



ANDREW ON WEDNESDAY

Why not?

A good politician is one who is not afraid to take out-of-favour decisions. Prime Minister Joseph Muscat has done this on a number of occasions in the areas of civil and human rights. In the case of Vote 16, after spearheading the changes necessary in the law that governs the Local Government back in 2013, young people from the age of 16 could now start voting in these elections.

This try-out worked and a majority of young people participated in the ballot. I always said that whilst this was a good move it was still half-baked and that we required that young people be allowed to vote in all ballots; from Local Council to MEP elections and from General Elections to Referenda.

I would like to go a step further now.

Young people should be allowed to contest in every type of ballot. I so believe that they can be effective and give that much needed boost our political landscape desperately needs. Young people have strength of mind and certitude. They are not inhibited by tradition or loyalties. They have their own resolve and will not be uprooted by the partisan rubbish that is thrown around. They are able to process the data, are keen on what future they want for themselves, have enough character, personality and maturity.

The lack of belief in young people simply astonishes me.

We just cannot seem to handle the fact that 16 year olds are well able to make judgement calls, decide on what is good for them and can take responsibility for their Country and the community they live in. We think from our fear (as adults) and our need to control these young ones. We are terrified to admit that young people have what it takes to decide on their lives. We have such a myopic and constrained idea about youth which is absurd.

The argument that we make about young people not being fully 'mature' is yet again a sham. I wonder whose brain is fully mature! Maybe the mature ones are those that decide on their purse? Or those Party loyalists, blinded by an irrational passion? Maybe we should consider exempting these devotees from voting because their judgment is based on the one-way thinking they have, rather than choosing on facts.

We claim that 16 year olds are not 'grown-up' enough to make and take these decisions. Of course one could construct an argument around this contention, but what we need to keep in mind is that; young people are allowed to consume alcohol at 17 years, the age of criminal responsibility is 14 years, they can be fully employed at 15 years, choose what Intermediate and A-levels to take (that would eventually steer their careers) at 15/16 years, can get married (and hence have sex) at 16 years and the age of sexual consent is being touted to go down from 18 years. So I really cannot understand what is the issue here. I find it strange that we do not seem to believe in young people enough to vote for their representatives, for those who will be taking the rulings on how they live their lives - sounds outlandish to me!

The benefits of voting at 16 years of age are immense.

First: Young people will start getting directly involved in the decisions that construct their

lives. They need to be unswervingly engaged in the debate that is happening in the Country. Our politicians will now have to confer with this segment of the population.

Second: The fact that 16 and 17 year olds will be allowed to vote will make them more aware of the environment, their community and social wellbeing.

Third: Young people are generous and big-hearted. 16 and 17 year olds should be able to have the freedom to speak up not only in delimited set-ups like school, but also have access to public fora. Young people are 'full' people, 'complete' citizens and I believe will vote after debating in favour of those side-lined by society like no other segment of the populace would be ready to do.

Fourth: Young people have opinions. They know whether they want recreational drugs legalised or not, whether the age of consensual sex should be moved down from 18 years, whether they should work or not whilst studying, what type of environment they aspire to have and so on and so forth.

This Country needs a drastic change and young people can be a vital loop in this.

We need to see politics discussed at school, openly, frankly and critically. Politics, even the one with a big 'P' is not a dirty word. It has only turned dark because of the way 'mature' adults have messed it up. The lack of intelligence of our politicians and constituents (who happen to be adults!) needs to be watered down.

This can only happen if we have young people voting.

Politics can be beautiful. It is the art of doing good, of doing what is right of having calibrated communities.

Politics is about discussing issues that are at the heart of the community, about taking the right decisions.

Politics is about identifying the lacunae we have in our society and trying to fill in those gaps.

Politics is about the encounter, connecting with each other, thinking how to take the Country forward, of bracing ourselves against the crises and difficulties we come across.

So in not so many words, *why not?*

Why not have young 16 and 17 year olds participate in all the ballots?

More so, why not have them contest?

This is a challenge we have to face up to. There are laws that may need to be adjusted and possibly introduce new ones to accommodate these changes.

This also entails that we place more responsibility on our formal, non-formal and informal education programmes to provide for political instruction.

These are exciting times.

I am four square behind the Prime Minister on this one. Well done!

(PS: A great example of maturity lies in the debate currently taking place on Facebook about which of the two main Parties collected the most money last Sunday. Now isn't that a sign of maturity from our adult electorate!)

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Monkey lost after space flight

The search for a small bushy-tailed monkey fired into space in the nose cone of a Jupiter rocket has been called off.

The squirrel monkey named Gordo survived a 300-mile journey into space and then travelled more than 1,500 miles in the rocket until it dropped in the South Atlantic.

A technical problem with the recovery gear meant a parachute failed to open and the nose cone sank taking Gordo with it. The US Army abandoned the search after six hours.

Gordo's condition was monitored by the

Pentagon, which said the monkey suffered no significant adverse physical effects during the time it was weightless.

Angry protests

The 50-ton Jupiter AM-13, which usually carries intermediate-range missiles, was fired by the army from Cape Canaveral in Florida this morning. The flight lasted 15 minutes.

Gordo, a South American breed of monkey about one foot (30cm) tall and weighing between two and three pounds (1-1.5kg), was chosen because it has a similar anatomical make-up to man and is also very sensitive to changes in temperature.

US defence officials say the breathing of the monkey slowed down after take-off and its pulse became slightly irregular, but both quickened as the missile gained speed and once the nose cone was beyond the pull of Earth's gravity they returned to normal.

Gordo wore a leather-lined plastic helmet. He was strapped on a moulded rubber bed with his knees drawn up to resist

the strains of gravity.

The monkey was insulated against temperature changes with foil and fibre glass. He had a thermometer under his armpit, a microphone listened to his heartbeat and other instruments detected his breathing.

There have been angry protests from animal rights groups about the decision to send Gordo into space.

The American Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals said only inanimate objects should be used for such tests. The British Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals also expressed "grave concern and apprehension".

But the US Defense Department insists the experiment was an invaluable step in preparing for man's first venture into space. They say the monkey's make-up is so similar to man's there is now no reason humans cannot undertake similar flights in future.

Gordo is not the first animal to have ventured into space, but he is the first primate to have flown so high.

In May 1959, the United States sent a pair

of monkeys, Able and Baker, into space on a Jupiter missile. They were the first living creatures to be successfully recovered after a trip into space.

Although Able died in June 1959, monkey Baker survived until 1984.

Later in 1959 and in early 1960 there were further experiments involving a pair of monkeys named Sam and Miss Sam.

Soviet scientists decided against using monkeys for test flights. Their scientific research - published in September 1958 - suggested the monkeys would have to be anaesthetised and the anaesthetic would interfere with test results.

They had already launched a dog, Laika, into space in November 1957. At the time, Russian scientists claimed the dog had survived a week in orbit but later reports show it died shortly after take-off from overheating and panic.

But it was the Russians who won the race to launch the first man into space. Major Yuri Alexeyevich Gagarin orbited the Earth for nearly two hours on 12 April 1961.