

Sunday, 8 June 2008 – MaltaToday on Sunday

# Parking in Valletta

Anna Mallia

Whoever decided that the CVA parking scheme in Valletta is to be considered as a prototype for all cities in Europe must be the product of two things: he either does not want what the system is all about or that he based his conclusion on the information supplied by the authorities and ignored the stakeholders who ultimately are the commuters.

About two weeks ago a student at University informed me that she was conducting a questionnaire as part of her assignment on the CVA parking scheme. She also explained how the Valletta mayor refused to meet her up to answer her questionnaire. If this is true, I see no reason why the mayor of Valletta chose not to participate in this exercise except that he is not happy with the parking scheme.

There is only one person happy with the scheme: the man behind the CT car park company as he has the monopoly of the situation and during the rush hour it is practically impossible to find a cab to take you from your place of work in Valletta to the car park in Floriana. Even in the morning, the service is a problem. I was told by the cab drivers themselves that before 8am, only two cabs are on duty and so it is very difficult to find a cab before that time from the Floriana car park to take you inside Valletta.

The CT car park company is aware of this but the situation has not changed so that even though we have been made to endure extra costs, we are still not getting a good service. Not only that but it is not the first time that these cabs are low on electricity and a ride from Valletta to Floriana can take you more 20 minutes. Also, in the rush hour it is not the first time that you see two cabs on the charge at the same time as if they charge these cabs at the same time instead of taking it in turns.

Although one positive thing there is, and that is the politeness of the drivers who go out of their way to help you with the things that people like yours truly whose office is in Valletta have to take, be it stationery supplies, files, etc. The GRTU says it is happy with the system and so are tal-Monti: why shouldn't the latter be happy when they can park in Valletta for free?

But Valletta is not only made up of shop owners. There are businessmen who

are also wholesalers, especially those in St Paul Street, whom I pity, watching them load their orders on wheelbarrows and riding it to their vans in Lascaris. These people are not only shop owners but they are also wholesalers, and the CVA system does not address these people although they made representations with the Ministry under Dr Austin Gatt, for all that matters.

For people like myself, parking in Valletta is paying another tax. I am asthmatic and I do not have the strength to walk from my office to the car park with files and the lot everyday. Nor do I afford to waste one hour daily entering and leaving Valletta on foot. At the same time I cannot afford €6.29c a day on parking. But it seems that many people can afford this because whoever said that the measure was intended to reduce car emissions did not know what he was talking about. Traffic in Valletta has increased thanks to the CVA parking scheme and if Europe is looking at this scheme as a prototype to be copied by other European cities, it must take into account that this scheme does not qualify as a prototype for environmental awareness for sure.

Besides the CT car park company, the mayor of Valletta, Minister Austin Gatt and tal-Monti hawkers, there are also our members of parliament who are happy with the system. They shut their mouth and sold their soul for free parking in Valletta. Once they do not know what it is like to walk, rain or shine, in and out of Valletta everyday and sometimes more than once a day, they do not even dare to ask why the scheme is affecting the commuters and the residents of Valletta. May I invite them to walk out of Valletta in the scorching sun this summer or in the wet and windy winter days in order to have an inkling of what we have to go through.

We have a Consumer Department whose role is to protect the consumers. Still I do not understand why this department does not query the billing method used by the CVA system. If your car is in Valletta for 31 minutes, you have the first 30 minutes free but then you are made to pay for one hour for that minute.

Now of course you can tell me that this is only fair, but I can assure you that you will have second thoughts when you stay in Valletta for 3 or 4 or 5 hours or more and you are charged for one hour for that extra minute or extra thirty minutes. Why shouldn't the second and subsequent hours be charged according to the time consumed and not by the hour?

This is theft and if the Minister is happy that the CVA Technology Company is making a lot of money we are not. Had these taxes been injected for the embellishment of Valletta, we might have closed an eye but all this money is

purely going to a purely speculative company whose only job is to install the cameras and stay spying on us and charge us for doing the spying. At the end, this is what it all boils down to.

Not only that, but the least this company can do is to coat the colours of the parking spaces once again as most of them have faded and that poor driver is being booked for parking in a green space which has faded so much that there is nothing green in it anymore except the fine.

Neither can I understand why the CT cabs have passed the health and safety test when they are such a hazard to the passengers as there they have no support in case of an accident except that flimsy seat belt which does not serve its purpose at all.

The scheme is here to stay. My feet are not here to stay. The only solution is to park in Valletta and bear the brunt, but we cannot accept the present situation when hawkers and members of parliament continue to be exempt from paying for parking in Valletta. If their work takes them to Valletta, so does mine!

---