a general hospital for acute illnesses, but we will also ensure that relevant departments develop tertiary level health care. It will be professionally managed, and serve as a model for other hospitals and health service units from this point of view.

The quality of health care can be measured by the quality of the professionals who provide the service. The last Nationalist government strengthened the Medical School, set up the Institute of Health Care at the University, invested in training programmes for health care workers, and drew up the best collective agreement they have ever had. Expert opinion places much emphasis on team work between consultants, doctors, pharmacists, nurses, and paramedics. Quality health care requires sufficient numbers of professionals, employed on suitable and attractive terms.

Government contracts have not provided doctors and medical consultants with professional satisfaction, and

have not enabled them to integrate into the public service. We know that, when compared with the size of the local population, the number of medical consultants employed by the state is lower than that of other European countries. Some professionals have decided to leave Malta, mostly because of delays and muddles in appointments. Split service between the state health system and the private sector is generating tension within individual doctors and within the health service as a whole.

164. A new Nationalist government will enter into discussions with the Medical Association of Malta (MAM) to improve the working conditions of doctors employed by government. One of the issues to be considered is whether doctors should continue to form part of the general public service. It should be possible for specialists to choose between full-time employment with the public health service, with appropriate remuneration, or part-time employment with the government combined with private practice.

165. A new Nationalist government will also encourage the development of private hospitals. This will ease the workload of state hospitals and reduce the pressure on their budgets. Under a Nationalist government, private health insurance will be tax-exempt, and the premium will be tax deductible. A significant proportion of medical bills will also be tax-deductible. A new Nationalist government will consider making use of, and paying for, private services which are not available at state hospitals.

166. A new Nationalist government will remove the tax on illness and its cure, introduced by Alfred Sant's incompetent approach to the health service. Policies for the distribution of medicinals should cut down on wastage, but should not compromise quality.

167. A new Nationalist government will enter into discussions with the Chamber of Pharmacists, to devise a scheme for the distribution of medicinals to registered patients. The new scheme will allow patients to collect their medicines from their local pharmacy. The Government Medical Stores will be reformed, to offer an improved service, with more effective controls.

168. A new Nationalist government will renew its commitment to reforming the mental healthcare system. Patients should, wherever possible, be cared for within their community and not in an institution. A new Nationalist government will commit itself to offering the best possible support to families who care for those with mental health problems, as well as coordinating the training of volunteer workers in this sector. Above all, we will lay much emphasis on prevention. The best use will be made of available resources, while the reform of the mental hospital will continue.

169. Health services will be decentralised, allowing the Department of Health to concentrate on planning, auditing and monitoring.

170. A new division, devoted to young people's health, will be created. This division will concentrate on dietary problems, sexually transmitted diseases, psychological stress, and drug and alcohol addiction. When restructuring the health services, a new Nationalist government will consult the unions, and other organisations, about conditions of work and the quality of health care on offer. Consultation will mean real influence, and not mere words, as has been the case for the past two years. Good health care requires constant monitoring and auditing.

THE ENVIRONMENT: our physical and mental health depends on the environment in which we live. With the help of the local councils, a new Nationalist government will implement a policy of public education, to ensure that the outdoors environment is as well cared for as our homes.

171. We will encourage research into means of transport which reduce the level of pollution.

172. A new Nationalist government will encourage the use of solar power, giving it tax advantages and subsidies. Modern technology enables surplus domestic solar power to be transferred to the Enemalta grid, with savings all round. This is the truly modern way to cut down on the state's cost of providing electricity, while keeping the environment clean - and not Alfred Sant's antique methods of transferring the cost of inefficiency to the consumer, in exorbitant bills.

There is no doubt that the aim behind the Nationalist government's creation of the Planning Authority was the finest, and that this Authority is needed. But experience has shown us that:

173. A thorough revision of the structures is essential. There is too much bureaucracy, and this must go. Some delays are unjustified and unjustifiable. Building applications in areas designated for the purpose must be processed faster, and within a fixed time limit.

174. There will be a revision of the Structure Plan, according to law, and local plans will be finalised within the shortest possible time. This will enable areas of land which are surrounded by buildings and which are not suitable for agricultural purposes to be considered for development. Some zones were left out of the Temporary Building Schemes in 1990 and these may be included for development. This will help reduce the demand-supply upwards push on prices. All of these radical reforms will be undertaken with full, true dialogue and consultation.

175. Health and sanitation regulations applicable to dwelling-places will be brought up to date. Provision will also be made to modify those plans which cover old town and village cores, so as to preserve traditional characteristics of vernacular architecture particularly conducive to fostering social solidarity as well as to welcoming the challenges of life in the next century.

VIII. Social Policy - nobody will be left behind

The PN is convinced that: "It is a sign of an intelligent society that every individual member of it feels involved in its workings, and in the lives of those who are in need". The family is to be the cornerstone of the government's social policy.

There are two major changes in the field of family affairs which a responsible government must take into account before issuing pronouncements that smack of instant solutions. These changes have provoked a crisis in the family but also open up new prospects which could lead to a happier future for it. A first change is in the relationship between husband and wife and the division of work between them, with more and more women taking up paid work outside the home. The relationship between parents and children has also changed. These changes, which are part of the move towards equality between men and women, must continue. Alfred Sant promised women that they would not have to leave their homes to go to work, because he would chop down the cost of living so drastically that one wage packet would be enough. But if more women have stayed at home all day during the past two years, it has not been because one wage packet is now enough, but because there are no job opportunities, especially in the part-time sector.

A new Nationalist government will continue to strengthen equality between men and women.

176. We will toughen up Malta's laws, to make sure that there is no discrimination against women when they compete for employment.

177. We will introduce effective measures against sexual harassment.

178. We will ensure that women are represented in greater numbers at decision-making level.

179. We will increase opportunities for technological training, so that women are better-equipped for advancement in scientific fields, like engineering.

Another major change, with great implications for family life, is also taking place in the world of work. The possibilities for working from home, linked up by computer modem, have hugely increased. Job-sharing and flexi-time are modern family-friendly ways of approaching work. These methods are catching on rapidly, and we will explore the possibilities for their use here in Malta.

180. Two people - husband and wife, for example - may share one job and one salary, taking the holiday leave due to one person, and distributing work-hours between themselves. This allows both to work, while also sharing home duties and child-care. This system works efficiently where both are adequately trained and capable of handing over to each other when changing 'shift'.

181. Another system is that of a fixed-period contract for seasonal demand, as with tourism, or the other way round - for all the year except the summer months, when students on holiday can take over. This would allow parents to care for children in the summer, and to spend time with them.

182. We will explore the possibilities of allowing people to take unpaid leave in all cases of family emergency, for example those which involve seriously ill children or elderly parents.

183. The carer's allowance, which is given to unmarried or widowed women who care full-time for relatives who are seriously ill, and who live under the same roof, will be extended to bachelors and widowers who are in the same position.

184. We will put structures in place to allow contact with workers who are on special long leave, so that they do not lose touch. Women on maternity leave are a case in point. They will then find it easier to return to work. Contact will be kept by means of people specially-trained in the field.

185. We will give training to those people who want to return to the work-place after an absence of several years, particularly those women who have stayed at home to raise their children, who are now grown-up. For those with younger children, we will hold informative courses on how to combine the demands of home and family with those of a job. In these, we will have the full cooperation of the Employment and Training Corporation, which will also assist women in achieving more skills to help with their advancement in the work-place.

Modern family life places greater demands on parents, who are the prime educators of their children. Children are socialised, first and foremost, in the home. Yet the demands of today's fast-paced lifestyle can make this more difficult. We commit ourselves to doing whatever is in our power to help, to stop the process of side-lining and ignoring those men and women who are making tremendous efforts in the raising of their children. We will give them our full support.

186. We will give financial and other support to the Cana Movement, and to other organisations which offer support and guidance to parents in their dealings with each other and with their children and to those men and women who plan to form a family.

187. As explained elsewhere, we will ensure that the education system aims at both life-long and life-wide education.

We commit ourselves to offering full support to those families who find themselves in difficulty.

188. Victims of domestic violence will be offered shelter, support, and guidance in the setting up of a new life.

189. There will be greater protection afforded to young victims of abuse.

190. There will be special support for children separated from their parents.

191. We will help those who adopt children, and the adopted children themselves.

192. We will offer help and support in cases where one of the parents is absent.

We commit ourselves to helping and supporting those families which break up.

193. A PN government will ensure that the Family Court functions efficiently and humanely, and that when it is clear that the marriage is beyond saving, the procedures are shortened and made easier to alleviate as much unhappiness and suffering as possible.

194. Without prejudice to the rights and obligations of a legally valid marriage, we will establish at law the rights and obligations of men and women who live together while unmarried (cohabitation). We will safeguard the rights and interests of the children of such unions. These children should not suffer for reasons that are beyond their control. The law will seek to protect each person from exploitation or unfair treatment.

A new Nationalist government will increase tax benefits for the family.

195. For income tax purposes, single parents and widowed parents with dependent children will not be taxed as though they are living alone, but as though they are married.

196. Important family occasions (such as weddings and funerals) will be tax exempt.

197. Loan-payments for the acquisition of a family home will be deductible for income tax purposes.

Young people have a major role to play in the development of the country, but one of the worst consequences of Alfred Sant's government is that 40% of those who are registered for work are under 30 years old.

198. A new Nationalist government will give increased support to the National Youth Council.

199. We will provide the services of professionals who are specially-trained in work with young people, to give support and advice to youth organisations.

200. We will ensure that young people are represented on all boards which take decisions that affect their lives.

201. We will help the local councils to provide facilities for youth activities, including suitable centres, which may serve as a focus for environmental and other work.

202. We will ensure that young people from Malta and Gozo are able to participate in EU youth programmes, like Socrates and Leonardo, Youth for Europe, and Community Action Programme for Youth.

The elderly are well aware of the esteem in which they are held by the Nationalist Party. We will continue to develop programmes like Telecare. We will build new residential homes in neighbourhoods like Mellieha and Zurrieq. We will extend the facilities offered by Zammit Clapp Hospital, instead of cutting them down as Alfred Sant did. We will upgrade St Vincent de Paule Hospital. And we will add other programmes too.

203. We will provide small homes, suitable for elderly people, in various towns and villages.

204. We will set up day centres where elderly people can spend the day, and night-centres, where they can spend the night, in a suitable environment.

205. We will develop a cost of living index tailor-made according to the particular requirements of pensioners. Cost of living benefits will then be given in full to pensioners according to their own index, instead of the mere three-quarters accorded to them at present.

In the housing sector, a new Nationalist government will find alternative and complementary means to the policy of ear-marking parts of the countryside for building.

206. We commit ourselves to finding uses for the many houses which remain empty. We will enter into partnership with the private sector, to give subsidies for this purpose; or we will buy the houses and distribute them according to already-established procedures.

207. We will encourage the letting of houses by increasing the subsidy given to those who let houses to families.

208. We plan to convert large abandoned houses into apartments, in partnership with the owners and private contractors. Similar partnerships will be set up to demolish slum dwellings and build modern apartments in their stead.

209. We will have lifts installed in buildings which too many stairs to climb make unsuitable for the residents, because of illness or age. This is more economically advantageous than providing them with alternative accommodation. We will also facilitate the exchange of dwelling place between residents with different requirements.

These new methods of dealing with the housing problem are called for because there are more people with problems related to unsuitable accommodation than there are with no shelter at all. Land is also one of Malta's scarcest and most costly resources. However, a new Nationalist government will also continue to implement the schemes begun in previous years, including the Pembroke project, which got stuck under Alfred Sant's government. Our ideal aim remains that of each family owning its own home.

The social security system will be improved, to safeguard the interests of those most at risk.

210. A new Nationalist government will exempt from national insurance payments those with an income level lower than the social assistance threshold as well as men and women on unpaid parental leave.

211. Those who suffer from chronic illness, which renders them unable to work, will qualify for financial assistance.

212. Those unemployed because of illness who are entitled to social assistance will have their benefits increased to equal the amount of the retirement pension.

213. Employees and self-employed persons who suffer serious illness will be given an Invalidity Pension, not at the present fixed rate, but according to a rate worked out on the same basis as the two-thirds pension.

The pensions system will be improved, so as to offer true peace of mind today and in the future, for everybody.

We know that one of the greatest challenges faced by our country is that of financing the social services in the years to come. We know that it is our duty to look for solutions now, so that nobody gets left behind, today or in the future.

People in Malta as in other developed countries, thanks to progress in healthcare, are living longer. Consequently, the burden on the social services is increasing. This burden could be borne if contributions from wage-earners were also increasing. But, with development, it is usual for the birth rate to decrease. Hence, in years to come there will be fewer people working and contributing to the financing of social benefits and pensions. A new Nationalist government is committed to finding solutions after full consultation with all those involved, not only of present, but also of future looming problems.

214. We will ensure that in the coming legislature, all pensioners will receive the two-thirds pension.

215. We will initiate a process of which the goal is that those who receive a service pension will not suffer deductions from their social security pension because of a lump sum received as part of the service pension.

216. Those who have commuted their British Services pension will be considered as having no Services pension whatsoever, even if they are or become entitled to a pension higher than two-thirds of the analogous current salary.

217. Those who receive a Services pension based on a higher wage than the highest wage on which social security contributions are paid will not suffer any deduction on that ground from the Social Security pension.

218. We will explore ways and means with all concerned parties, including pensioners, with the aim of establishing a system in which no account is taken of the service pension in the calculation of social security pensions.

Disabled persons will not be emarginated, but will be integrated into society. We commit ourselves to removing the obstacles which prevent this. A new Nationalist government will implement inclusive policies wherever possible.

219. With the help of the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities, we will introduce new services aimed at helping persons with disabilities to lead as independent a life as possible. Personal assistants will be allocated to those who are unable to live alone. There will be interpreters for the hearing-impaired, and readers for the sight-impaired. There will also be a specialised service for those with mental disabilities who also have behavioural problems.

220. We will implement a programme by which public places will be made more accessible and

take other measures to give access to persons with behavioural disabilities .

221. The National Commission for the Disabled will be given legal status with the authority and resources needed for it to be more effective in its role as catalyst for change. A new Nationalist government is also committed to enact the already drafted law on Equal Opportunities meant to eliminate all forms of discrimination which may affect the disabled and to provide a remedy when any such discrimination does take place.

222. We recognise that the greatest problem faced by the parents of disabled children is that of preparing for their children's future when they are no longer there to help. As already said, we will invest in a system of personal assistants. We will also lend our support to initiatives for the setting up of small homes in the community and we will adopt the policy that specialised services available to the elderly be made available also to the disabled.

223. We will help voluntary organisations to work together with the National Commission for the Disabled in order for them to fulfill their function in their respective spheres of operation.

We have based this electoral programme on the conviction that nobody today expects any longer everything to be done by the Government. The family is another operative unit which is taking on new strength through forms of partnership only now becoming possible, as we have seen, because of the electronic revolution. There are other non-profit groups made up freely of individuals who work together for the public good and constitute the backbone of civil society. Voluntary organisations also have a significant role to play.

224. A new Nationalist government will enact legislation on Voluntary Organisations, which has already been prepared. This recognises the ever more important role played by these organisations, and by the people who work within them, possibly on payment to ensure their livelihood and quality of service, but essentially not for monetary gain.

225. There will be a Council for Voluntary Work which will provide a forum for civil society and a platform from which to work out and rationalise cooperation with the government.

226. We will provide the training and resources required by these organisations.

IX. Inside Europe - after a Referendum

THE FREE TRADE AREA sought by the Labour government would mean that:

- all EU products would enter Malta freely, including agricultural products;
- there would be a tax on value added (TVA) of more than 20% on all locally-manufactured goods, as agreed by Ministers Leo Brincat and George Vella;
- government contracts would be open for tender to foreign companies;
- foreign companies would be able to set up businesses in service sectors like tourism and banking.

None of this would of itself entitle us to funding or assistance from the European Union.

Alfred Sant caused Malta to lose out on the start of negotiations for membership, last March. These

negotiations began with six other countries: Cyprus, Slovenia, Poland, Estonia, the Czech Republic, and Hungary.

A new Nationalist government will make every effort to repair the damage wrought by Alfred Sant, when he deprived Malta of the chance of entering into negotiations for membership, despite the warnings of colleagues.

227. A new Nationalist government will request the European Union to agree to the start of negotiations and will ensure that we obtain the best terms and conditions for all sectors involved. These sectors will be involved in the negotiations and will be consulted throughout. Their representatives will be included in the teams which enter into formal negotiations.

228. When the negotiations are concluded and the conditions of membership are known, we will hold a referendum so that the people of Malta and Gozo are able to give the final decision on membership.

The Nationalist Party realises that darkness creates fear and uncertainty, and that a lack of information is not conducive to good decisions.

229. A new Nationalist government will make every effort to ensure that the general public and specialised groups have access to all pertinent information all through the negotiation process.

230. We will strive to lift the question of EU membership out of the ambit of partisan politics and keep it at the level which befits a decision on which the future of generations yet to come rests.

X. We know where we are going

THE NEW CENTURY will bring with it more change than ever before, for better or worse. More than ever, we will need a government with commonsense and a sincerity, which is totally alien to pretence. Only thus will our people be able to reap the rich promise of the new millennium.

With the sort of leadership that does not lose its head in petty squabbling but sets its sights on clearly perceived objectives, there is undoubtedly much to be gained. The world of work is undergoing radical change. Demand is growing for work of a different kind than was prevalent in the past. The demand is for personalized services, ranging from counselling to the individual design of goods. It will soon be possible for a great deal of work no longer to be done in huge and ugly factories but in clean and comfortable spaces or even at home with electronic tools.

To us Maltese, who have no natural resources to sell to the world these changes open up new horizons, dangerous but exhilarating. God has blessed us as people with intelligence and a rich cultural heritage, a way of life built on family values and reciprocal understanding. These are the main qualities which excite the most quizzical interest among the visitors to our islands. They know that these qualities are worth far more than our sun and sea. These are the qualities which give the added spark of unique value to our output.

Yet what will happen to our identity as a people under a government for whom modernity is nothing but a useful buzz-word? This government cares so little for truth that it proclaims the economy to be flourishing when people are struggling to pay their water and electricity bills. Under such a government we risk losing both ways - missing the opportunities offered by the new times and frittering away the heritage of our past.

A new Nationalist government will ensure two things and so put back hope into people's hearts. We are committed to the newly unfolding world of innovation and discovery in which we are determined to share as fully as possible. At the same time we will ensure that nobody loses hope and suffers as the result of failing to keep up with the rapid pace of growth. Our aim is not only a learning, but an all-inclusive society.

A new Nationalist government will celebrate the second millennium from the birth of Christ with the courage that comes from true solidarity. We do not want to exclude anybody from the festivities. We want every single Maltese man and woman to rejoice. Without exception.

With a new Nationalist government, we will know where we are going: towards prosperity, and the just distribution of its fruits among all. That will be the result of confidence in our country and in our own abilities, and of a clear sense of direction, perceived equally by ourselves and by those who peer at us from beyond the sea.