

Leading contractor on how to revive construction industry

By a Staff Reporter

Leading contractor and hotelier Mr Angelo Xuereb feels that a revolution in quarrying and construction methods is needed to bring new life to the industry in Malta.

Today, at the start of the nineties, he says, the construction industry in Malta "looks ahead with weariness". It is facing a serious labour shortage and unless the root causes of the problem are tackled, the trade will continue to decline.

Mr Xuereb, as managing director of Angelo Xuereb Ltd, writes in *Industry Today*, journal of the Federation of Industry, that despite the high level of wages and salaries in the construction sector, the number of employees in it is on the decline, as young people opt for cleaner, less strenuous jobs.

TRAINING SET-UP

Not only is there a shortage of labourers and stone masons, the industry also lacks specialised middle management and foremen. The fault, he writes, seems to lie in the absence of any central training institution.

But, Mr Xuereb adds, a proper training set-up is not the only element needed to revive the construction industry in Malta. Introducing modern quarrying and construction methods would go a long way towards improving efficiency and productivity.

Building stone blocks need to be cut to a smaller size, making them easier to handle. In the quarries where they are cut, the blocks should be neatly stacked and strapped onto pallets, and lifted out by means of a gantry crane, and loaded on trailers or trucks. This would eliminate the danger for truck drivers who have to go down to the quarries, and then, fully laden, back up to road level, he



writes.

The main advantage of transporting building stone on pallets would be, however, the possibility of unloading it at the building site by a crane, rather than tipping it down from the trucks. That would eliminate chipping and breakage of stone blocks, the need to re-dress them and the resulting dust.

Mr Xuereb does not indicate in his article if his suggestions would make building stone more expensive.

Promoting a less dusty environment, he suggests the use of jumbo bags for the transportation of stone dust (*xahx*), and sand. It would create a cleaner, more dust-free environment on building sites, he writes, and would also mean easier clearing up of the area on com-

pletion of the building works.

To enhance the workers' safety and reduce stress-related ailments a simple mechanical platform could be used for the elevation of stone slabs up to the required level. Another innovation is the use of prefabricated concrete structures, enabling faster completion of large buildings.

NEED OF LICENCE FOR CONTRACTORS

Mr Xuereb writes that one needs to have a licence to act as a peanut vendor in Malta, but to be a building contractor no licence is required. A group of persons without the necessary equipment

or experience could tender for large construction projects and the situation encourages sub-standard workmanship.

A classification system would ensure that projects are undertaken by suitable contractors.

Mr Xuereb says government contract conditions also need to be brought up to date. They were formulated 40 years ago and are heavily weighted in favour of the government. The FOI's recently-formed building contractors committee, he adds, is in the process of discussing with the authorities the possibility of introducing a revised set of conditions of contract for government projects.