

GHASRI PAINTING

Following the restoration of Ghasri's titular painting, Dr AARON ATTARD HILI looks back at the origins of the parish and this important painting.

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Josie Muscat's party launched

AZZJONI NAZZJONALI (AN), a new right wing political party, was officially launched yesterday pledging to "clean up" Malta of dirt, corruption and migrants.

Steered by former Nationalist MP Josie Muscat, property developer Anglu Xuereb and university lecturer Philip Beattie, the new party announced at its first public meeting, held at Le Méridien Phoenicia yesterday morning, that it would be contesting the next election.

Dr Muscat, a medical doctor and owner of private hospitals, who is AN's nominal head, called for a change in the political system, which he said had been hijacked by the two vote-catching political parties who completely disregarded the people.

In an emotionally charged oration delivered in the fashion of a seasoned politician, Dr Muscat laid out the party's vision of restoring the traditional values of patriotism, the family and justice. *Azzjoni Nazzjonali* wants to give more powers to an elected President of the Republic so as to ensure public accountability in the country's institutions.

The party is hoping to garner support from disgruntled voters, and is appealing to people whom it claimed have been "set aside" by the two main political parties.

It is expected to push to outlaw underhand political party funding, reduce the number of ministers and members of parliament, streamlining local councils into five regional

by Massimo Farrugia

councils. Dr Muscat said the party wanted to allow illegal migrants to stay in the country for only one month, after which they should be sent to other countries.

The 200-strong mostly male audience attending the meeting was greeted by triumphalist music on the style of the 1957 film *The Bridge on the River Kwai*.

On the stage was a large billboard depicting *Azzjoni Nazzjonali*'s emblem: with the letters AN in the middle of red and blue semi-circles intentionally recalling the political baggage associated with both colours.

The slogan (sovereignty, seriousness and justice) *Sovranità, Serjeta, Gustizzja* beneath the logo reiterated the party's principles.

Large flags with the AN emblem hung from the ballroom's gold-coloured balconies and were unfolded as the event started. Red, blue and white balloons hung from each balcony, with the same colours reflected in flower decorations beneath the stage.

The 19th century tune of *Bohero* by self-declared atheist Maurice Ravel was played as the speakers took their places on a table set up in front of the stage's proscenium arch, although this was hardly the most appropriate piece to open the meeting of a party claiming to revive Malta's Christian values.

Addressing the audience, Dr Muscat said it was unacceptable that people who did not work and abused the social services system were becoming burdens on those who worked hard to earn a living. By giving handouts to single parents and people on the dole, for example, the state was encouraging people to be lazy and to abuse alcohol and drugs.

He claimed that people were being discouraged from getting married and family values, which was fundamental for society, were being eroded, adding that it was worrying that a third of Maltese were marrying foreigners.

He emphasised that the problem of illegal immigration – both of people



DR JOSIE MUSCAT is applauded by Anglu Xuereb and Philip Beattie at the launch of the new political party yesterday. (Photo: Noel Bartolo)

reaching the country on boats and those arriving with a regular visa and overstaying – was acute due to Malta's size and dense population.

He said Malta joined the European Union to be helped, not just to contribute financially and to be scolded for killing birds.

As the government gave out public funds for the welfare of migrants, people with special needs were disregarded he asserted. "If we are not careful, they will overcome us and in 50 years' time we will not be in control of our country any longer," he declared.

Dr Muscat said injustice was the main reason for the people's disgruntlement: "Those who are not part of the *Gomorra* have to wait for months to get a hospital appointment and will have their projects stalled for years awaiting the Malta Environment and Planning Authority's approval."

He said *Azzjoni Nazzjonali* wanted to respond to a number of failures in education, the "stinking" judicial system, and the environment.

Mr Beattie, a former member of the right-wing *Alleanza Nazzjonali Repubblicana* group, said he believes that "the natural and

Christian order is fundamental to achieve genuine progress", adding that the new party was introducing new ideas at a time when the two main political parties of Malta were stagnant. He asserted that there was practically no longer any ideological distinction between the PN and MLP, and that the interests of entire strata of people were either not being represented or was under-represented in Parliament.

"The moral aspect cannot be divorced from politics," he declared, emphasising the need for a political formation that stressed morality.

The party should consider endorsing a number of "non-negotiable" principles, such as the right to human life, the safeguarding of the traditional family format, the right to private property and free initiative, as well as the preservation of Malta's traditional hobbies (*delizzji*).

Developer Anglu Xuereb called the new party's agenda "radical but just".

The former Naxxar mayor, whose relationship with the Nationalist Party soured after he refused to contest the local election on the PN ticket, said the big parties were engaged

in a race for votes that blurred their visions. He claimed that their only interest was to achieve power in elections and hold on to it from one legislature to the next.

He asserted that the political parties were in need of more money to run their organisations and their media, and this had created a system of underhand financing by interests which in turn expected to be repaid in the form of favours.

Mr Xuereb said he would seek to curtail overspending in public projects, use EU funds more efficiently, radically change the public transport system, improve roads, give more attention to aesthetics in architecture and ensure quality developments that are carried out "with the least possible inconvenience to people living in the vicinity".

He claimed that the authorities botched his proposed Verdala golf course after years of expensive studies, and he criticised MEPA's lack of transparency.

Mr Xuereb said, "I can carry out proposals that I have put forward over the past 18 years but that the government has discarded because it lacked courage to take decisions."

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