

NEWSLETTER

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Sustaining youth activism

Recent strikes affecting MCAST and the University of Malta (UoM) elicited varied reactions amongst the student body, but there seemed to be a concerted recourse to direct action; a

walk-out was scheduled at UoM, and multiple demonstrations took place in and around MCAST's campus.

These were not the first of such reactions over recent months. Late last year, the demolition of the sole bookshop in UoM's environs triggered a protest to lament the situation's irony and students' interests being the latest lamb for the slaughter in the country's 'development' drive; it was well organised, well attended, and well covered. A few weeks prior, hundreds of youths – if not thousands – took to Valletta to decry the death of Jean Paul Sofia and the Government's brazen disregard for calls for a public inquiry; youth organisations, including ŽHN, collaborated purposefully to get the youth to turn out.

These examples, of which there are others, suggest to me that a flurry of youth activism has taken root. Organisations have boldly coordinated direct action on contentious issues important to them, and unaffiliated individuals appear to have shown a greater affinity to demonstrating their support with their presence, placards, and noise.

What's changed?

Ex nihilo nihil fit, nothing comes from nothing. If a renaissance is taking place, it is the fruit of youth organisation's work, dedication, and tact. This year's executive team at *Kunsill Studenti Universitarji*, for example, has displayed unprecedented nimbleness, irreverence, and organisational capacity to spur students' causes. The *National Youth Council* (KNŽ) has also been ready to quickly engage youth organisations on hot topics, forging consensus and collaboration through structured discussions. *Moviment Graffiti* and their student wing ought to be lauded for their ever-presence, and their unparalleled capacity to mobilise so quickly and concertedly. There are many others.

The contribution of youth-led communication platforms – including the likes of *FreeHour*, *SideStreet*, and *A Bird's Eye View* – is also significant. These have been instrumental in relaying youth's message, simultaneously demonstrating youth's unparalleled capacity to reach and engage audiences through media. Fresh, young faces at mainstay newsrooms are also significant in thrusting youth causes into the mainstream.

It is also evident that young people are increasingly dissatisfied with the direction our country is headed. Whilst the instances cited above are responses to one-off events, there are clear signs of anger at a system which is defunct and political apparatus far removed from the best interest – the long-term interest – of our country.

If correctly diagnosed, this shift of gear is heartening for our democracy and invaluable for the advancement of youth's role in politics. The question is how to keep moving forward – if we cycle too slow, our bike's bound to topple.

These are our suggestions.

Treat differences with dialogue.

Too many of our forebearers have fallen short in this regard, and we must do better – individually and collectively. Whilst remaining critical, we should make a conscious effort to interact with others with respect, dignity, and patience. Youth platforms praised above bear a large responsibility in this regard, in ensuring that they steer clear of parochialist and sensationalist approaches which some have at times toyed with.

Rebuild organisational identity.

Building on the above, let us rekindle the identity of organisations we form part of – even if they are radical. We should not be afraid of diverging from the rest, and when coupled with a commitment to purposeful dialogue, this will attract members who associate with what we stand for. It is through celebrating our differences – rather than seeking to converge – that everyone can feel at home in youth civil society spaces.

Commit time and resources to the National Youth Council (KNŽ).

A space and structure for collaboration is already well-established; let's make the most of it, to maximise collaboration and amplify impact as far as it is fitting. Even those with reservations should get involved and work towards reform built on consensus.

As ŽHN, we are working towards all these goals. We've hosted many conversations with organisations, industry stakeholders, and Parliamentarians, to share our vision and discuss our divergences. We are reclaiming our history and reaffirming the Movement's ideology through engagement with ex-members and Movements overseas – at which point I cannot but pay tribute to the memory of Piju Spiteri, ex-President of the Movement, who passed away last month. We seek to engage in all KNŽ initiatives and endeavour to contribute whenever called upon.

We continue to rebuild this ŽHN Movement and work towards transforming this reawakening in youth action from a perturbation into a wave of change.

We are committed to being the change we want to see.



Tribute to Piju Spiteri

ŽHN President (1959-1962)

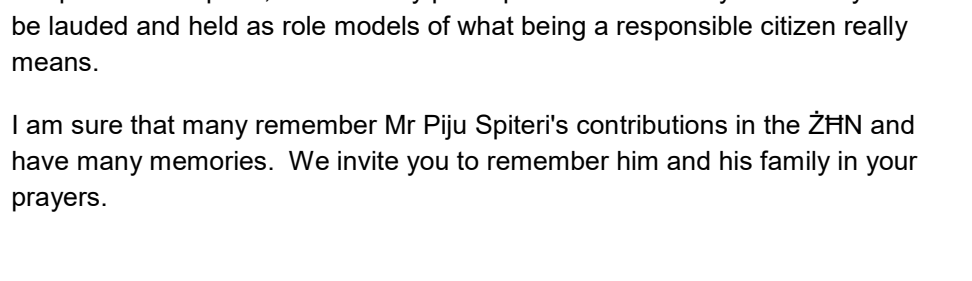
It was with a heavy heart that we learnt of the passing away of Mr Piju Spiteri, president of the ŽHN in the early sixties. Mr Spiteri passed away on the 26th of January 2024 at age 85.

Mr Spiteri contributed significantly to Maltese society in his lifetime, including being an active member of the ŽHN as well as editor for a time to the ŽHN's newspaper 'Il-Fladdiem' (The Worker). During his tenancy as president of the ŽHN he was well respected by those who worked with him and the many members of the movement. He led the movement in a difficult time in our islands, always working to push forward the rights of all workers. Even in his latter days he kept in touch with the movement for which the movement is very grateful.

A member at the time fondly remembers attending one of several events held when Mons. Joseph Cardijn visited Malta. In particular Ms. Borg recounts that in a rally held on the 1st of May 1961 on workers day in front of the Catholic Institute, a rally attended by a large crowd, Mr Piju Spiteri, as the then president of the ŽHN addressed the crowd, followed by Mons Joseph Cardijn.

People like Mr Spiteri, who actively participate in various ways in society are to be lauded and held as role models of what being a responsible citizen really means.

I am sure that many remember Mr Piju Spiteri's contributions in the ŽHN and have many memories. We invite you to remember him and his family in your prayers.



A4U and BeActive Grant ceremony

On 29th January, ŽHN attended Aġenzija Żgħażaġh's A4U and BeActive Grant ceremony. This kickstarts our work towards improving the safety and security of our premises, which is being funded by the Aġenzija Żgħażaġh A4U Scheme.

Young People and Work session

On 31st January, ŽHN held a Young People and Work session following an invitation by ZAK Mosta at their premises. This is the second such session for this group, conducted by Christian Cassar. The well-attended meeting was a good space for a lot of questions by the teenagers present.

Any organisation wishing to have a YPW session for their members, should send an email on zghazaghaddiemansara@gmail.com.