



ANDREW ON WEDNESDAY

A party in meltdown

It would be, to say the least, simplistic if we had to try and evaluate what brought about this massive meltdown of the Nationalist Party in 2,000 words.

However, it is safe to state that the margin of difference we are looking at is not only the blunder of Dr Simon Busuttil, who took the principled position and shouldered the responsibility. It was also honourable that the rest of the Party Administration took the bow. However, I wouldn't stop there. I think the Administration should sit for a 'public' hearing in front of the party members and answer to their failures. Because this is what is essentially wrong in our political scenario - no one takes any responsibility on the podium when the tide is out but just disappear when it starts getting messy, shambolic and muddled.

Nevertheless, I wouldn't stop there. The reasons for this meltdown are motley; wrong strategic (or should I say confusing) decisions, ineffective party structures, message overkill, non-stop confrontational disputation, non-stop attack on the institutions and their leaders, bigoted attitudes, 'holier than thou' political dialectic, non-stop personalised attacks, confusing choice of candidates (the cherry on the cake), elitism, pathetic media presenters anchoring political programmes, the syndrome of the pot calling the kettle black, over-reliance on the stories of a blogger, a media campaign that lacked slick and detail and an inability to read the signs of the times, amongst other.

These are only some very quick takes in a political scenario that is almost surreal considering that a week or so ago the Nationalist Party was almost feeling that they had a real chance at giving the PL a run for its money (another miscalculation that should have at least been read in the surveys).

I think that at this point the PN needs to go under the radar, com mission a professional report, get all its systems in place, re-think how its values are translated in politics, re-create the soul of the party and bring in a Party Leader of known qualities (but yet a 'wild card').

I feel duty-bound to share what I had written almost 3 years ago on the two main leaders. The writing seems to have been on the wall.

On Dr Joseph Muscat on the 30/10/14:

A well known and accepted fact is that probably the biggest miscalculation done by the Nationalist Party prior to the 2013 general elections was to underestimate the political acumen of Dr Joseph Muscat.

... So there was a happy bunch at the Stampertja rubbing their hands thinking that with Joseph Muscat at the helm, this Alfred Sant acolyte from long lost and forgotten Burmarrad, meant they would be in power for the

long haul.

Muscat by many was considered too young, too go-getting, too self-assured - all elements that the PN felt were a recipe for yet another PL failure.

Later on some PN insiders even went on to argue prosaically that although Muscat had won three elections, not counting the outstanding victories in the Local Council elections, 'all this had to happen' and that it was a political cycle that meant the turn was for the Labour Party to govern.

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This is not an issue that 'with or without' Joseph Muscat Labour would have won just the same. The verity is that Joseph Muscat is the formula.

He brought in a fresh feeling in the PL. He reminded people all the time that he was new but did not want to discard the old. In the absence of an ideology he came up with the progressive-moderate mantra which most did not understand but somehow subscribed to - because it felt inclusive, it felt new, it felt as if a new page was being turned.

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Metaphorically speaking the PN strategists decapitated their own Party and removed its soul in the process. Now the PN is struggling with organizational issues, popularity give outs and a soulless organisation that has no identity, not clear what inspires its existence and where it needs to go.

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This politician called Muscat not only won but has engineered his party to keep winning. Because what is interesting in Joseph Muscat and the way he has calculated it all is that it's not about winning this one and then we see, but the moment 'this one' is won it's onto the next.

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What fascinates me about this politician is that he manages to recreate himself. He has grown into an imperious personality; ruthless some would say whilst others would describe him as unwavering.

(Joseph Muscat does a touché - 31/10/2014 - TMI: <http://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2014-10-31/blogs-opinions/Joseph-Muscat-does-a-touche-6736124736>)

On Dr Simon Busuttil on the 27/10/14:

Following the discourteous exit of Lawrence Gonzi, not only from the reigns of the country but also from those of the party Leadership, somehow everyone 'knew' that the next in line would be Dr Simon Busuttil, this young, endearing lawyer dedicated to the European cause which he almost took on single headedly.

We knew that Simon Busuttil was a

prodigious campaigner and this could be seen by the tally of votes he amassed over the elections he has contested as an MEP and even in his first run as an MP.

This was all in some measure due to his ability but there were other fundamentals in the pot, namely, the endorsement of the party and in the case of the MEP elections the scrappy candidature that characterised the MEP elections he contested.

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Simon Busuttil looked fresh, he played the 'giving it all up for the good of the country card' (which in all truth didn't work much) and even though Gonzi was the outgoing leader he wanted to leave his legacy by anointing Simon Busuttil as his chosen and special one. In a way the PN Counsellors felt that they didn't have too much of an option and felt that they should toe the line.

Nevertheless, extraordinarily enough, a number of people I know who are close to the Nationalist Party still feel uneasy about this new leader and estimate that this was a strategic lapse that will lead them to a would-be second electoral defeat.

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Simon Busuttil has gone on the blink on too many fronts for someone who is in Opposition and where the only way is up.

In my ruling he has until now fallen short of rallying back the troops that abandoned the party and most of all he has not succeeded in drawing in the people who are unfamiliar to the PN.

But I think Simon Busuttil has been pushed around too much within the party 'to be someone he isn't'. His advisers seemed to be interested in making him a direct polarity to Joseph Muscat, which is a wrong move of incredible proportions.

With the charisma, media persona and style of Muscat, there is no way that Busuttil with his soft spoken, person-centered, crowd phobic personality would be able to take him on. He would be outshined big time, and that was what was happening.

Simon Busuttil doesn't need to create a style.

What he needs to do is to recreate himself if he has any chance of facing the music in three years time.

People have known Simon Busuttil for ages and any change in his style, for example packing his speeches with sarcasm and black humour, kicking hard with cynical metaphors and the rest - won't really get him any social currency. He really needs to understand who he is and get back doing what he was best at, explaining the specifics, rationalizing the essentials and touching on the facts.

Together with that, some vital standpoints need to be in force. The Nationalist Party and Simon Busuttil's leadership needs to be seen that positions are being taken.

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In my opinion Simon Busuttil should take his act a step up.

He needs to stop using confrontational politics, it's not his style and he messes it up anyway. If he wants to have a real go at becoming Prime Minister he has to lay back and walk the talk.

People more than ever are more interested in politicians that take a position even if they might not share the carriage.

Simon Busuttil needs to get away from the media attention and focus on rethinking the PN's identity which is nowhere near clear. If the PN does not reinvent itself it will soon become obsolete and irrelevant.

He should give direction, work on winning back the trust of the innumerable 'interest groups' and the social sectors that the PN has managed to throw out of the window but who in the past have traditionally found solace in the Nationalist Party.

Simon Busuttil in other words needs to bring the laces behind the ball!

The CEOs, conventions, party logos, flashy TV wipes, and new presenters on NET TV will only serve a purpose when the direction is clear. If not, people will read into all of the 'fixfix' and give the PN another drubbing.

This is nothing less than a presidential contest we are getting, election-in-election out.

The PL's strongest element has been and remains Joseph Muscat. All the political discourses are designed around him. What's extraordinary is that he manages to recuperate every time a slip-up happens.

So there you go, at this point this is not about Simon versus Joseph but it's about Simon versus Simon.

If the wrong Simon keeps coming across, the prospects are not good - if otherwise the PN stands a chance.'

(Simon Busuttil needs to bring the laces behind the ball!)

27/10/14 - TMI:
<http://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2014-10-27/blogs-opinions/Simon-Busuttil-needs-to-bring-the-laces-behind-the-ball-6736124443>)

Proably we all agree that the saddest outcome of this General Election is that we are left with a ripped social fabric, with an 'us' and 'them' like we have not seen for some time, with a great deal of anger, resentment and irritability floating around.

This is what our political parties have given us in return to the trust we show, in the volunteering that thousands of people are involved in, in the financing of their shenanigans.

This needs to change. We need a process of healing, a conscious and deliberate plan that will bring us all together, a new political dialectic.

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