

MALTA FIRST AND FOREMOST

THE LABOUR PARTY REAFFIRMS ITS FAITH

In all our actions we take our inspiration from the teachings of Our Lord Jesus Christ, as propounded by the Roman Catholic Church. In our relations with the British Government we are guided by the belief that all men are born free and equal; that all men are God's children. For the smooth and friendly cooperation between employers and employees, between rich and poor, we shall continue to apply the Christian tenets of the *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno*.

Conditions in Europe and Malta

Peace has given Great Britain social security, full employment and all the benefits of a Welfare State. On most countries of Europe she has bestowed the gifts of comparative prosperity and inspired their peoples with hopes of a decent life in the years to come. Five years of peace have brought Malta uncomfortably near to prolonged agony. Our national existence as a hardworking and peace-loving community is in immediate peril.

Increased taxation and the introduction of new direct taxes have not stemmed the tide of unemployment and national bankruptcy. Decades of Crown Colony neglect and stagnation have accentuated the havoc wrought by war; two years of strenuous effort on our part have brought into greater relief the impossibility of achieving economic viability and financial stability without outside assistance. In this predicament we have not been alone; all the countries of Europe, including Great Britain, faced a crisis of similar magnitude at the end of hostilities. They have been able to pull through with American aid (Marshall Aid).

Futile Negotiations

In June 1949 Malta's Labour Government laid before Great Britain the adverse impact on our people's standard of living by the discontinuance of the British Government's food subsidy, the sudden drop in employment with the Services, and the general tendency to decrease appreciably the flow of sterling into these Islands. Our lives lacked stability not only by the emergence of a dollar shortage but also by a huge yearly sterling deficit (nearly 23% of the total annual sum of sterling earned by the Islanders).

Not unreasonably the Government of Malta inquired why the counterpart funds of Marshall Aid were being retained entirely by the British Government and Malta was only being allowed her due share of dollars against payment of sterling. In simpler words our people were anxious to learn the moral justification for ignoring Malta in Europe's scramble for rehabilitation. Singularly unenviable was Malta's situation: a loyal, bankrupt Island, surrounded by ex-enemy countries generously irrigated by a continuous stream of American dollars. Even more infuriating was her helplessness: a sham self-government lays upon her leaders the burden of economic deterioration and simultaneously makes it illegal for them to participate in any international or Commonwealth treaty. Whatever the hardships on the people, Malta's leaders are barred by law from running counter to the ways of Whitehall.

Three months of patient and painstaking negotiations were crowned by refusals. Whitehall would not accept responsibility for Malta's economic mess. The Islanders had "self-government" and it was therefore unconstitutional for the British Government to revert to the previous level of employment, to subsidise its workers with cheaper food and to worry unduly with figures and deficits. Marshall Aid was "a method of buying and selling" (the Secretary of State's literal definition) and far too complicated for any one person to sort out its ins and outs. Britain's welfare state was built after half a century of toil and martyrdom; the people of Malta should not expect to reach such heights overnight.

In August of the same year Malta's Cabinet decided to end the deadlock by inducing the British Government to face realities. In a signed statement Malta's Labour Ministers made clear their intentions to go back to the people and ask for their support in an attempt to have removed the legal barriers presented by an illiberal Constitution. The plan was simple. The people would be asked to endorse an amendment to the Constitution and Malta would then follow in Britain's footsteps. She would make a direct approach to the U.S.A. and, not unlike Britain, promise naval bases in exchange for economic aid.

Boffa's Betrayal

Barely 48 hours after signing this statement the Prime Minister, Dr Boffa, and five of his colleagues lost heart. The risk of losing office carried more weight than their fears of economic depression. Dr. Boffa promptly declared "non existent" the signed statement and went over the heads of the other two delegates in London. and decided to revert to the path of "moderation" and appeal once more to the good heart of the bureaucrats in Whitehall. He promised the people of Malta he would resign if he should return empty handed.

Whitehall was unmoved. The economic picture drawn by the Malta Delegation was blurred and inelaborate! Britain's Chancellor of the Exchequer was bent on cutting down the Defence Estimates. Malta was also deriving benefits from Marshall Aid, even though the dollars were against payment. The Government of Malta had magnified their difficulties and would be well advised to engage the services of an economic and financial expert.

To cover the shame of the London fiasco Dr Boffa and Malta's Minister of Finance suddenly became aware of the non-existence in these Islands of an economic and financial crisis. They asserted categorically in Malta's Parliament that the People of Malta would stand in need of assistance in 1954, after the exhaustion of the War Damage Fund. Following close on this assertion came the bombshell of devaluation. By a stroke of Cripps' pen Malta's cost of her yearly 8,000,000 dollars import of essential commodities was increased by 25 % and her sterling deficit inflated accordingly. As a counter measure to the anti-Malta policy of its erstwhile leader, the General Conference of the Malta Labour Party in October of the same year passed a vote of non-confidence in Dr Boffa and expelled the Minister of Finance.

Schuster's Recommendations

In May 1950 Malta was honoured by a flying visit from the financial expert Sir George Schuster. His hurried findings vindicated the Malta Labour Party's vociferous claim for immediate assistance. His analysis of local conditions was unbiased. He stressed the deplorable state of our public utility services, the lack of facilities for education, whether technical or otherwise, the insufficient accomodation in our hospitals, the absence of decent port facilities and the supreme need of developing new industries for the absorption of redundant workers in Imperial employment. Above all he confirmed our present bankruptcy - "...an adverse balance of payments which is of the order of £3,000,000 a year, despite annual drawings of over £2 million from the

War Damage Trust Fund." - and he never minced his words in blaming the former Crown Colony Governments for our present impasse.

We are in agreement with his diagnosis. To put it more frankly his diagnosis of May 1950 bears out ours of the previous year. We do not believe his prescription to be the right one for the patient. With the present rate of Government and national spending, Malta is already weak in social services, her workers are poorly paid, their food is inadequate and their social life not very dissimilar from that of Englishmen of 50 years ago. By cutting down National and Government Expenditure Malta's already low standard of living will reach a level below what is enjoyed by any civilized community. By accepting the offer of a yearly subsidy of £300,000 for a five-year period on condition of lowering her standard of living and forsaking her claim for Marshall Aid. Malta is not being refunded the financial loss suffered through devaluation much less helped to solve the crisis.

Malta's right for immediate assistance has been admitted by Sir George Schuster in the following words: "The broad ground on which I consider that Malta can legitimately ask for some financial help at present is that the effects of the war and post-war years have meant much more than the mere physical destruction of buildings. They have left many difficult readjustments to be made as well as heavy accumulated arrears of tasks interrupted by the exigencies of war and its aftermath. As a result the era of responsible government started at a most difficult time, and I consider there is full justification for requesting some help to enable your Government to get through the period of readjustment. This is closely analogous to the ground on which the United States based the plan of "Marshall Aid" for the purpose of helping European recovery. It is just this kind of aid which I think Malta can honourably seek".

Where We Disagree

Notwithstanding these brave words Sir George recommended the immediate curtailment of food subsidies, the imposition of additional taxation and the cutting down of recurring and Extraordinary Works Expenditure. He confined assistance to the needs of capital investments and ruled out the liability of the British Government to aid Malta financially in her day to day requirements until such time when the Island becomes viable or solvent.

On the basis of his recommendations the Boffa Government signed an agreement with the Secretary of State for the Colonies whereby Malta would receive the meagre assistance of £300,000 annually for five years, provided the people were willing to lower their standard of life. In simpler terms provided we are willing to be satisfied with a higher cost of living at ruling wages, provided we agree to put up with illiteracy and increased unemployment for an indefinite period. No figures can express the human sufferings envisaged in this course of action. As a rough guide to English residents on these Islands we restrict ourselves to the comparison of wages of our workers with their counterparts in Great Britain - roughly one-half - and to the £2. 14s. yearly cost per person of Government food subsidies in these Islands as compared to £8 per person per annum in the United Kingdom. To dispel all illusions it is important to keep in mind the unpalatable fact that the intrinsic (less duties) cost of commodities in Malta is higher than in Great Britain. Add on to this an unknown number of unemployed males together with over 35,000 unemployed females and an idea may be gleaned of what life would be like on these Islands if we were to follow the Schuster plan and agree to a further lowering of our abnormally low living standards.

Cost Of Bread To Be Decreased

These considerations led the Malta Labour Party to repudiate the Boffa-Secretary of State agreement and in

particular to define as un-Christian the Boffa Government's decision to increase the price of bread by id. per rotolo. Whatever the results the Malta Labour Party is irrevocably committed to restore the price of bread to the pre-June level, it seems to us immoral, at a time when money in circulation is getting shorter and shorter, to place beyond the reach of the poorer families their only staple food. There is no reason why they should be penalised as a result of the British Government's policy to sell more goods in the dollar markets.

The Fight Against Communism

Indeed, Britain's assistance would be honestly considered analogous to Marshall Aid if, as in the case of the European Recovery Programmes, it were made to cover (a) Capital Investments for future viability (b) the maintenance and improvement of the present social and educational conditions. The former has been admitted in the Schuster Report; the latter has been conveniently forgotten.

We are proud of being Europeans and like all free Europeans we are determined to fight Communism. The best way of sealing these Islands against Communist infiltration is to improve forthwith the people's standard of living.

It is therefore important for us to take stock of local resources and to explain in concise terms what we mean by the assistance we have a right to demand.

In an acceptable Aid Programme Capital Investments should take the shape of :-

- 1) provision of water for domestic and agricultural purposes;
- 2) installation of a new Power Station capable of generating electric current at a cheap rate. It is futile to hope for the development of new industries unless this urgent need is satisfied;
- (3) encouragement of new light industries. Special arrangements must be made to furnish Malta's industries with foreign markets. In a small Island with a tiny local market industrialization presupposes the facility to compete with foreign manufacture. To cut across customs barriers all manufacturing countries resort to the device of bilateral and multilateral trade agreements besides adhering to agreements incorporated in scientific regional planning. But Malta's Constitution does not allow room for any of these measures and the vicious circle may be broken either by reshaping the Constitution in such a way as to make it legal for the people of Malta to trade and barter on a collective basis or else by Great Britain herself providing the markets of which we are in need. The rate of Malta's annual imports from the United Kingdom is of the order of £8 millions;
- (4) port dredging and the installation of harbour equipment. The number of our port labourers is dwindling annually through the lack of entrepot trade;
- (5) the launching of an adequate apprenticeship scheme coupled with the institution of technical colleges. Technical colleges in Turin mirror the Italian Government's efforts to catch up with industrialization in England and Germany. They present a pattern which we could follow to our profit;
- (6) greater assistance in our efforts to speed up emigration if the target of an optimum population of 250,000 is ever to be reached. Any rational emigration scheme should include counter measures to make up for the depletion of our poor stock of skilled workers;
- (7) provision of large fishing boats and construction of slip-ways;
- (8) enticement of tourists by modernizing our highways, developing our beaches and advertising Malta in

other countries. Marshall Aid allocates Italy a yearly sum of dollars for the purpose of advertising Italy in the U.S.A.;

(9) the institution of an Agricultural, Fishing and Industrial Bank;

(10) the building of hospitals and schools;

(11) the extension of the drainage system to the outlying villages;

(12) the amicable settlement of War Damage liabilities including a plan to redistribute to every dispossessed owner building property fetching an equivalent 1939 rent.

Outside assistance for maintaining and improving the social and educational status of the people of Malta implies : -

(1) the introduction of a full employment policy whereby the Malta Government and the Imperial Government collaborate and accept obligations according to their available resources;

(2) the launching of an unemployment insurance scheme on the English pattern and the overhaul of the Compensation Act to bring it in conformity with the Industrial Injuries Act of the United Kingdom. A National Health Insurance Scheme should exempt all wage earners from hospital fees and should grant them treatment and medicine free of charge. Longer holidays with pay for workers under 18 years of age should provide the younger generation with enough leisure for self education;

(3) increase of food subsidies or an all round increase in wages;

(4) a minimum living wage and better conditions of work for employees in private industry;

(5) rehabilitation of ex-servicemen and Imperial employees on being found redundant in any particular sphere of employment;

(6) equal remunerations and allowances for Malta's servicemen as compared with U.K. entries. This measure implies identical conditions on engagement;

(7) free and better education for all children under the age of sixteen with an adequate pay for qualified teachers;

(8) increased remuneration to H. M. Judges in Malta. In the case of Magistrates the reduction in the years of service required for eligibility for pension rights would ensure the recruitment of experienced and learned personnel;

(9) the institution of a Court of Criminal Appeal for trials on indictment to bring our Courts of Law in line with other European Countries;

(10) revision of remuneration for extra hours of work to members of the Malta Police Force, Hospital Nurses and Attendants when strict adherence to the 48 hour week is not practicable. Revision of conditions of work of Postmen, Signalmen, Prison Warders and refuse disposal workers;

(11) the construction of a national Stadium. Even more urgent is the need for providing with a playground the children of every town and village in Malta;

(12) the encouragement of local theatrical companies with the explicit object of fostering a strong and cultured

nucleus of artists capable of giving birth to a national theatre.

Immediate Steps

Without adequate outside aid not one of the measures mentioned in the two lists quoted above can be carried out. There are however other reforms which do not involve any financial burden on the local exchequer and which could be profitably undertaken simultaneously with the envisaged presumption of negotiations with the British Government. These include: -

- (1) the setting up of a Police Federation to protect minor officials from any possible victimization, to administer the Malta Police Fund and to ensure greater cooperation and closer understanding between officers and men,
- (2) inclusion of representatives of Trade Unions in a National Economic Planning Commission; encouragement of cooperative societies by fiscal easements;
- (3) reinstatement of workers victimized by the Boffa Government for no other crime bar that of refusing to accept the Boffa clique's macabre political ideology;
- (4) protection of local musicians' by disallowing the entry of foreign musicians of equal standing into these Islands. Local traders stand in need of as great a protection from the expanding activities of the N.A.A.F.I. and steps will be taken with a view to restoring the equilibrium in local trade;
- (5) replacement of Customs duty by Excise duty and vice versa whenever it is in the national interest. Exemption of new industrial enterprises from Income Tax during their first five year period~ of operation;
- (6) the calling of a round table conference including representatives of Wine Producers, Wine Importers and the Farmers' Union to study the wine question;
- (7) the sale of Government land to farmer occupiers;
- (8) legislation to place the onus of divulging news to the public on local and officially recognized democratic organizations in lieu of irresponsible anti-national individuals;
- (9) the setting up of a public Corporation to run a nationalized Relaying Broadcasting Service and Motor Vehicles Insurance scheme. The amalgamation of the Gas Service and Cable and Wireless Service with other public utility services;
- (10) the abolition of the electoral system of proportional representation in favour of the British "scrutine de liste";
- (ii) all persons domiciled in these Islands (liable to pay Income Tax) and temporarily absent will be given the right to vote by proxy in all elections for the Legislative Assembly;
- (12) the enactment of film renting and film exhibiting regulations to prevent the unwarranted exploitation of the film going public.

Abolition Of Reserved Matters

We are aware of the impossibility of providing a sound and fully responsible government to our nation within the limits set down by the 1947 Constitution. What was once defined by almost every political party in the field as the "minimum acceptable" has turned out to be under the stress of modern developments an utterly unworkable mechanism. "Reserved Matters" or matters on which the Malta Government is not even consulted include treaties and relations with foreign states or powers, coinage and currency, immigration, nationality, naturalization and aliens, postal and telegraphic censorship, the issue of visa and passports, lands, buildings, docks and harbours and other waters which are required for defence purposes, the compulsory acquisition of lands and buildings and the control and regulation of air navigation and aircraft. Moreover, Whitehall reserves the right to enact emergency laws whenever a Secretary of State is satisfied that a public emergency exists. A County Council in the United Kingdom wields almost as much power without the threat for ever hanging over its members' heads of being kicked out of office whenever a Secretary of State feels like it.

True Friendship

We are therefore convinced of the necessity to elevate the Malta-Britain relations on to a higher plane of mutual friendship and respect. This course is dictated by a far-sighted desire to look after Britain's genuine interest as much as by love of our own country. Indeed, we consider ourselves the most sincere friends of Britain since we are not afraid to state what is amiss even at the possible cost of a transient loss in popularity. So long as Britain's hold on Malta remains rooted in fear of sneer force, so long will there be political opportunists who will be as anxious to betray her in her hour of trial as they are keen to flatter her to-day in her moment of strength.

Two Alternatives

At this fateful crossing of the roads we therefore give a positive lead to our nation by advocating two possible alternatives, each of which would make every son of Malta answer any eventual call for duty by the Mother Country without pangs of conscience and misgivings.

The first is the gradual incorporation of Malta into the political, financial and social institutions of the British Isles. This objective, would involve a 20 plan to turn Malta into an integral part of Great Britain with representatives at Westminster and enough safeguards to keep intact the full rights and privileges of the Roman Catholic Church in these Islands. It presupposes an immediate guarantee of aid to raise gradually the social status of the people of these Islands to heights recorded in Great Britain.

The second implies the recognition of Malta's right to self determination with the removal of Reserved Matters and an amicable negotiation of a 20 'year Treaty of Friendship regulating the relations between the two countries. The choice of any of these two alternatives rests with the British Government. On our part we shall strive to work through U.N.O. to eradicate racial discrimination and build a sounder civilization on racial parity.

Marching On

Ours is not the gospel of laissez faire or despair. We believe in the dignity, honesty and brains of our people. We believe in Malta's right to survive. We are striving to unite 'our nation, in this, her hour of greatness or abject defeat. We are calling for the brotherhood of rich and poor. To the rich we promise not to introduce

new direct taxation, to the poor we give one last hope of staving off hunger and disease. We reaffirm our faith in Malta. We are determined to go forward. We expect every man, woman and child born and bred in these Islands to help Malta in her onward march to Nationhood.

3rd August, 1950.

DOM. MINTOFF,
Leader.

J. ATTARD-KINGSWELL,
General Secretary.

E. C. TABONE,
Chairman.