



ANDREW ON WEDNESDAY

It's not just about Arnold's spring eggs

Once again we are being asked to vote, this time round in a referendum (and a proportion of us in the long forgotten local government elections).

Some have claimed that the electorate is struggling with voting fatigue after being asked to mark the ballot once again. This is a position I hardly share. People, in my opinion, are bothered with the wiles not the voting.

I believe that the referendum will enjoy a decent turnout even if many or most still don't have a clear idea what issue is really at stake here. But the people in this country still get excited about what hits us, both far and near. Quickly browsing through our Facebook News Feed will emerge all sorts of arguments and debates flooding this virtual piazza, profile pics supporting either of the two causes, quotes of our revered leaders, the occasional forewarning from the Church and the odd brainless mention. So there you go, people the way I see it will vote in droves - this facet of civic participation is part of our convention.

Now as things stand with the referendum on spring hunting, the 'NO' vote is trailing behind even if it is still early days.

I must admit I thought that with all the bad publicity that some of the hunters bring upon themselves I wouldn't have imagined in a thousand years that it would be such an uphill struggle from the word 'go' for the 'NO' inclined.

Naturally when the 'YES' sympathisers have not yet made known their position in terms of campaigning, possibly as they waited for the PN to take its stand, with the 'NO' vote that has only just launched its campaign, with the three independent papers scarcely starting to dish out editorials, commentaries and articles, one needs to see with time how all of this will unfold.

My own opinion poll albeit unscientific on www.aud.eu.azopardi.org, at the time I sent this article for print, revealed that 67% of those who participated are saying 'Yes' to

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spring hunting against the 28% who are saying 'No' and more surprisingly than that only 5% are yet undecided.

Some thoughts come to mind. Firstly, I really think that people don't know unerringly what they are voting 'for' (or 'against' for that matter), why we have this issue on the table in the first place and the possible ramifications of having a referendum on such a detailed and specific issue that interests particular groups in society. Because let's face it, very few apart from those absorbed with bird routines and the hunters themselves are really bothered about the turtle doves or other wild birds that fly over Malta and Gozo.

Secondly, The PN and its leadership had no other option than to adopt the position taken last Saturday. With Dr Busuttill himself being involved in this matter when still campaigning for Malta's accession to the EU and after that as an MEP, it hardly left any doubt what his

position would be albeit a bit of unpersuasive moments oozed during the press conference. Apart from that he couldn't sit this one out. Taking a week to decide the obvious was disquieting I must admit.

What I find troubling is that Dr Busuttill claims he will be giving a free vote to the MPs! (To say the honest truth I never really understood this issue with the 'free vote'). So does that mean that there will be MPs who will not respect the people's choice, assuming more than 50% of the eligible electorate will cast their vote?

Thirdly, As has happened repeatedly these last years, Muscat has forever preferred crouch starts, moving rapidly ensuring velocity by going out of the 'blocks' with earnest. Prime Minister Muscat has stuck to his position as per political manifesto. I don't think that arrangement could have been shifted around. He was fast and crispy that's true but as a consequence this allowed very little space for the party diehards to really think about the issues at hand.

What I really find puzzling is the position taken by Deputy Leader Toni Abela.

At one point he speaks passionately against hunting (during my radio show *Ghandi xi Nghid* last Saturday) and also directed me to an article he wrote called *Nammira u mhux Nimmira* ('I appreciate but I will not target') obviously referring to his derision towards hunting. Yet he implicitly affirms that he will stand by the position Dr Muscat is taking even if he states, as clear as crystal, that he has a different thought about this. Baffling indeed!

Dr Abela is highly opinionated on so many issues and I would think that taking a standpoint on something he believes so much in would come by design. So on one side we have the elected political parties telling their supporters to do what they feel is right for them and then

the deputy leader responsible for party affairs struggles with doing just that and instead wobbles the argument by saying that Malta is trying to be more European than the EU (didn't quite grasp what he was after here when it was some 40,000 Maltese citizens who asked for this referendum) and also saying that we are trying to be more Catholic than the Pope!

Fourthly, You then have Prof. Cassola. Whenever I interviewed him his case has always centred around the fact that AD wants to abolish spring hunting because the birds need to rest and nest as they carry their eggs. Taking one down would entail eliminating two or three birds at a go.

Sorry Arnold, but from where I come from you're either going to adopt a thorough opinion on this one or you are sitting on the fence behaving the same way as the politicians you have repeatedly censured - it has to be 'hunting' or 'no hunting' - anything in-between makes little sense to me especially coming from the Greens.

Finally, I must admit that what bothered me most in all of the chinwag I've had to endure about the subject so far is the one engaged by the political parties which in their customary patronising attitude have 'authorised' people to think this up on their own and to make their personal choices.

Circuitously this implies that either political parties are customarily controlling or else, political parties are realising that they are becoming irrelevant to the way people make a decision meaning that they are losing strength and endurance - so they choose to let go.

It appears that the political parties are worried that they might lose all their eggs in one quick and painful wrong movement and being mid-term it seems like it's not the right time for this to happen! At any rate, the referendum squabble is pleasures yet to come!

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21 January 1966

Future of Monte Carlo rally in doubt

The Monte Carlo rally has ended in uproar over the disqualification of the British cars expected to fill the first four places.

The first four to cross the finishing line were Timo Makinen (Finland) driving a British Motor Corporation Mini Cooper, followed by Roger Clark (Ford Lotus Cortina), and Rauno Aaltonen and Paddy Hopkirk, both also driving BMC Minis.

But they were all ruled out of the prizes - with six other British cars for alleged infringements of complex regulations about the way their headlights dipped.

The official winner was announced as Pauli Toivonen, a Finn who lives in Paris, driving a Citroen.

BMC and Ford have lodged protests but even if they are upheld, the reputation of

the rally has been severely dented.

After the race, a British official said: "This will be the end of the Monte Carlo rally. Britain is certain to withdraw."

Timo Makinen said: "None of us dreamed that the stewards would turn the results upside down - and for such a stupid reason."

The British cars were disqualified because they used non-dipping single filament quartz iodine bulbs in their headlamps, in place of the standard double filament dipping glass bulbs, which are fitted to the series production version of each model sold to the public.

According to new rules introduced at the end of last year, any car entering the rally must come off a standard production line, with at least 5,000 cars being built to a sim-

ilar specification.

The British cars were equipped with standard headlamps - but the only way of dipping them was to switch to non-standard fog lamps.

Richard Shepherd, from the BMC, said: "There is nothing new about the lights at all. They have been used in our rallies, on rally cars, including the Monte for two years now and we've had no trouble at all in the past."

The confusion arose because the rally organisers initially said the race would be run under the old rules - and only announced the switch after entries had been accepted.

The BMC says it spent £10,000 on preparing for the Monte Carlo rally - and is now considering withdrawing from next year's race.