



Divorce

Labour 'open' to holding a referendum

Christian Peregrin

The Labour Party is open to a referendum on divorce, saying yesterday it would consider "all options" when it came to the way the decision was to be made.

However, according to a party spokesman, the way to introduce divorce was a "secondary issue". "What is more important is that, irrespective of the forum where the decision is taken, rather than a vague 'yes' or 'no', the debate should be an informed one on specific legislation," the spokesman told *The Times*.

Labour, the spokesman said, felt the debate should focus on "the type of divorce legislation to be introduced", and ensure it protected the interests of the parties involved, primarily the interests of children.

A survey published in *The Sunday Times* last week found that 49 per cent of respondents would vote in favour of divorce while 45 per cent would vote against and 11 per cent were undecided.

It also found that only 18 per cent wanted the decision to be postponed until after the next election, and that 58 per cent wanted to have their say through a referendum.

So far, Labour leader Joseph Muscat has promised to propose a Private Member's Bill once

elected Prime Minister. He also assured his MPs - including some who oppose divorce - he would give them a free vote.

He later reiterated this position when Nationalist MP Jeffrey Pullicino Orlando pulled the divorce rug from under his feet by proposing his own Bill last month and demanded it be discussed by January.

De Pullicino Orlando later called for the finalised Bill to be submitted to the electorate after a parliamentary discussion so it can be endorsed in a referendum.

The Prime Minister, Lawrence Gonzi, has expressed a preference for letting "the people" decide the issue, although he has not specified whether that would be through a referendum or a general election.

The Nationalist Party has since begun internal discussions to come up with its stance but Labour has so far remained quiet on the issue, saying only that it should be discussed freely.

Asked if the party should rethink its position and come up with a cohesive policy in light of the recent developments, the spokesman said there was "no reason" for any rethink.

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Vlada Kravchenko. Photo: Chris Sant Fenech

Paralysed gymnast Vlada stands again

Christian Peregrin

Two years ago, Vlada Kravchenko was told she would never walk again. But after two sessions of stem cell treatment, her nerves are regenerating rapidly and, with a little help, she can already stand up and take small steps.

"It's very exciting. I feel like running. But I need a lot of training and the doctors told me to take it slowly because I could hurt myself," the former gymnast and aspiring model adds.

Ms Kravchenko, now 19, suffered a spinal cord injury after a lighting structure fell on her during a party in September 2008, leaving her wheelchair bound but

determined to dance again one day.

Her former physiotherapist Matthew Krasopolski described her improvement as an unprecedented "fantastic achievement".

"After she was operated on she could barely move alone. Even sitting down on a bed was a struggle."

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Anxiety-reducing drugs: warning about potential danger
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Malt, thyroid, diet for mass
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New hotel in Turkey
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Mid-Med office manager in Sydney charged with fraud

James Calvert

- Representative offices investigated in connection with tax evasion
- Two clients under "close examination"

Mid-Med Bank's Sydney office manager has been charged with fraud by the National Crime Authority of Australia following an 18-month investigation.

And the bank's Australian representative offices have also been investigated in connection with tax evasion.

The Sydney manager, whose name could not, under Australian law, be revealed by the National Crime Authority, was charged with conspiring to defraud the Commonwealth under the Commonwealth Criminal Act.

Now the manager, currently on bail, will appear before Parramatta magistrates court on August 22.

The NCA's investigation identified a pattern of deposits of less than \$10,000 in cash which were made apparently to avoid report-

ing requirements of the Financial Transactions Reports Act.

When contacted by *The Times*, a spokesman for the NCA said he was under instructions not to reveal the name of the bank involved.

However, contacts in Australia confirmed it was Mid-Med's representative office in Sydney that had been under investigation.

An NCA statement said the first phase of their investigation examined deposits of less than \$10,000 in cash in South East Queensland.

This showed a pattern indicative of "smurfing" - deliberately avoiding the requirements of the Financial Transactions Reports

Act to report deposits of cash over \$10,000, the statement said.

In one instance, a person appeared to make 25 separate deposits of \$8,000 at 10 separate branches of the Australian bank managing the foreign bank's accounts in suburbs in Brisbane on the same day.

While the first investigation was being carried out, a second was underway into Mid-Med's other representative offices in Australia.

This investigation allegedly showed that Mid-Med staff in the office had developed a system which enabled the bank's Australian clients to avoid Australian tax liability.

Under this system clients would deposit up to \$10,000 in cash anonymously. The money was then transferred to Mid-Med office elsewhere.

"Also it can be exploited by those seeking to launder money from criminal activity," the NCA statement said.

This second investigation was carried out by the NCA in conjunction with the Australian Taxation Office, the Reserve Bank and Ausnet.

A spokesman for Mid-Med's Head Office in Malta said they are "actively following the situation" in Australia.

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Show of force

A man fired five shots in the air outside his family's house yesterday after his parents stopped him from seeing her.

Police sources said the 19-year-old from Zabbar went to see his girlfriend but had an argument with her parents because they would not let him see her.

The sources said the parents had not approved the couple's plans to marry.

The man went home, got a shotgun, and fired the shots outside the Robert parent's door.

Police said the man had no intention to harm the couple but it "was just a show of force".

The incident happened in Zabbar, August 11, around 11:30 a.m.

The man is expected to be arraigned in court today.

World Assembly of Families to be held in Malta

Ruth Buttigieg

The sixth triennial World Assembly of Families aimed at highlighting world health, social integration and poverty will be held in Malta between August 29 and September 3.

"Towards a global vision: visions for the journey" is the main theme of the assembly organised by the International Confederation of Christian Family Movements.

About 500 couples from 50 countries are expected to take part in this year's event to discuss a variety of issues ranging from AIDS, families and environment to social integration, racism and tribalism.

Anthony and Lily Gaudi, chairing the local organising committee of the assembly, said the topics chosen for discussion relate to the family in a local and global context.

Fr Anton Gauder, Pastoral Secretary, said it was significant Malta was hosting this year's assembly because the Maltese

family served as a model of the Christian family.

Mr Charles Vella, founder of the Casa Movement, will be one of the speakers at the assembly.

Mr Vella believes the family should be open to others' needs and cover based on individualism.

"The family of the future has to be an open family for it to survive," Mr Vella said.

ICCFM represents a network of family support groups set up throughout the world over the past 50 years.

The Malta six-day assembly will include discussions, workshops, cultural tours and an "experience experience" when delegates will be taken to St Paul's Grotto and a centre of the Casa Movement in Rabat, Dar tal-Previdenza, San Blas rehabilitation centre and the Unusville Centre in Gwardamanig.

Application forms for the event may be obtained from the Casa Movement, Catholic Institute, Floriana.

60 die in Salvador plane crash

At least 60 people were killed when a Guatemalan jet crashed into a volcano in driving rain in central El Salvador, Avianca airline said yesterday.

None of the passengers or crew survived, police said, but it was still unclear how many people were aboard the Boeing 737 that crashed on route from Miami, Florida, to San Jose, Costa Rica.

The victims include several US citizens, Europeans and a Korean, but most were Latin Americans from Central America and Mexico, said Jose Maria Gomez, a National Civil Police inspector in the central city of San Vicente, near the crash site.

A Reuters photographer at the scene said broken bits of fuselage littered the remote hamlet on the flanks of the Chichontepec volcano, some 90 km from the capital San Salvador. Police, who cordoned off the crash site to journalists, were carrying out corpses, some of which looked as if they had been torn apart in the crash.

"There's definitely no survivors," Gomez said. Among the dead were the Brazilian ambassador to Nicaragua, Osmar Antonio Moreira, 60, and his wife, Magdalene Graciele de Moura.

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