

Gonzi challenges Labour: reveal Sargas plant studies

Prime Minister Lawrence Gonzi yesterday challenged the Labour Party to say whether it had studied the environmental impact of the coal-burning Sargas plant it was promoting to reduce electricity bills. Dr Gonzi said the Government had commissioned a...

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Lawrence Gonzi embraces Finance Minister Tonio Fenech at a San Ġwann event yesterday. Photo: Chris Sant Fournier

Prime Minister Lawrence Gonzi yesterday challenged the Labour Party to say whether it had studied the environmental impact of the coal-burning Sargas plant it was promoting to reduce electricity bills.

“ I could lower utility prices overnight –but at what cost? ”

Dr Gonzi said the Government had commissioned a study on the prototype power plant and asked for further analysis on, among others, its environmental impact.

He said the Government was wary of returning to coal, which used to fuel the Marsa power station, causing problems.

Norwegian firm Sargas last November proposed a plant that would run on coal and biomass with modern carbon capture technology, saying it would almost halve the cost of electricity.

While confirming that the Sargas plant would lead to cheaper energy, Dr Gonzi expressed serious doubts on the fuel's environmental impact.

“It is true that coal is cheap and I would be able to lower prices overnight – but at what cost? Returning to coal,” he asked.

Addressing a party event in San Ġwann, Dr Gonzi said Labour was promising everything to everyone but stopped short of explaining where it would get the money to support its election pledges.

“Has Labour suddenly struck oil? Has it unearthed some hidden treasure? If not, how will it fund the many promises it is making?”

“Are Labour’s plans based on the Sargas plant? Had Labour studied the proposal? What meetings were held? What was its position?”

He briefly referred to the November 30 election to choose a PN deputy leader. Contenders Tonio Fenech sat in the front row to Dr Gonzi’s right and Simon Busuttill to his left in the second row.

He thanked both for ensuring the party remained young, energetic and capable of responding to challenges.

Answering questions by youths, Dr Gonzi spoke of the importance given by the PN to investing in education and creating jobs.

He said people knew where they stood with the PN because it had passed the “sternest test” of job creation notwithstanding severe international economic conditions.

The Government believed in assisting the arts and sports and had decided to build a new arts academy in Qormi, a project that was still in its initial stages, he said.

Returning to politics, Dr Gonzi warned people to “be wary of Labour’s promises” because “promises which undermine Malta’s competitiveness will undermine the future of jobs in this country”.

He said that when Labour was in government in 1996, it promised to remove VAT but failed to tell people what would replace it. It then introduced 33 new taxes to make up for the loss in revenue.

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Dr Gonzi said he was confident that, when the time came, people would make the right choices for the country and society.

Reacting to Dr Gonzi’s comments, Labour said the Prime Minister admitted his government had done nothing on the proposals it had in hand for years. Instead, he preferred buying a power station extension “off the Yellow Pages”, which ran on polluting heavy fuel oil.

“It’s a fact: bills can be brought down and these will only be reduced under a new government led by Joseph Muscat,” Labour said.

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