



ANDREW ON WEDNESDAY

Not just a beauty contest

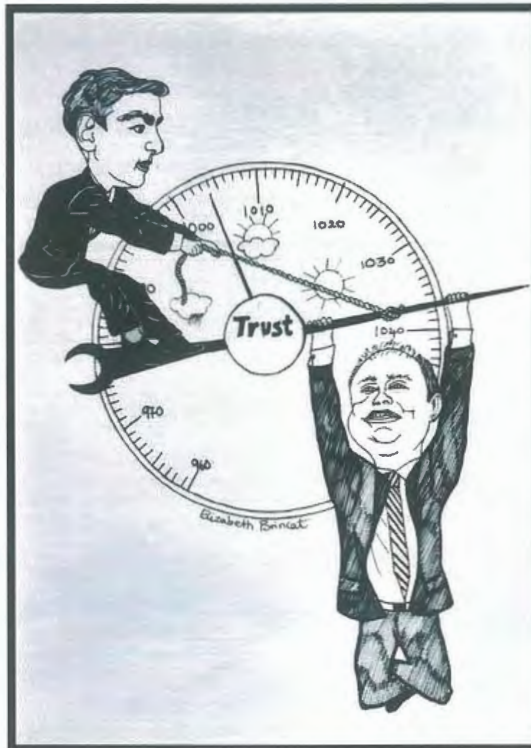
Well it's always good to look on the bright side of life. Our two leaders might be eye candy for some of their devotees, being so young, amiable and charming and seemingly ready to take on the world. But for those enthusiasts who measure success by 'looks', I am going to burst your bubble, leadership is more than appearance!

draw my inspiration in this regard from an article penned by the acclaimed journalist James Debono on this Sunday's edition of the *Malta Today*; 'Trust barometer - Muscat leads by 11 points as Busuttil gains trust boost'. As a side note, the issue that strikes a chord is that there seems to be an incongruous connection between party popularity and leadership regard. In fact it seems that what drives people in the ballot is more than ever the leader of the party.

I respect the meticulous and scientific method Debono applies but as always and as expected with such surveys, there are always positives one could draw from whichever way you read and interpret these statistics. Considering that the Prime Minister has had to deal with one crisis after another these last months and having spent most of the summer travelling on international commitments and still retaining a reputable margin of popularity over Dr Busuttil and adding more than a percentage point might seem decent enough. This, compounded with the fact that it is midway through the legislature, makes this survey even more courteous to Dr Muscat.

On the other hand, the subtle but ongoing campaign the PN has been working on during the summer and the way that the leader of the Opposition is dealing with the issues that keep cropping up in this country seem to indicate that people are starting to respond to Dr Busuttil. I believe that the fact that the Nationalist Party is now more affirmative and constructive in its approach is reaping dividends. Contributing positively is important because an Opposition is also about providing alternative options. Even though the Prime Minister is leading by 11 percentage points, the fact that the leader of the Opposition has gained three percentage points is a significant improvement, albeit the difference is still momentous.

The flip-side to this is that ideologically I cannot understand why the Nationalist Party has thrust in its box-room the Christian Democratic principles that are so crucial to its policies. It makes me think that the PN wants to be everything for everyone, a big risk in my opinion as it might lead to irrelevance. The same can be said of the Labour Party that appears to be very keen on being perceived as 'liberal' with the possibility, once again, of meaning everything to



everyone and nothing to all, especially if the social democratic spirit of this party is flushed out of the system.

This is the hazard of a political class that has sacrificed almost entirely what they believe in, and conveniently claim that ideologies are no longer valid. Wrong. Politics is about dialectics, about people coming together and making sense of the issues they are faced with and above all politics is about being informed by principles - remove those and you are left with a nonentity.

Regrettably at this point the parties are focusing almost exclusively on ensuring that they are presenting a style of leadership that enlivens them.

Now in my opinion, people need direction on where they are heading. I personally want to know what leaders stand for, what they believe in and what are the values that spurn them on. I want leadership that talks ideals, optimistic and does not matter about utopia but ideals, leaders that make people hope and aspire to bring about a better country and a stronger nation, emancipated citizens that have communities structured around the principles of love and collaboration.

I want leadership that is respectful towards institutions,

that strengthen the structures that are there to provide direction to this country. I want leadership that does away with 'big government' and gives credibility to people's voice. We need institutions that are safeguarded and protected from political influence. I no longer understand the concept of 'persons of trust'. You either have the expertise or you don't. If you don't use your qualities to the benefit of the country or more so you try to sabotage it, then you are nothing less than a turncoat.

I want leadership that doesn't just talk economics but is interested in generating a wealth of social consciousness. I'm interested in leadership that talks culture and art and that recognises the importance of having these two ingredients for a healthy society. I desire leadership that gives equal importance to micro as it does to macro politics.

I want leadership that is intent on making people happy and comfortable, that contends wellbeing as part of its day-to-day language, where the intention of every government is not just to be re-elected but to help the nation grow in harmony and mutual respect, which is ready to listen to the soreness of people and do something about it.

I want the person in charge that vies for freedom, who has 'liberty' as a core political dialectic. We need leadership that values free speech, civil and human rights where every citizen is provided with an opportunity to access the community resources equally. I want leadership that strives towards a situation whereby people are as free to walk on a pavement as they are to enter the world of employment. I want people who have the opportunity to grow relationships as much as they are to be free to transition from a body that disowns them and where diversity is not a curse but a blessing.

I want leadership that doesn't listen to people and then treat them as being stupid, obtuse and brainless. I want leadership that listens and acts, leadership that respects people's intelligence and choices. I want leaders that never stop listening, from the moment they start occupying an office.

I want leaders that value entrepreneurs, developers and business people but not at the cost of an economy that becomes an end in itself.

I want leadership that is ready to allow inhabitants to construct a good life for themselves, who have the space to become better persons, who can develop their talents, who feel engaged and involved in their community and can grow their life plans.

I want to see leadership that does away with customer care officers that mean nothing more than having people wanting to see you squirm, wriggle and twist - to get what is 'yours' by right.

I want leadership that has the courage to provide an ambience of competition even in social services so that potential services users get the best.

I want leadership that finds a delightful balance between a liberal society that is open to diversity, but at the same time a community that is founded on principles of social justice, of social equality where everyone has the space to be the person he/she wishes to. What we need is leadership that continually asks, 'What can you do?' - in other words guidance that has belief in the people.

We need leadership that ensures we have wealth so that we can provide for welfare, that we have institutions to protect our freedom so that people can get along with their matters and emancipated citizens that have the ability to make the right choices.

Not too much to ask for I suppose!

Ghandi xi Nghid
Journal by Andrew Azzopardi

Dr Andrew Azzopardi
 Senior Lecturer, Department of
 Youth and Community Studies
 Faculty for Social Wellbeing,
 University of Malta &
 Broadcaster - Ghandi xi Nghid
www.andrewazzopardi.org