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LORNA VASSALLO

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Your money but not you

The Red Cross volunteers' protest outside their quarters has momentarily drawn the public's attention to the credibility of philanthropic institutions in Malta. However, the cry was suddenly hushed up by the media and no outcomes were further reported.

It has come to my knowledge that, at least in the case of a particular organisation, some of the funds collected in aid of victims of natural calamities were retained to pay the wages of a full-time employee.

Philanthropic institutions appeal for our mercy daily on TV and at our doors. They collect record sums of money which would later be at their disposal for charitable aims. Political parties have, throughout the years, gone into the same habit of collecting money that should be spent to uphold their political principles and to run the parties.

This seems to be working much more than any other technique of collecting money. However, when philanthropic organisations do not publish their accounts at the end of the year, or when they turn away volunteers, the situation starts getting suspicious. When they exclude people, or when they serve as a showcase for "exhibitionists" they start losing their scope.

Sometimes membership of such organisations leads to success in a political career. At other times, the work of members of philanthropic societies or NGO's overlaps too much on that carried out by members of political parties or local councils. And, at the end of the day, you'll realise that some people do manage to don saintly attire and work their way to very terrestrial positions of power and/or of wealth.

But all money donors should remember the subtle but very important distinction between their money and themselves. The idea is one that runs parallel to what could be said during election time – they care much more for your vote than for you.

All organisations and parties have hierarchies. And hierarchies have leaders and followers. This is something dictated by nature as most people prefer to be followers. In the same way, any organisation has active or passive members. And a number of other people prefer to stay out of the whole affair. This is how structures in any civilised society are formed.

However, when the freedom of a person to associate himself to any organisation, party etc and to be active in it is stifled, especially if this impediment is created by the leaders who should act to enlarge the number of members, then the genuineness of a philanthropic or political society or organisation is put into question.

I myself have given and still give hundreds of liri to charitable purposes. And everybody accepts my money. It was only this year that I dared to move closer to this noble cause and planned to go to Africa on missionary work. After a long time of having attended regular meetings and started being active, I was told I could not go. The persons involved said they had prayed for hours to decide upon my case. It seemed too embarrassing after all the work I had done and the money I had given along the years. Yet, both me and my help were rejected although my money never was!

What had actually happened was that, due to my contacts, I had gathered quite a group of people working on part of a project that would have helped collect more money.

By the time my participation was refused, I and other people that worked with me had given services and incurred expenses that a court of law would have quantified at over Lm500, one of the reasons being the fact that everything was done professionally.

What came out so clearly was, however, that whoever worked with me on my part of the project was also rejected and the work s/he was offering freely was also rejected. Eventually the whole project was rejected – after being finished. In all, there were five more people who worked with me and all were given the cold shoulder when it was too late.

It was obvious that I was becoming too active for somebody's likings. Only some people can enjoy the benefit of being active members. Others will be dumped as soon as they start acquiring some importance.

This case of my refusal as volunteer is still being dealt with in the right way; however it does seem to indicate that something does not allow me to be active in the philanthropic field. Coincidentally, I started tracing down the members of the group and found some interesting curiosities. An evident pattern emerged which I will be speaking about eventually.

Money is the most exchangeable of goods. It can be changed into anything once handed over. Money is usually accepted no matter how unwelcome the source is.

Voluntary work is another thing. As to volunteers – you have to accept the whole person. And a lot of people leading societies, organisations, funds and political parties would dump you as soon as you start getting closer – either because you're too bad or because you're too good.

Don't worry, everybody will accept your money but not everybody will accept you. The next time you're asked for money, look the one asking for it in the eyes and see whether his charitable purposes are just charitable or whether there may also be some "exhibitionist" tendencies, especially originating from non-religious motivations.

I will definitely have to change my channels to funding the hunger in Africa from this year on. The pity is, I do really want to get to those people and help them.