

## Green Whistle-Blower

The old adage of history making a complete 360° revolution could not find greater coherence than on our islands. Hotel developers are the epitome of this.

For instance, after the deplorable bail-out by the Solemar owners in Marfa, who managed to obtain patronage for their illegal development of 180 rooms rather than the permitted 62, the baton was taken recently by the Portomaso developers, who are stretching every sinew to get 25 apartments developed illegally to be authorised in what surely must be a sanctioning haven that is Malta.

Nature Trust (Malta) blew the whistle on this one more faux pas by our hoteliers last month. The Portomaso developers must surely be rubbing salt into the wound after having tinged the water at their site with an unnatural milky hue, which has smothered all marine life in the area.

This should surely serve as an omen for the Hondoq ir-Rummien yacht marina advocates - wishful thinking?

Despite the recent, much-heralded Rural Development Plan, we had to witness further encroachment on prime agricultural land in our islands - this time at Wied Filep, l/o of Naxxar, leading to Wied I-Ghasel. Plans to site a number of micro-enterprises within the valley were announced last month.

While the word "micro" is surely a misnomer since existing industrial activities in the area are all but gargantuan, these stick out like sore thumbs in such a site due to their nature.

In fact, such enterprises include a batching plant, sand storage facilities and even a boatyard, despite the nearest opening to the sea being about 2.5 km from the site and the pungent scent of animal manure rather than seaspray enveloping the boats!

MEPA seems to have thrown in the towel about the matter - the planning ruckus that has evolved over the years at the site, testified by the 19 enforcement notices issued by MEPA, seems to have made the Authority buckle since none of these notices were enforced (excuse the pun) and some illegal developments were even sanctioned.

Nature Trust (Malta) is buoyed by the phenomenon of increasing public involvement in land use issues in this country, as emulated in the Tal-Wej and Lija Elderly People's Home cases.

This time it was the turn of the Tal-Budaqq Residents and Owners Association to voice its opposition to the current proposals.

Further down the same valley, Burmarrad seems to have been uncannily earmarked for rampant development to the detriment of its once tranquil nature due to it being an unfortunate gateway to Bugibba and Qawra.

Much hailed road works have played havoc with roadside trees on site, exposing for the umpteenth time the lack of respect for trees fostered by our road contractors. Isn't it time for contracts to be awarded on such merits as green credentials?

People living in Zabbar and Fgura certainly endorse such a proposal since the newly-opened road there has been completely denuded of trees. One can only augur that the rustic nature of Burmarrad is not further blown to smithereens by the permitted expansion of incompatible activities in place, such as truck storage activities and supermarkets or the further mushrooming of building areas towards Wardija.

Comino was once again in the limelight last month where we witnessed a somewhat indecorous tirade by the head of Captain Morgan Cruises in response to the welcome removal of some concrete jetties on the small island.

The tirade can be branded as ridiculous for several reasons, namely that no mention was made of the fact that Comino is a nature reserve, that such concrete jetties were illegal besides being an eyesore, that the jetties in question did not even belong to Captain Morgan Cruises but to one of its competitors and, most hilarious of all, that the tirade included a stern warning that if MEPA proceeded in the demolition of such jetties the company would have to sack its 80 employees (what's this about financially blackmailing our authorities on election eve?).

What the tirade did not include was mention of the deplorable sea pollution, in the form of diesel and oil, generated by such cruises, especially in the Sliema and Harbour creeks. Also, incredibly the fact that the same company failed to clear for many years the metal remains of a

submarine it used to operate in the late Eighties and early Nineties (an enterprise doomed to failure) from the mall at Cirkewwa.

Back then, the company's stalwart has again clamoured to be given a permit for such a submarine operation, only to leave its eyesore remains high and dry on land once its heyday had passed. One can only augur that MEPA does not buckle under pressure from such diehards and proceeds in such a laudable demolition - I can't envisage any problem to visitors to the island swimming the short distance to the beach on Comino from the boat moorings; after all, many protected beaches on islands, such as Sardinia for example (in the Archipelago della Madalena), prevent complete access to such beaches.

One of the last idyllic valleys in the Maltese Islands - that of San Blas in Gozo - was once again in the limelight where Nature Trust urged MEPA to refute outright a development application for a dwelling right in the middle of the valley.

This application is adding insult to injury as an enforcement notice to rectify the destruction of part of the watercourse with a concrete pathway leading nowhere has not yet been respected in the same valley.

Nature Trust also urged the Maltese government to stick to its guns in striving to obtain a derogation from the EU on plastic bottles whereby it is requesting that our soft drinks are bottled in glass bottles, rather than plastic ones as requested by the EU, thus sparing our landfills the 80 million or so plastic bottles otherwise generated every year.

## **Silver linings**

August witnessed the ground-breaking stance taken by our bishops in their green Sunday pastoral, read in our churches before Santa Marija. Our bishops should be commended for finally realising that safeguarding the environment should top the priorities list for a Catholic, contrary to the bygone days of bridling and exploiting nature in the name of progress to the tune of "Go forth and multiply" and that the Church has to play a leading role in drumming in this message.

The Bishops did not refrain from mentioning some controversial issues in our country, such as green-related corruption, as well as hunting, animal cruelty, over-development and, in a not-so-subtle way, the course hot potato. Nature Trust augurs that this was only the tip of the iceberg in what surely must be a more active role played by Church authorities in environment-related issues.

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