

A NEW MALTA

Malta Labour Party 1966 Electoral Programme

Historical Background

Although foreseeable and inevitable, the rapid dismantling of Malta as a British fortress had left our tiny nation bewildered and weak.

With unemployment pegged round the 9 per cent figure, with the annual exodus of 9,000 of its able-bodied citizens (population 316,000), with a national debt exceeding thirteen million sterling (nil in 1958), with the steady deterioration of educational standards and with the steep rise in the cost of living, the people of Malta stare catastrophe in the face.

Our newly acquired independence (September 1964) looks grand on paper. In reality it is a sham. The sooner we admit this to ourselves, the quicker we are likely to exchange the counterfeit for the genuine: humbugs always end up as the laughing stock of their fellow-men.

This initial, grave, national setback may be easily traced to one main cause - an obsession to cling to the past.

Politico-religious issues have split our people into two hostile camps and landed them with an impotent government enjoying the deep loyalty of none.

A traditional faith in a paternal Britain, driven by self-interest to look after the welfare of our people, had played havoc with all our thinking on international relations. This childlike approach has only made more pitiable our economic plight.

Whether we like it or not, there has been a radical change in the international balance of power. If more proof were needed, the recent British White Paper on defence should convince the most dyed-in-the-wool conservatives.

This new look in British strategy may be the most attractive for British eyes; to our workers it spells unemployment and the social scrap-heap.

THE WIND OF CHANGE

Our Islands are, however, now set for a change. The wave of liberalism within the Catholic Church culminating in the epoch-making pronouncements of the Ecumenical Council, together with the amicable negotiations between the Vatican Authorities and our Party, have paved the way for a new era.

This era, we augur, will be marked by the urge for a deep spiritual revival. A revival born and bred in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance and respect; a new social climate in which the human personality can freely develop; an intellectual integrity in which men can gain dignity by following the dictates of their own conscience.

Coercion and suppression will make room for enlightenment and guidance. Faith will replace superstition. Friendly co-existence will supercede fratricidal fanaticism and bigotry.

The Maltese people are today facing the biggest threat to their survival - bigger than ever experienced in their long history. This common danger should draw Church and Labour together.

Pulling together we could salvage what is still living of our past heritage. In a spirit of mutual understanding we could build a new democratic socialist state. Working together we could bring to life a healthy community which steers clear of the grave social injustices characteristic of unbridled capitalism and the irksome restrictions imposed on the freedom of the individual wherever Fascism or Communism holds sway.

New Orientation

Labour has faith in the Maltese people. Although the difficulties are tremendous, great are our still untapped resources.

Our geographical position, if judiciously exploited, can be our making. A sine qua non condition is, however, a cool pragmatic approach to international relations.

Whatever may be said or written about the dwindling of Malta's strategic importance, the presence of foreign forces on our soil is a sure indication of Malta's value in the next quinquennium.

With this in mind and with the knowledge of the complete disappearance of this asset within a few years, the Labour Party will strive for a revision of the Defence Treaty and Financial Agreement with Britain.

Amendments will be sought, calculated to bring us benefits sufficiently large to enable us to withstand the economic shock when the Treaty comes to an end. Similarly it will be necessary to ensure the smooth development of tourism and industry on our Islands during the period in which the Treaty is still in force.

In our dealings with the United States Government, the other NATO countries or any other friendly state, Labour will be guided by identical criteria.

For in accepting these limitations to Malta's sovereignty we are being driven by dire economic necessity. Logically, therefore, the object of this exercise should be to free our economy from these unpalatable, unreliable and dangerous measures. Before we put our own economy on its feet we cannot afford the luxury of ideological considerations in our international relationships.

TOURISM

Our more lasting asset, however, is Malta's excellent climate and the spontaneous hospitality of our people. There is no reason why our intake of tourists should not reach the level of 400,000 annually. Our archaeological and historical monuments, the enchanting bays and golden beaches, our people's familiarity with the English language, should more than outweigh the barrenness of Malta's landscape.

There are two main physical obstacles for a spectacular increase. These are the absence of adequate transport facilities and the insufficiency of hotel accommodation.

To solve the first problem, a Labour Government would encourage chartered flights to and from these Islands. If necessary, the Department of Tourism will be directed to take the initiative in this field.

In the past eight years we have witnessed how slow has been the pace in hotel building where it has been left entirely in the hands of private, foreign speculators. A Labour Government would supplement this activity by offering greater inducements to local entrepreneurs and by directly building seaside motels which would then be turned over to reliable operators.

Labour will also make it easier for wealthy foreigners to acquire a second home, in our sunny climate. A new modern coastal road round Malta's coast would increase tenfold the area ripe for development. A similar road will be constructed in Gozo.

Unless the sale and use of lands is guided for the greatest benefit of the Maltese people, the consequences will be disastrous not only to the peasant and the worker but also to the entire economy. Development will therefore take place along predetermined lines and the sale of land and property to foreigners will be made to conform with enlightened social policies.

INDUSTRIES

Everyone recognizes how small our local market is as a base for modern industries. A remedy can only be achieved by some form of customs union with countries boasting of a much larger population. Otherwise our advantage in the skill and relatively low wages of our workers vanishes at the frontiers.

A Labour Government would therefore strive to form some profitable relationship with the Common Market or a customs union with Libya or if possible a combination of both. In consultation with the Unions and local industrialists the Labour Party would also consider other alternatives. But a solution is urgent for, without a wider market base, industrialization becomes too much of a gamble.

Although expert reports were submitted years ago to the Nationalist Government for the institution of a Central Bank, no action has been taken. Labour is aware of the major role a bank of this type can play in the development of our economy and will treat this problem with the urgency it deserves.

To retrieve a part of the Maltese capital invested abroad, a Labour Government will grant to Maltese citizens a ten-year tax holiday for moneys invested with a Malta Development Corporation.

The main policy of this Corporation will be determined by the Government, but the trade unions and local and foreign industrialists will be represented. So will the private investors.

Careful consideration will be given to the proposal of granting an income tax amnesty to income undeclared during the past seven years - provided, of course, that these funds are simultaneously and irrevocably invested in new local development projects.

With the aid of experts, Labour will determine what factories can be directly set up and initially run by the Government. For instance a machine tools factory and the production of welding rods appear to be a feasible proposition.

Similarly in the issue of building permits, frames, tiles, furniture and other items of local construction will be speeded. So will the planting of trees and the collection of rain water round villas and semi-detached villas.

As for the Free Port scheme at Marsaxlokk and the projected huge yachting centre at Marsamxett, it is now time to come to some final decisions.

In the case of the former, the interested company will be asked to give a guarantee of its firm commitment to build the factories. Should this be forthcoming, the Maltese Government will proceed with the construction of roads and breakwaters. The control of the Free Port should be in Maltese hands.

The urgency to provide employment should also be the primary consideration in the negotiation with the Marsamxett Consortium as well as with the present recipients of grants and loans for building hotels and other amenities.

Enough evidence has been collected years ago to indicate the presence of oil-bearing strata in our continental shelf. Labour will therefore press for exploration and extraction without more delay.

Owing to the unresolved dispute between Bailey's and the British Government, the second phase of the conversion of the former naval dockyards into commercial drydocks has not yet commenced.

This grave state of affairs, far from being a cause for complacency, should be remedied at once: without more docking and berthing facilities the Drydocks stand no chance to compete and survive.

As a first step Labour will accept the composition of the Council of Administration giving equal representation to the Maltese Government and the Drydocks employees. A chairman will be nominated by the British Government if it clears up its own mess with Bailey's and abides by its commitment to provide the funds for the second phase.

As a second step Labour will invite foreign industrialists to study with the Council of Administration the feasibility of expanding into shipbuilding.

Four years of stagnation have caused - through emigration - a considerable depletion of our former pool of skilled workers. To replenish this stock and to provide for the new skills called for in our new economic life, a retraining programme on a large scale is now necessary.

Labour intends to emulate the USA in this respect and will call on the US Government, the Peace Corps, the international organizations of the United Nations, the British Ministry of Overseas Development and other European organizations to help us carry through this vital programme.

AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES

Both agriculture and fisheries will decline if no serious attempt is made to complete the process of modernization enthusiastically launched by the Labour Government of 1955.

Foreign aid will therefore be sought to provide Malta with modern horticultural tower-glasshouses and with long distance fishing trawlers to ply in the Atlantic or the Red Sea.

Before embarking on a costly and problematic sewage purification scheme, Labour will endeavour to reduce the surface water run-off by providing gutters in new coastal roads and collecting the water off the old ones. Not only will this project make it possible to provide water for irrigation at a cheaper cost, but it will also temporarily absorb part of our redundant labour.

A National Agricultural Import and Export Agency will be set up within the Ministry of Agriculture. Its object will be to find profitable markets for our agricultural and horticultural products, to organize suitable collective transport for their export and to seek the importation of seeds and of fodder at a minimum price to the producers.

The inducements of a tax-holiday will be extended to cover new agricultural and fisheries enterprises.

In both these fields, Labour will provide vocational training courses, will modernize the existing legislation and will entrust the necessary scientific research into the hands of more progressive and better-equipped Mediterranean States. Serious consideration will be given to the possibility of modernizing Mgarr harbour in Gozo.

Co-operative societies will be offered all possible inducements. Efforts will be made to rescue the Gozo Co-

operative Society from its grave financial crisis - after instituting an inquiry and determining the causes.

A fishermen's co-operative society will be aided to provide its own cold store, to acquire suitable homes for its members and an economical means of delivering fish to the consumers.

The Department of Fisheries will resort to its previous status.

EDUCATION

An international commission of ten educationalists will be invited by a Labour Government to lay down the outline of a five-year plan for education.

The plan will have as its ultimate aims:

(a) the raising of the school age to sixteen; (b) modern methods of teaching in the primary schools with special emphasis on proficiency in the English language; (c) the reaching of the 'A' level General Certificate of Education by secondary school pupils; (d) the provision of a genuinely technical education in the secondary technical schools; (e) the raising of a College of Arts, Science and Technology to an institution of higher learning where knowledge is imparted to would-be technologists; (f) the improvement of University courses so that local degrees may gain recognition of Universities abroad.

To reach these objectives a Labour Government will:

(a) launch a pilot scheme for kindergartens; (b) improve the training of primary school teachers so that they may reach the qualifications enjoyed by their counterpart in the United Kingdom and on the continent of Europe; (c) provide the facilities so that all new entrants to the University and the College of Arts, Science and Technology have already passed the 'A' level; (d) provide scholarship and employment inducements to students willing to take up new professions forecast to be essential in our new economic development; (e) consider sport as part and parcel of the whole educational system throughout all levels of society and gradually provide for the badly lacking facilities. A new site for the gradual construction of a permanent stadium will be provided.

THE NATION'S HEALTH

A contributory national health scheme - covering all classes of the population and run on similar lines as the national insurance scheme - will be introduced by stages *pari-passu* with the preparation of the required facilities.

A first stage will include free medical advice in the G.P.'s clinic as well as free visits at the patient's home by the general practitioner who will be employed on a panel system. The insured person will have the right to nominate his panel's doctor once in every year.

A second stage will be represented by free specialist examinations in the patient's home. Government consultants will be manning this service besides attending to their routine work in the hospitals.

Free hospitalization will mark the third stage and free medicine the final stage.

This projected improvement in our health services will entail: (a) free nursing service in the patient's home in order to avoid undue congestion in hospitals; (b) the building and equipping of a new Children's Unit; (c) the building of a new wing to St. Luke's Hospital for chronic cases; (d) the construction of a modern hospital to deal with infectious diseases.

Other measures calculable to improve the health of the nation include:

(a) a new legislation to regulate the entry and discharge of patients in mental homes; discharges from mental hospitals will thus become the sole responsibility of the specialist-in-charge - subject only to appeal to a Review Tribunal; (b) aid to families burdened by physical or mentally handicapped children. (c) the setting up of a Blood Transfusion Centre and a national Blood Bank; (d) the abolition of the Hospital Management Committee and the Advisory and Executive Board; (e) the institution of a Pharmaceutical Council for Malta and Gozo; (f) the provision of nursing courses for midwives in order to make good the present shortage. (g) the abolition of duties on medical drugs.

Labour will also explore the possibility of canvassing the support of African States for the setting up of an international cancer-treatment centre in Malta. An effort will also be made to cure and eradicate leprosy from our midst.

In hygiene an overhaul will be made of our antiquated legislation for the prevention of the adulteration of food. A national campaign will be launched to keep our streets and our shops clean.

HOUSING

Labour looks upon housing as a social service. To increase the number of dwellings within the reach of the labouring masses, a Labour Government will turn the War Damages Commission into a National Housing Authority with powers to provide loans against mortgage similar to those of a building society. Powers will also be rested into the Authority to dispose of Government-owned flats to the present tenants so that with the proceeds a rotating fund available for other building projects may be procured.

DEPARTMENT OF LABOUR

Legislation will be promulgated to define a national minimum wage and other conditions of work.

As a first step in the implementation of the Party's principle of equal pay for equal work, Labour will forthwith increase the ratio of female pay from two-thirds to four-fifths.

A reorganization will take place in the Government-sponsored and Government-aided apprenticeships schemes.

All legislation governing labour and all forms of national assistance will be reviewed in the light of the exigencies of modern times.

In cases of infringements of discipline, civil servants will have the right to defend themselves before the Public Service Commission.

In particular amendments will be made to the National Employment Act so that the present loopholes in the fair allocation of jobs in Government and private employment may be filled.

Until the crisis in employment is solved, no foreigner will be allowed to take employment in these Islands for a longer period than five years. When it is in the national interest to make exceptions, these exceptions will need the affirmative confirmation of a resolution in the House of Representatives.

SOCIAL RELATIONS

Labour will break fresh ground in its attempts to control the ever-rising cost of living. This can only be done by intervention at its source, namely by the bulk importation of fodder, seeds, cattle, meat and other items of

daily consumption by the farmer, dairymaid and the housewife.

Our criminal and civil codes will be gradually amended in the light of the principles enunciated in the Universal Charter of Human Rights and in line with the Convention promulgated by the Council of Europe.

A study will be undertaken with the object of simplifying and speeding up procedure in our Courts. The existing meagre facilities for free legal aid will be revised so that needy persons may at last reap the benefit.

PRIORITIES

This vast panorama of social progress will turn into a mirage unless we are first prepared to solve the problem of unemployment.

Although the prospects of foreign aid are not at all gloomy, the Maltese people will have no right to expect others to help them unless they are also determined to help themselves. All talk of a relaxation or abolition of direct taxation at this juncture is not only premature but also against the national interest.

Indeed Labour intends to spare the nation no sacrifices to reach the target of full employment within three months from Budget Day.

To implement this promise it will be necessary to:- (1) set up a temporary commission for projects to relieve unemployment. The commission will be in charge also of the Retraining Schemes. It will be run independently of Government Departments, although in close co-ordination with them. Part of its funds will come from the National Insurance Fund. It will also carry the necessary authority to, offer inducements to new industries for the transfer of its employees to more remunerative and subsidized new jobs;

(2) reorganize the Government Departments into productive and administrative branches. The former will be given incentives normally associated with private enterprise.

(3) devote the entire energies of a Labour Government during the first three months to the speedy preparation of schemes which are also economically viable.

Next in our order of priorities comes education. For the improvement in our rickety educational system is our best investment for tomorrow.

The amelioration in all other fields is subordinated to the success in these two sectors.

Once our economy shows signs of viability, it will be possible to turn our minds to the provision of other amenities and to some relief to the most deserving cases in our admittedly heavy taxation.

Labour's past record is the best guarantee for the implementation of the promises in this electoral programme.

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