

National

WWII underground Hal Far sickbay restored by ETC

A World War II sickbay, which has been restored by Employment and Training Corporation employees, opened its doors to Prime Minister Lawrence Gonzi and Education Minister Dolores Cristina yesterday morning.

The underground sickbay - a shelter which was used to treat the wounded - is located within ETC premises in Hal Far and was restored and researched by the workers during their free time.

The workers gathered vintage uniforms, old photographs and model airplanes to do up the previous makeshift hospital. It will open its doors to the public in October, when it will be managed by Heritage Malta and the corporation.

Dr Gonzi praised the ETC, which is celebrating its 20th anniversary, for the way it addressed the economic crisis last year, training workers in different skills. He said this was the "true test".

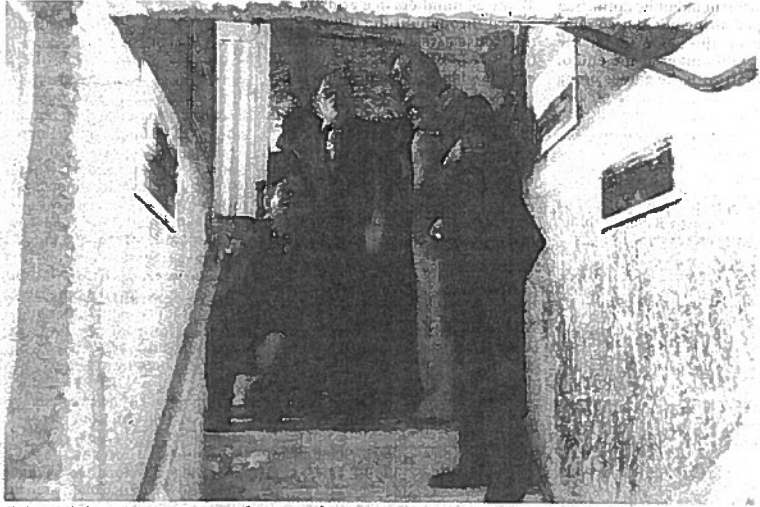
Accompanied by Parliamentary Assistant Franco Debono, Dr

Gonzi and Mrs Cristina were shown around classrooms and workshops where people are taught different skills.

Mrs Cristina said the corporation planned more changes which would see more long-term unemployed engaged in community services and earning up to 75 per cent of the minimum wage by working 30 hours per week in the community.

Meanwhile, several vintage cars gathered outside the entrance of the corporation's headquarters yesterday to commemorate the event, and Dr Gonzi beamingly posed by a vintage MG after a proud car owner asked him to take a picture beside him and his car, pointing out that they would put it on the front page of the Old Motor's Club magazine.

ETC workers who had served for over 15 years with the cooperation were presented with a certificate by the Prime Minister.



Prime Minister Lawrence Gonzi (squatting) being shown around the sickbay, yesterday.

Verbal sexual harassment perpetrator 'deserved stiffer penalty' - Cristina

Equality commission 'riding the wave' to launch another campaign

Nikki Abela Mercieca and Claudia Calleja

Employment Minister Dolores Cristina yesterday said she would have liked to see a tougher penalty given to the perpetrator in the first local case of verbal sexual harassment at the workplace.

Following the Industrial Tribunal judgment passed on the case, the man in question got away with a slap on the wrist - a meagre verbal warning from the company and a formal apology to the victim, who left the job about one month after the incident and needed psychiatric help.

Mrs Cristina told The Times the case sent out a very strong message that sexual abuse in all forms was unacceptable, but observed that the final penalty was light in comparison with what the victim had gone through.

The case goes back to November 2007, when Doris Agius attended a board meeting at General Soft Drinks.

She walked into a room with some 20 people there and asked where she would sit, since there was no chair for her, to which Marketing Manager Martin Agius said: why don't you "sit between my legs".

"The story will make people think, not twice, but three times,

before passing such comments which strip people of their dignity", Mrs Cristina commented yesterday.

She said it was made clear that Mrs Bonello's life was touched in the most negative of ways, and hoped that this case would serve to raise awareness about the fact that sexual harassment was unacceptable in all forms at the workplace.

The minister sympathised with the victim, who allegedly faced repetitive harassment from her former colleague, saying that the circumstances made it, "the worst thing that can happen" to someone who was trying to project themselves as a leader among other employees.

She said the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) would be "riding the wave" created by this case to launch another campaign against sexual harassment at work.

NCPE Commissioner Romina Bartolo said she believed several workplaces in Malta were not geared to ensure that women did not suffer from discrimination or sexual harassment.

"The mentality is still that it's a man's world out there. The fact that women's employment rate is low does not encourage the change in mentality that is needed," she said, adding that many still thought it

was alright to act in a harassing way.

She spoke of the need for more assertive women to join the labour market and not be afraid to speak up when something bothered them.

She also believes there is a general lack of awareness among companies and employees on the need for sexual harassment policies.

The law does not force companies to have a policy but since complaints are filed against companies not employees, it paid them to have policies in place, she added.

The NCPE offers training to company management and staff about the matter.

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