

## 5 Post-War Malta: The Dependence - Independence Syndrome *a rather difficult situation to understand*

Much attention has been devoted to the war: the sea and air battles, the North African campaign and, via Malta, the invasion of Sicily, strategies and generals, campaigns and offensives. The same rather applies to Maltese in the second world war - heroism, devotion, fortitude. What the war did in the socio-political sphere has been rather disregarded, yet this could be more important. Apart from the physical destruction, hence the need for reconstruction which became dominant motifs of politics and government, there were two other major consequences. The first was that the war put paid to *italianità*. The second was that it radically altered the social composition and lifestyle of various towns and villages, particularly those most devastated by the Axis. Allied propaganda during war hysteria, when parachuting pilots tended to risk lynching, left a heavy toll on Maltese outlooks.

*Italianità* was suspect even during the first world war when Italy fought on the 'right' side - vide Nerik Mizzi's court martial in 1917; how much more so was it bound to suffer then once Mussolini, in a fit of illusion, declared war on 10 June, 1940. Worse, if the Italians ever really wanted to take Malta, they had a golden

chance to do so in June and July, even in August, of 1940. Malta was practically undefended. The Italian fleet, supported by the Aeronautica, would have almost certainly taken the island quickly and it is not at all sure that, at that stage of the war, with Hitler's divisions advancing at unbelievable speed right across western Europe, the British would have rushed to Malta's defence. But when the suggestion was made, twice, to the Italian chief of general staff, Badoglio, he seemed ill at ease and would not entertain a continuing discussion of the prospect.<sup>1</sup> Instead of sending their fleet, the Italians sent air raid planes to bombard airfields and harbours. If any Italophile was on the roof with his binoculars awaiting Malta's liberation, he was in for a surprise because the fleet never came, except to surrender in 1943; and by the time E-boats were sent the war climate had changed. By the time that an invasion plan had crystallised in 1942, Malta was far better defended and the British had dug in their heels. Italy lost many planes in the supposed invasion of Britain, in which Mussolini wished to have a hand, instead of concentrating on *mare nostrum* where he might have scored notable successes and even influenced the course of the war.

It is said that the Italian air force was instructed not to hit civilian targets, because the Maltese population was after all akin to the Italian, and indeed the Aeronautica was a different kettle of fish from the dive-bombing stukas that came later. Any survivor of the war in Malta will relate and elaborate on the difference. But still, here was Italy bombing Malta, with its 'Faith', 'Hope', and 'Charity' air defence!

Even before that fateful declaration of war, Maltese nationalists had started being rounded up by the British, partly on information supplied by Maltese collaborators to British Intelligence (represented in Valletta by a Colonel Ede). Once the war was on, what better pretext could there have been for an attempt to eradicate nationalism from Malta? During the course of the war, suffering mounted, propaganda was intense, and the net result was that as far as almost every ordinary person was concerned, Italians were enemies, the Britons friends. This growing sentiment turned the pre-war nationalist position on its head. Uttering a word of Italian in Malta could land you into trouble!

Simultaneously with this "cultural" metamorphosis, <sup>change</sup> you had the exodus of middle class and upper working class families from the harbour area, particularly Cospicua, Vittoriosa and Senglea, out into the country, to Rabat, the Three Villages of Attard, Lija and Balzan and even Gozo. When the war ended, many of these had nowhere to return to - their houses had been razed to the ground. They took up residence elsewhere in large numbers, whereas others from various parts somewhat filled the vacant social spaces in the Cottonera, where during the war work was plentiful at the Royal Dockyard. Thus the death-knell of *italianità* coincided with a re-peopling of places in a major demographic shift with bearings on society and

politics. Much more than before, the Cottonera district became the hot-bed of anti-*italianità*, that is of concentrated "loyalism".

When the bells finally pealed to the high heavens and survival no longer depended on convoys, shelters and victory kitchens, Malta, as in 1918, awaited her new destiny. The mood in 1918 and 1943 is quite comparable; there was a war fought in common, with the Maltese population enduring what was necessary in the cause of empire and of democracy, now that the war had been won, people rightfully asked: "what was in it for us"? The situation in 1943 and after was worse than what it had been in 1919 in some respects. Malta was knocked out, on the canvas and on its knees. How to build a Phoenix out of these ashes?

In April 1943, Mabel Strickland in the *Times of Malta* hit on a solution: the integration of Malta with Britain. Thus Malta would depend on British resources, in return for continued and increased loyalty and affinity; prosperity would slowly come our way through assisted reconstruction and rehabilitation. More dependence on the mother country could lead to greater prospects for progress and for prosperity among the Maltese. Thus ran the argument. Olivieri Munroe, one of the Anglo-Maltese political pundits of the time, argues the case well into the forties, although Mabel herself had second thoughts about this great plan for a permanent panacea. Malta's Catholic majority, through integration, would have been turned into a minority; and even with representation at Westminster, as envisaged by Mabel, the Maltese would still be in an infinitesimal minority. Hence, she reasoned, it was better to stick it out autonomously and faithfully without in any way loosening ties with Britain. The integration idea was a novel one: more ability to stand on our feet through greater association with the mother country. It was an idea which in time of war, or just as a victorious war was coming to an end, could be sympathetically regarded, even supported. Britain had not treated her possessions like *départements* and given them a say in her own parliament, as France had done, but the fact that this had not happened need not necessarily have debarred Malta George Cross.

In 1945 controversial elections (contested mainly by the Labour Party) were held to the Council of Government before any new Constitution had been agreed on, under the 1939 set-up; and in 1946 a National Assembly on the lines of that in 1919 was formed to prepare drafts for a self-government constitution. The key figure in embodying and representing the voice of the assembly in 1946 was Count (Sir) Luigi Preziosi, who may thus be said to have stepped into the shoes of Sir Filippo Sceberras. In such moments, figures who were by general consent regarded as patriots exerted a unifying bond on the political movement as a truly national one, in spite of the usual and inevitable differences of opinion. Preziosi's role was to do a Sceberras and he fulfilled that role to the best of his ability. As in 1918 there was much anticipation and impatience, although apart for some organised riots in the dockyard there was no bloodshed. It was however a sign of unfolding trends

that whereas the Secretary to the first meeting of the 1919 Assembly had been the President of La Giovane Malta, Nerik Mizzi, his "successor" in 1946 was the Secretary General of a newly-formed General Workers Union, Reggie Miller.<sup>2</sup>

After the war had ended, Maltese nationalists repatriated from their exile in central Africa, and Nerik Mizzi immediately found the stamina to start re-organising the Nationalist Party. Contrary to a belief widespread in pro-British quarters - and one fanned by the dominant Stricklandian press - the PN still breathed life and they polled enough seats to emerge as the leading opposition party, with Mizzi now as its undisputed and venerable leader.

(But in the meantime something else had happened. The Constitutional Party of Strickland had disappeared from the political scene. On paper, looking at electoral statistics, there was good reason to believe that this party could have still led the way or at least mastered a considerable following had it contested the 1947 elections. Britain had won the war; Italy had lost; the nationalists were shattered; the party had the best equipped press and a history dating back at least to 1920, and an experience of government; it had contacts in Britain and a residue of sympathy and support throughout the Maltese Islands. Why therefore does this party disappear just at the moment when it seemed poised for a great vindication of its past?)

One possibility, suggested by Tony Montanaro, an oldtime party stalwart, is that there was a family feud involving Lord Strickland's nephew Roger, and Strickland's daughter Mabel; at a later stage this feud spilled out further when Mabel's sister Cecilia Trafford, actually left the Constitutionals and joined the Malta Labour Party and even contested Mabel herself on the Rabat district! According to Montanaro, Roger wanted the press to serve party interest, whereas Mabel wished to have a more independent and national journalistic establishment. A crucial fact not to be underestimated was that Lord Strickland had died in 1940: his towering personality coupled with his enormous wealth were no more. Other developments too had taken place influencing a change of mood or shift of allegiance. Partly because of its depiction as potentially disloyal the PN, though not a capitalist party, found it difficult to extend or develop a strong working class base. Yet that base in 1947 was more crucial than ever because arguably the single most important aspect of the new self-government constitution was the grant of universal suffrage to Malta, for the first time. This meant that all those over 21 years of age, including women, could now vote. The electorate was a drastically changed one. Literates and illiterates, property-holders and paupers. Electioneering tactics changed accordingly - to spread the net as far wide as possible, to be 'populist', using the Maltese language to a far larger degree than ever before.)

(Unlike the 1921 constitution, the 1947 constitution was unicameral - no Senate; but there was precious little difference so far as local vis-à-vis imperial powers were concerned. The cabinet underwent a change of term, in line with the developing

situation - the leader of the governing party would be styled 'prime minister' instead of 'head of ministry'. There would be eight ministers (7 in 1921).)

Posterity's chief interest in this party line-up and the electoral outcome was that the Malta Labour Party, until now the toddler of Strickland's coalition arrangement - a baby brother next to big brother the Constitutional Party - suddenly becomes itself big brother (in relative and local terms). In this it increasingly has the support, to a considerable extent, of the General Workers Union formed by Miller and his mates in 1943, and of its press, starting in 1944 with **The Torch**. In the early fifties there was an attempt even to restore a lost balance by somewhat distancing that union from the MLP, which it had served unmistakably and even unreservedly. In view of what has happened to the GWU during the past decade, it must be clearly understood that in spite of a preference for the then Labour Party led by Boffa, the first leaders of the GWU did not want the union to be swallowed up by the MLP. On the contrary they prided themselves on their independence from it institutionally and professionally, on their concern for the welfare of their members whoever was in office, and on their refusal to be subjected to the instructions or directives of the MLP. Miller felt rather strongly about this and it is not quite clear why and in what frame of mind he eventually left the Union, having just about reached retiring age, to be succeeded as secretary general by Joe Attard Kingswell, a former secretary of the MLP (who ended up, like Miller and several others, disillusioned by the 'Mintoffian' grip of the Union's throat).<sup>3</sup> Attard Kingswell, however, was Miller's assistant and thus was a natural heir to the succession.

The Labour victory of 1947, with 24 out of 40 seats, not only led to our first Labour government; it was the largest victory the Labour Party had achieved until then and, as it turned out, its best showing ever. It may be compared to the Nationalist victory of 1932: in terms of seats 1932 was actually a still bigger victory — although not of course in the same league as the 1888 PN walk-over; in 1932 the PN had 21 out of 32 seats. But in 1947 the electorate was so much larger, and the number of voters far superior to what it had been in 1932.

(The atmosphere everywhere in the post-war Malta favoured Labour. The war had been a democratising influence in many ways — class differences broke down or were severely mauled and reshaped by a war fought in common, side by side, so that people from different walks of life who previously would not have mixed easily or at all became friends-in-arms; many friendships were retained for lifetimes, thus revolutionising social relations.) This had happened in Malta as well. Winston Churchill in Britain was defeated, V-sign notwithstanding, and Labour came in there. Malta had no Churchill to defeat, although had Lord Strickland been alive and had he suffered the same fate at the hands of the Malta Labour Party, the local comparison could have been made in that sense. But this is hypothetical. (What 1947 shows is that the MLP took over the Constitutionals: Boffa who had been something of a minion of Strickland, shone so much more in Strickland's absence

and in a sense replaced him. The position of the MLP was clearly pro-British and pro-Empire, as was that of the GWU. In spite of the Admiralty's pig-headedness in the late forties, there is no essential "philosophical" departure from the Stricklandian loyalism and conventional anti-Nationalism.) Anglo-Maltese bonds had been strengthened, not weakened, by the war, for the same sort of social, occupational and circumstantial reasons that Angus Calder examines in his **People's War**. *Camaraderie par force majeure* was a *camaraderie* nonetheless. Not much space for stiff upper-lips and conceited racial dislikes when bombs are dropping on your head! The rate of inter-marriage between Maltese and British would have increased too, although the religious bar there continued to be telling thought not with the Irish. (In addition to this friendship and improved relationship on the social scale - most notably, perhaps, in sporting events such as football matches - there was the expectation on the part of the Maltese that Britain would now deliver her part of the bargain - help Malta recover and get on its feet. The last thing on the MLP's mind was independence in any shape or form. This notwithstanding the fact that 1947 marks the attainment of independence by two gems of the British crown: India and Ceylon became '*Dominions*' by virtue an Independence Act of 1947, and continued to be so designated until 1950 and 1956 respectively when new constitutions came into force.

(The nationalist *forma mentis* was different, as indeed we had seen already in 1932 when the first formal, if tentative, demand was made for Dominion Status. Not a year had passed before the self-government constitution was revoked! Thus the nationalists had to be wary of their inclination to press for greater constitutional freedoms, because they realised that they were playing a very delicate game that could easily misfire and backfire. In the late 40s therefore we find Mizzi claiming Dominion Status, and using words which were ambiguous but clearly hinting at complete autonomy, fully responsible government and occasionally making use of the adjective 'independent' or even the word 'independence' in certain contexts, but always conscious of the danger of being pinned down to having dared suggest that Malta should embark on a quest for independence from Britain. Opposing parties would have laughed at that - and they did; they tended to pour scorn on any such suggestion, even on talk of Dominion Status.)

As the MLP's germinating bid for integration showed from about 1950 onwards, their thinking was predominantly in the opposite direction. But the Labour Party split in 1949 had also taught various lessons to those who cared to learn from it.

A reading of the parliamentary debates of 1949 demonstrates how apart from personality politics and individual ambitions, the difference of opinion centred on attitudes and strategies of dealing with Britain. The MLP, with its tradition of loyalism, was in a better position than the PN to take on the British 'from within' as it were, without scaring them or putting their backs up. Or so many in the MLP

thought. On the other hand, it was becoming clear that nice talking was not leading the party anywhere much, and that a determined stand had to be taken. The Maltese had to put their foot down and deviate, if and as necessary, from the traditional loyalism which assumed that the MLP was simply and solely a continuum of the Stricklandian CP. The pros and cons in this dispute were familiar to our political development; much the same serves had breached the nationalist movement and the nationalist party ever since its foundation, we find signs of similar problems earlier still. To push or to hold back, to risk or to preserve, to go for the sky and hope for the best or to plead reasonableness and common sense, justice and right; to defend or to attack. To be an abstentionist or an anti-abstentionist; to be a *dimissionario* or an *anti-dimissionario*; to resist or to assist. And how to go about it. Tactics require tact. Tactlessness or playing a wrong hand could have undesirable consequences. The whole disagreement about how to try and wrest more money out of Britain or the U.S.A. revolved on the parametres circumscribing the operation. The wording of the "ultimatum", to which the Cabinet had originally agreed, with some modification, was not a matter of words as much as a declaration of policy. Do you urge or threaten? Do you request or demand? If you plead, you may get something of what you desire without over-reaching yourself and coming apart; if you threaten and throw your weight around you must be pretty sure that you do have a weight and that you can take the likely blows, on your feet. This is what the dispute reduced itself to: the Boffa Cabinet saying that if Mintoff pressed too hard and made threatening noises, Britain could withdraw our constitution (as had happened enough times before, and as would happen again when Mintoff became prime minister); Mintoff on the other hand would not settle for diplomatic phrases or peaceofferings.

Mintoff's arguments were staunch and the cause in sight was worth going for, but as usual he was his own worst enemy; rash, impertinent, opinionated, bullying, uncouth. When in a significant speech in 1949, the Finance Minister Dr Colombo tried to finish Mintoff off - Mintoff was in a tricky situation at this point as he had fallen out with the entire Cabinet and was tantamount to a minority party in parliament - it is interesting to note how Colombo was portraying a pathological indecency in Mintoff's make-up, in his manner of dealing with others. "*Tgħallem flit edukazzjoni, ja pastas!*" "*Pastas int!*" This was not so much an argument about ideology as about manners, and it was motivated by intense hostility towards Mintoff on Colombo's own part, as much as by a defence of the Boffa Cabinet who were being faced with an impending rival grouping within the party, and in parliament. Boffa took very badly not so much to disagreement with Mintoff as to the latter's no-holes-barred personalisation of divergence, even in public meetings that had never before seen unabashed revilement. Political discourse reached a new low.<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately this manner of dealing and of behaving, this *enfant terrible* with a cutting edge, showed itself again and again and came to characterise an

important aspect of Mintoffism, as well as consequences which may have been unintended but which assumed a dynamic of their own thus increasingly identifying Mintoffism with crass intolerance and even systematic political violence against opponents. The writing was on the wall from the start.<sup>5</sup> The uncoompromising, *arraché* quality may not be the best hallmark either of a politician or a statesman, but it certainly seemed to drive Mintoff on, and it becomes a hallmark of the Mintoffian: a new species of partisan activist. Admittedly, the British could be infuriating. Starting with the Admiralty; and the Treasury. Boffa was not the best qualified champion to stand up to them, and he did not, nor did he behave unbecomingly. He was perhaps justly afraid of losing everything (*il-qaleb u l-ġbejna*) by excessive zeal. Mintoff sought to uplift the mass, largely through milking the British cow, and after 1971 he endeavoured to steal the world stage as a peace broker; a latter-day "King Tom", he somewhat outdid Strickland at his best and at his worst. Writing in the Nationalist daily in October 1988, J.A. Mizzi revealed a comment dating back to the 1972 negotiations with NATO, after Mintoff had scrambled back into office: Mintoff struck a great deal alright, but his behaviour was allegedly so obnoxious that negotiators on the other side held back monies they might have given Malta in addition. Much moved, Luns told Carrington he had never met "such a bastard".<sup>6</sup>

(The split in the Labour Party has been traditionally explained by Boffists in terms of ambitions and personalities, "*Boffa immoffa*", and such typical compliments; and as the need to stand up to the British, championed by the Mintoff camp. That split was pregnant with implications; its legacy was long drawn out. Mintoff from the start went for party support: party against government, party over government, party above government. He had a good hold over the party executive but lost ground in cabinet. Whereas Boffa went on about the need to look at "the nation's interest" and not only those of "the party" or "a class", Mintoff went for the party's guts, nation or no nation. Through popularity within the party, facilitated by what English call "gift of the gab" he could slowly but surely succeed in winning the numbers game in the executive and in general conference. From the word "go", therefore, Mintoffism implied partisanship *à outrance*. The party, was Mintoff's means to power; his ouster of the Labour leader and his own vindication by replacing him, and indeed humiliating him, could only occur through the new leader's sway over a changing party. What the split also did was force many Labour supporters to rethink their allegiance and their philosophy: 'Labour' after all was another word, what did it actually stand for in the Maltese context? An honest day's work? 'Workers' (the Boffa version) seemed more substantive: it implied actual people, rather than a party or an idea. And 'Workers' Party' translated '*Partit tal-Haddiema*', of course: the hand-in-hand solidarity emblem instead of a burning torch. Later copied by Toni Pellegrini and his *Partit tal-Haddiema Nsara* (Christian Workers Party). But it is the Mintoff ascendancy that set the hallmark for a future



MLP: the Leader Principle became enshrined in the commonplace slogan "Malta is Mintoff", "Mintoff is Malta". What the leader said was law.<sup>7</sup>

The comparison of Mintoff to Strickland is one that Mintoff might well resent and reject, but the comparison is unyielding before rhetoric, and it extends well beyond quarrels with the Catholic Church. Yet again here we are caught in a paradox. It is the same bitter-sweet irony that marked the eventual opposition of a Savona to a Strickland, when in terms of linear thinking and disposition and even behaviour, the former could be regarded, historically, as a mentor of the latter, and the latter a successor to the former's ambition. In 1958, Mintoff turned anti-British: the rhetoric changed drastically, but sentiments could hardly have been emptied altogether and replaced by a new alloy. Until 1958 there is no serious problem at deducing continuity. Mintoff, like Strickland, was a go-getter, arguing that the Maltese wished to be like the British in everything (starting with pay packets if possible). As the empire subsided, rather anti-historically Mintoff sought formulae for a continuum in the form of a full-scale integration of Malta with Britain to form a new State: THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN, NORTHERN IRELAND AND MALTA. As we shall see, that was his party's professed and clearly enough elaborated plan: it was priority number one in the MLP's 1955 electoral manifesto, with self-determination as a fall-back position. This is history. Mintoff, like Strickland, and like Savona before him, went off to Britain to study (he obtained a third class from Oxford, where he was resident at Hertford College); and like Strickland he married an English lady. (That *per se* is not the point. The point however is that in society races matter, and in a colonial society they matter even more. Having an English lady for a wife would allow and encourage access to social circles which otherwise might be permanently closed or even unknown to one. Sir Adrian Dingli had an English wife. Look at Fortunato Mizzi, for one. He married an Italian lady, Sofia Fogliero de Luna; his son, Enrico, thus had an Italian mother. The laws of social dynamics apply to politics, and racial origins are a factor to be taken into consideration by analysts of colonial situations. There is no implication that social relations were necessarily or constantly influenced *consciously* by such factors; no, that happened naturally, casually, which is how many things in life happen).

Women apart, Mintoff emerges as an Anglophile and, even more tellingly, he is anti-PN. The constancy and continuity of Savona, and indeed of Strickland, (from 1890 to 1940). His first letters to the local press, even as a student, are in the **Daily Malta Chronicle**, and **The Times of Malta** (and in the twilight of his political career, he once again has had recourse to the same Stricklandian paper profusely to air his views and memories). As we have already noted, it was Stricklandian votes that largely made the MLP after world war two.

Nerik Mizzi's rise to the premiership in 1950 was a poetic justice of historic proportions. A few years after he returns from exile, he becomes prime minister of

his country! It would never have happened were it not for Mintoff. Not that Mintoff had engineered it, or even desired it, but his actions made possible the return to power of the PN much sooner than might otherwise have been the case. Yet at this stage the PN was still reeling from the war years, and from a philosophy and an attitude which in certain vital respects were pre-war and *passé*.

The party's chief problem was that anglicization overtook it. Put in a different way, it would not change with the times. There were reasons for that: it disagreed with the trend and direction of events as influenced by British rule. But it was powerless to prevent the change that took place over the decades. The colonial *régime* had the power of patronage with which to supplement its own policies, it had jobs and promotions in its gift, and these were put to use as one might expect when government and governed are not one and the same people. To give up cultural allegiance was a severe test because it meant the fetter had worn through, as Herder once put it. Language was not a grammar or an accomplishment, it was a way of life, of thinking, of feeling, of relating, even of working. To give this up to the classical nationalist mind was tantamount to giving up the ghost. To render yourself: here I am, take me as your prisoner, I surrender unconditionally. Hence the resolve not to exclude the teaching of some Italian from the primary schools. Which was what the Britishers wanted, hence their opposition to *pari passu* - the teaching of both English and Italian. But after the war, those surviving it (with vivid memories of an earlier Malta, and of deep-felt ideals and sentiments) could only very grudgingly give up. Nerik Mizzi belonged with these; to a lesser extent so did the Nationalist Party as a whole. The quest for Dominion Status had been from the start tied to cultural *survivance*: one presupposed the other. Concern with social and economic reform took second place next to political and constitutional reform, which was seen as a necessary prerequisite. If we are responsible for our affairs, the belief held, then we decide what languages to teach and to learn, hence the need for self-rule. This commitment to cultural *survivance* led to a consciousness of right, to the nurturing of a body politic, to constitutional struggle; socio-economic concerns were relegated to second place. Could the constitutional struggle proceed, bereft of what had originally sparked it off? Grudgingly so. The language of **Il Patria**, the nationalist weekly in the fifties, remained italianised, not accepting the standard orthography of Maltese as approved by an *Għaqda* in 1931. It was a Maltese that read like spoken Senglean dialect, with k for q, ch for k, and so on. And why not? Who decided how to write Maltese after all? The presumption in other words was that purification was arabisation, whereas the underlying desire of the nationalist was to retain his latinity, his europeanity, hence the reluctance to standardise. Hence too the preference for phonetics over grammar. This was fine so far as that argument went, but what it meant in practice was that Nationalist communicability with the mass of the population suffered. The content of **Patria** as a political weekly was what one might expect of a local organ, possibly of higher-

than-average quality, with occasional contributions of real value, but it was no match to the idiomatic flamboyance of the Labour paper, **Is-Sebh**, edited by Micallef Stafrace, which seemed to be technically superior (for example, it made far more frequent and better use of photography). This is not an argument for sensationalism (which can be so despicable); it is merely an attempt to explain the slowly grinding popularity and truncated mass appeal of the PN due partly to its being *incomunicado* linguistically and stylistically. Mizzi was an untiring writer - he also wrote in Maltese, but not in English. His contributions to **The Bulletin** in the fifties used to be translated into English from Maltese, but it was not "*il-Malti tal-Għaqda*". Let us not take this too far: Maltese was not, until recently, properly taught in schools, and it is a known fact that some of our leading personalities, like Dominic Mintoff and Ċensu Tabone, have never been too comfortable with it, to say nothing further. Mintoff has hardly ever written anything in Maltese, whereas Borg Olivier's Maltese was fairly typical of his generation. This extract is taken *verbatim* from a manuscript in his own hand at the time of the anti-integration campaign "... *il Gvern Inglis dejjem haseb biss għall'interessi imperjali, minghajr ma l'ankas jicconsultana ahseb u ara chemm jiccompensana chif xierak tal hsara li isofru l'interessi nazjonali taghna...*" Even today one gets the impression that English language newspapers, such as these are, enjoy greater prestige not only among advertisers (who cater for tourists and foreigners) than the Maltese language papers, even if the quality of some of these may have improved somewhat. Before the war, and more so throughout the nineteenth century, the boot was on the other foot: it was the Italian paper that was regarded seriously, not anything in the vernacular which continued to be identified with gossip, sensation and parochial pettiness. Anglicisation thus destroyed the role of Italian in Maltese society, but it did not radically change the role of the foreign language so much, only that one foreign language that was relatively new to Malta substituted gradually and painfully the comparatively very old language of the country. (The transition from Latin to Italian dated back to about the same time as in Italy). Hence the dilemma: to destroy in order to build an edifice that was not any better.<sup>8</sup>

This preoccupation in Maltese nationalism may be said to die or to begin to die with Mizzi himself, who passed away only three months after assuming the premiership, in December 1950.

Ragonesi recalls how Mizzi had caught a bronchopneumonia when against doctor's orders he felt in duty bound to go to the airport on a wintry night to welcome a visiting royal couple! From Britain! How anti-British was he then? This too needs debating, because of the induced confusion that has always tended to equate *italianità* with disloyalty, often unjustly and deceptively. Mizzi was a monarchist and he respected royalty, particularly now that he felt redeemed in so far as having repatriated he could lead his country under responsible government. When Mabel Strickland went to congratulate him on his appointment in 1950, he is

said to have asked her whether she still thought him disloyal. Montanaro says she replied in the negative: "Italy and Britain are now both members of NATO".

Mizzi's legacy is a strong one, in spite of his defeat on the language issue. Yet how true a defeat was that in the long term? Independent Malta today receives umpteen Italian TV stations; Maltese children learn Italian watching cartoons; and Mizzi's argument that geography would not change even if the British empire ceased to exist, so scorned at when he made it, seems to have materialised with a vengeance! *Cavaliere senza macchia e senza paura!* Mizzi meant strength of character and of principle against all odds: *resistere, resistere, resistere*. He was no lackey, no careerist, no collaborator or climber. And however Italian he may have seemed, he was also Maltese to a fault. 'Italian because Maltese', he was above all a Mediterranean man, a Latin, and a great European. But was he also a Fascist? Like so many others, he would have admired Mussolini, even counted on his intercession with Britain, but Mizzi's record in Maltese public life is essentially that of a liberal democrat fighting against colonial desposition and militarism. Nowhere will you find, in Mizzi, whether in opposition or in government, the basic ingredients of Fascism: the personality cult; political violence; the alignment with big business; expansionism; regimented indoctrination; anti-semitism. For much of his life he knew an Italian political and cultural encirclement with influenced commerce and trade: the *terra madre* (or *terra ferma*) to the north, and to the south Italian Tripolitania, with thousands of Italians also in Tunisia and in Egypt. He saw Malta as a bridge. Mizzi had a Mediterranean soul - he fancied the *faldetta* as a custom of the region, for instance. His temperament, unyielding, excitable, spontaneous, spread across his political life emblazoning it with his peculiar characteristics. By the time of his death, he belonged to a bygone age: a relic, but a precious one, one to revere and to preserve in some awe. An icon from the past, a beacon for the future. Mintoff no less than Borg Olivier may be seen to have been influenced by him in various respects and in different ways.

Only a few months before his death Giorgio Borg Olivier had become Mizzi's deputy in the party. It is not at all clear whether Borg Olivier was Mizzi's choice; he probably was not. The two were very different persons, not only in outlook. Mizzi was committed, passionate, giving his all to the cause. Borg Olivier was easy-going, calculating, complaisant and charming but slow and procrastinating, albeit doggedly determined to have his way whenever he set his mind to it, but then without the Mizzian brouhaha. Borg Olivier was not exactly a man of letters, and to a rather more literate generation he might have seemed as lacking in the stature required for a party leader - a stature which, say, Professor Giuseppe Hyzler might have been more generally regarded as possessing. Hyzler formed the DAP (Democratic Action Party) partly it is said, because he was disappointed at being given the cold shoulder by the PN, and above all it would seem by the young and aspiring G.B.O.<sup>9</sup> No sooner had Mizzi passed away than G.B.O. stepped into his

shoes; he was prominent at his funeral, whereas Hyzler was nowhere to be seen in the frontline. (Vague inklings of the importance of funeral *cortèges*: at the time of Lenin's death Trotsky, who was convalescing at a Black Sea resort, was not even told about it!). Albert Ganado recounts a story about an alleged letter from Mizzi to Borg Olivier during the former's exile, which proposed or hinted at Hyzler's potential, given that Mizzi did not know if or when he would return. No trace of such a letter exists apparently.

Borg Olivier quickly buried *italianità* as a priority and as a policy, but he marched on in the constitutional road. If he had a set mind on further constitutional freedoms, in his own sweet way, enervating, exasperating, damning, he would out-patience anyone and keep to the chess game until night fell many times over. This he did again and again. Often rather quietly - he disliked fanfares, organisation, punctuality; his party's propaganda machine was more or less at a standstill, public relations were zilch. One has to delve into the documentation to discover what was afoot, and how far in fact this seemingly docile and quiet man was persevering and undaunted in his ambitions for Malta. Take the memorandum to London of 16 October, 1952. This is arguably the most comprehensive historical-political statement of claims ever made by a Malta government to the British, certainly throughout the fifties. Was it even published in Malta? It was laid on the table of the House; and if you could not retrieve it from there, thirty years later you could go and look for it at the Public Record Office in London!<sup>10</sup> Borg Olivier was epigrammatic. He had a habit of reducing things to their lowest common denominator, and not wasting words. Looks could do it, nods, body language. Once this writer was in the House of Representatives listening to a veritable barrage from Mintoff and other MLP speakers. When these had finished, Borg Olivier rose to speak and uttered two words: "*Qed nitghallmu*". (We are learning). That was some four years after independence. The point was that now that Malta had become independent, and had the chance to actually do its own thing, teething troubles were to be expected, and progress was being registered in the treatment of them. When this writer in 1971 asked Borg Olivier whether the British had not helped Malta develop materially during their stay here, he replied epigrammatically again: "*Kesksuna ma' xulxin*". (They turned us against one another). And what about Mintoff then, his all-time rival, had he not made any positive contribution, what did he make of him during all these encounters and arguments? Another epigram. "*Jigġieled ma' kulhadd*". (He quarrels with everyone). Two words, three words, each utterance a knock-out. Borg Olivier and his epigrams, his silences, his courtoisie, his cunning, his habit of putting his arms around your shoulders in a quiet manner to confide a thought, of chatting calmly even to foes in public, his cuff links, his Bergerac nose, stole many a heart and exasperated many another.

Before the formal bid for independence in August 1962, Borg Olivier's main constitutional hassles had consisted of asserting Malta's right to Dominion Status

and doing so rather more forcefully, albeit not much more successfully, than Ugo Mifsud and his team had done in London in 1932.

His tasks in 1953 were threefold: in the coronation festivities he insisted that the Maltese colours be flown (and they were) and that he be given his due as a Commonwealth prime minister (and he was). These achievements were generally acclaimed by all parties in the parliament. Thirdly, Borg Olivier requested that Malta be transferred from the Colonial Office to the Commonwealth Relations Office, what formerly was the Dominions Office.<sup>11</sup> The request was personally handed by Borg Olivier to the Colonial Secretary in London. Now then, the British said, what's up his sleeve this time? Surely he does not dare wish to move Malta towards independence? Had these Maltese italophiles not yet expurgated themselves of such pretensions? Rather than doing what the Maltese premier asked, Britain would transfer Malta away from the Colonial Office. But not to the Commonwealth Relations Office. To the Home Office! Now we could truly feel at home! Maltese aspirations had come home to roost.

This was not at all the "Full Independent Membership of the Commonwealth" or the "Fully Responsible Government within the British Commonwealth of Nations" (with special provisions for Defence and External Affairs) that the PN was after. Yet Mabel Strickland regarded the Home Office Offer as an honour. "For the Maltese, to whom Colonial Status is justifiably invidious, the prestige value of the Home Office transfer, when it is fully understood, will be high. It removes Malta from the orbit of the African Colonial Empire with which the Island is too often unmistakably classed, and should once again permit Maltese immigration to the U.S.A. on the British quota..."

In a dig at both the MLP and the PN, Strickland added: "The Home office offer appeared to appeal to Mr Mintoff leader of the Malta Labour Party, largest single party in parliament, as being one step towards a day-dream of total integration with Britain..." "Both the Nationalist Party's aspiration for Dominion Status and the Malta Labour party's formula for integration with Britain are, in my view, ill-considered".<sup>12</sup>

The Labour Government's main proposals very briefly were that a unicameral Maltese parliament (elected on a direct voting system similar to the British one) would have legislative authority over all matters other than foreign relations, defence and (subject to some qualifications) direct taxation; and Malta would be entitled to not less than 3 MPs in the House of Commons on the Northern Ireland example, in addition there would be joint consultative committees in Valletta as well as in London. On the financial side, Her Majesty's government in the UK "should provide economic aid for the capital development of Malta" and subventions towards recurrent budgetary expenditure, the object of such aid being "the gradual raising of the standard of living of the Maltese people towards the level of the people in the UK. The "ultimate aim" was "parity" and "the disappearance of wage

discrimination". The Nationalist Party on the other hand wanted "a new form of self-government within the Commonwealth" in which it would be autonomous in its relations with the UK "but not with the Commonwealth and foreign countries". Defence and foreign affairs (including Commonwealth relations) would be "the joint responsibility" of the UK and Malta, such joint responsibility to be "governed by agreements to be made between the two Governments". The Prime Minister of Malta would attend Commonwealth Prime Ministers conferences "when matters affecting Malta were under discussion", there would be an exchange of High Commissioners between London and Valletta, Malta "should become the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations", and have a Governor-General (not a Governor) who would "act in accordance with the Constitutional Conventions applicable to the exercise of similar powers and functions in the UK by Her Majesty".

Clearly, then, whereas the PN sought to move slowly but surely in the direction of independence within the Commonwealth (what Malta obtained in 1964 and has today) the MLP envisaged still closer association with the then colonial power with a view to Malta's integration and incorporation within it, subject to a set of mutually agreed conditions. In view of shifting political grounds, the relevant part of the MLP's 1955 electoral programme is best quoted in full here:-

Our Relations with the British Government have improved to such extent as to earn us the accusation of "tools of British Imperialism" by the same sources who only a year ago were branding us "anti-British agitators".

We therefore take great pride in quoting in full the key note of the Labour Manifesto published immediately after the party's rebirth in April 1950.

## Two Alternatives

i. "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 act for duty by the Mother Country without pangs of conscience and misgivings".

ii. "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 year plan to turn Malta into an integral part of Great Britain with representatives at Westminster and enough safe-guards 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 the social status of the people of these Islands to heights recorded in Great Britain".

iii. "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.

It may lie in our eagerness to share the benefits of a welfare state without an equal readiness to shoulder the burdens. No lasting agreement with the British Government is possible, even at this late stage, unless it is sustained by a goodwill on both sides and by a spontaneous desire to take the rough with the smooth.

## v. A New Constitution

The Labour Party therefore, has already officially submitted the following six points as a *sine qua non* basis for a new Constitution:-

1. Social Service and direct taxation for the people of Malta on a basis of absolute parity with residents in Britain.
2. Equality of opportunities and treatment putting an end to the existing wage discriminations.
3. Extension of economic planning and full employment measures to these Islands.
4. Retention of exclusive rights by Westminster in all matters affecting foreign relations and defence.
5. Adequate representation of the Maltese People at Westminster.
6. Unfettered local autonomy in all other matters.

## Referendum

In the impending talks with the Secretary of State for the Colonies, the Labour Party will therefore reaffirm and give flesh to its beliefs. Above all its promises to submit any eventual agreement with the British Government for the approval of the people of Malta in a national referendum. Without the unequivocal consent of our people no new order can come into being.

One of the most controversial speeches against integration was made by G.M. Camilleri as Acting Leader of the Opposition on 13 July, 1955: this was in reply to a statement by Eden in the Commons and an interview with Mintoff in The Catholic Herald. The PN was "on principle contrary to integration", not because disloyal to the crown or a Conservative Party (as Mintoff had alleged it was) but because it believed that "the same advantages, or even better ones, could be gained for Malta without renouncing the individuality, culture, traditions and national heritage of the people of Malta." These were dearer to the people than mere material advantages such as wages and social services. The people of Malta would unite themselves with their political and religious leaders at the right time..." Their verdict, he was sure, would be to the effect that Malta should retain its individuality and its flag within the British Commonwealth. "Oh! oh!" Government MPs interjected.<sup>13</sup>

"Integration!" said Mintoff. A new State would be created, that of "The United Kingdom of Great Britain, Northern Ireland and Malta". The Home Office offer seemed like a step in the right direction, if integration rather than independence was where the wind could blow. And we know from Mintoff's latest articles in the Strickland press that as of July 1989 he regrets that Integration failed. Had Malta been so integrated, Malta would have become (wilylily) a member of the EEC as long ago as 1973, when Britain joined.

If the MLP were keen on integration, so too were the British. No doubt about that. Initially, at least, the British were tickled pink, flattered that Malta should wish to become one with them — equal and true. Eden, then prime minister, is said to have exclaimed during a cocktail party that whereas all other colonies seemed eager



"to leave us, Malta wants to join us!" Tut, tut, tut. A reading of the verbatim round table discussions in 1956 leaves no doubt in one's mind that the British delegation used kid gloves with Mintoff, Balogh, Attard Kingswell and the MLP team whereas they were hard - and, in at least the case of Richard Crossman - rude, with the Borg Olivier delegation which included, *inter alia*, Frendo Azzopardi and Felice.<sup>14</sup> At one point, the use of political violence by Mintoffian supporters against Nationalists was brought up, and the British side tried to twist this around to prove that the Maltese being evidently immature would benefit from integration with Britain (i.e. democracy). But, the Nationalists retorted, because a few Mintoffian thugs wrought havoc at Nationalists meetings, throwing missels and injuring G.M. Camillieri in the head, that did not mean that the entire Maltese people were thugs.<sup>15</sup> The British, with possibly one exception in that delegation, were intent on integration, and Balogh, who did much of the talking for the MLP side, was sold on the idea. As were at least 67,000 Maltese who voted 'yes' in the referendum. Which brings us back to our dependence-independence syndrome in post-war Malta (and it seems, at all times).

Today it may seem rather staggering to realise that in fact more people voted in favour of integration in 1956 (67,000 plus) than voted for the independence constitution in 1964 (65,000 plus). The precise proceedings and results in February 1956 were as follows. Asked if they approved of the MLP proposals outlined above 67,607 electors out of a total electorate of 152,823 voted in the affirmative. The snag here was that the Nationalist directive being for a boycott of the referendum, the figure of 67,607 was over 60% of those who had voted (20,177 voted "no"), but only 44.2% of the electorate. Thus if you counted those who followed the Constitutionals' directive to vote in the negative, together with those who for one reason or another had not voted at all, the net result was that 55.8% had not approved of the Government's proposals. This calculation here excludes a small number of invalid votes (2,559) which could have meant anything; but which were more likely to be negative votes, given that MLP supporters were enabled to take a "trusted friend" into the polling booth to help them vote. Apart from this "trusted friend" stratagem, there was constant harassment and physical intimidation of PN and PCP attempts publicly to mobilize opposition to the Labour plan. The General Workers Union expressed itself in favour of integration, even if there may have been some concern with regard to potential religious consequences. Still, as stated above, more voted for integration than did for the proposed independence Constitution in May 1964. Out of a larger electorate in 1964 (156,886 compared to 152,823), those who voted "yes" amounted to 65,714. Moreover 54,919 obeyed the MLP's "no" directive and we had as many as 9,016 invalid votes. Besides a "yes" votes would have been generally or at least partly viewed as "pro-church". Those are the facts.

Circumstances differed considerably. In our integration referendum, we had, as already indicated, persistent Mintoffian intimidation against opponents with De Gray's police trying not always effectively to do their job and protect the assailed. This violence was well organised and directed and took place also indoors, when anti-integration spokesmen went to schools, say at Birkirkara, to talk. Here Mintoffians made us of some kind of gas "bombs" as well, in order to choke the speakers. The Qui-si-sana meeting (with Borg Olivier waiting in the stairs of an apartment block behind the rostrum) is well-known; there were others, and eventually the PN called off its public meetings campaign. Mabel Strickland's PCP (ironically enough opposing integration after having invented it), soldiered on, on one occasion being herself beaten up by MLP supporters. Courageous and enlightened socialists that they were! Opponents of Integration were derided in posters and in the media as "*Tradituri*" and even as "*Għedewwa tal-Poplu*" (enemies of the people).<sup>16</sup> Apart from systematic violence against opposition, the Labour government also enacted an ingenious law for Trusted Friends to be allowed to enter the polling booth with the voter to assist him or her in the voting. Just in case you could not write, or didn't trust the electoral commissioner on duty, or felt uneasy about something. *Kull qalb trid oħra*. In the government's defence, Ellul Mercer noted that the electoral law amendment "was modelled on the corresponding provision of the Saar Referendum Law which had the blessing of the W.E.U.", insisting that every voter would record his vote personally but any voter who satisfied the Assistant Commissioners that he was unable to vote without assistance owing to defective eyesight or to his being otherwise physically incapacitated or to his being illiterate, "could, in the polling place, make use of the services of a trusted person not being a Commissioner or an Assistant Commissioner or a Member of the Legislative Assembly". But in a letter addressed directly to Sir Anthony Eden, Mabel had suggested more conventional remedies, such as the use of colours and symbols on the ballot paper "which enable illiterate voters to vote with freedom and secrecy". The PCP added that a large percentage of illiterate voters were government employees or held government licences "and may not feel themselves free to refuse the help of a 'trusted friend' pressed upon them by pro-government canvassers".<sup>17</sup>

Envelopes bearing the words "Malta wants Freedom. Malta against Integration" and others bearing the words "Malta is Mintoff. Mintoff is Malta. Malta wants Mintoff" subsequently became the subject of various legalities.

So how far was the referendum result fair? We shall never know, but £9 a week at the time was a lot of money, about twice the average wage - a goal therefore to aspire to - and that was what mainly sold the integration plan as far as most people were concerned. A gradual wage upgrading to £9 a week, and the expectation that Maltese would obtain equivalence with British in just about

everything. Plus 3 MPs at Westminster. Would Dom Mintoff not be one of them? Could greater achievements not lie ahead?

Many genuinely believed that integration could truly have been a God-send. It would give more scope for opportunity and wider scale involvement. Malta was small and resourceless, if it could tag on to Britain, and be a holiday resort and harbour, that would probably have settled Malta's economic fate (and cultural identity) irrevocably. So much for cultural *survivance*! Nationality changes, argued **The Knight**; people get in contact with each other, nothing stays the same. Indeed. This too is very much what Mintoff thinks, as expressed personally to this writer: "*Fid-dinja xejn ma jibqa' l-istess. Jew timxi lura jew timxi 'il quddiem*". A truism. But not so easy when peoples, languages, religions, histories, customs, geographies are concerned.

A correspondent in **The Knight** 's January 1956 number wrote thus:

"those who still dream that Malta can live on its own resources and be completely independent of Great Britain, those who believe that Defence requirements will always remain what they are today and will always provide our enormous population with a high standard of living, those who would prefer forced emigration and a reduction of our population to a few farmers and fishermen...can have no interest in Integration...But fortunately the great mass of the people has been sufficiently educated, thanks to the unstinted efforts of the Malta Labour Party, not to tolerate such hide-bound and humiliating conditions...They know that to ensure the present standard of living and to relieve the anxiety about the uncertainties of the future, our available resources must be exploited to the fullest. They understand that the nearest to a full guarantee that Great Britain will never abandon us, whatever the circumstances, lies in the admission to the House of Commons..."

High taxation would be needed, wrote another correspondent, to permit a Welfare State and for Defence, adding that "culture" was "a groundless objection since this is a vague and nebulous thing, a state of manners, taste and intellectual development which is never static but always fluid under the influence of time and place..."

The really intriguing question is why integration failed. The Malta government wanted it. The British government wanted it. Most of those who voted wanted it. Why therefore is Malta not Britain today?

- There were a number of snags. First, Mintoff wanted more. More money. For longer periods. No trial period, no restrictions. Halfway through the negotiations certain doubts began to creep in, possibly resulting from Mintoff's relentless drive.
2. Then there was the Suez débâcle, followed by the British decision to clip imperial wings. The MLP argument ran thus: if you intend to make less use of Malta for defence purposes, you should give us more money so that we can put our house in order. But, the British countered, if we are making economies, how can we spread the jam for you? And then there was another snag. Less than 50% of the electorate had supported Integration in the 1956 referendum. The Nationalists boycotted it,
  3. and the PCP and its supporters voted 'No'. Borg Olivier told the British repeatedly in London that he would not recognise it because it was unnatural and impossible.

Asked (in Ragonesi's presence) what he would do if the Maltese MPs at Westminster were expected to support one party or another at Westminster, Borg Olivier replied that he would to see which party needed his support most, then vote against it. Borg Olivier again. And Gonzi. If the church had feared press freedom in the 1830s how much more had it reason to fear integration with *niente di poco di meno che* the Protestant, agnostic, secular, libertine mother country herself? All the sins of openness, all the phobias of closeness. Not on, said the venerable Archbishop who might then have had a British Cardinal for a direct superior; although it is well to recall that no mortal sins were involved here. Only moral suasion, which was grist to the PN's mill. But then again, Maltese and British cultures, which had clashed in the past, were conspicuously different, influenced by quite contrasting traditions, how could you suddenly unite them, make Maltese affairs subject to a London parliament for the foreseeable future. Was that not what Maltese patriots had opposed at their cost for decades upon end? How now should we suddenly give ourselves away and voluntarily bid for oneness? These Islands would the more easily have been settled and swamped by English. And yet this urge to join a larger whole, to place your feet firmly in a stirrup, to reach beyond Marsaxlokk and Delimara Point was not new to our history, however anti-historic it seemed in the evolving course of British Imperial history at the time when Integration was being sought by the Maltese Government. Read Nerik Mizzi in 1912, and go backwards in time to our ramblings recording Malta's role in centuries past, Maltese disappointments with one ruler and overtures to another - right back to the Romans, and probably earlier still. The price of smallness, and poverty and insecurity. A yearning for freedom mixed with the fear of it. Here was a tiny market fit only for the basic and the immediate. Hence the mirage of a hinterland which, alas, so far consisted largely of salt water. The mountains, rivers and lakes lay beyond, the land masses and forests even of the European mainland were out of sight. The colonial empire had offered some scope, if only to emigrate to it; in times past there was Madrid or Rome, Paris or, now London and the English-speaking countries of settlement from the North Atlantic to the South Pacific. In **Party Politics**, we described Mizzi's vision:

As in Malta Britain was the dominating power, Mizzi was the one who suffered for his ideas, Strickland the one who was promoted; but did not Enrico, like Strickland, conceive of Malta as a separate nation, yet not as potentially an independent State? As a country that would be better off -politically or economically - as part of a larger, sovereign whole? This recurring "apron-string" theory, that Malta was small enough to cohere as a nation but not strong enough to subsist as an independent state, that the island had a unique nationality but, equally, a strategic importance and a military impotence that so required to be defended from a position of strength, could lead to a comparison between Enrico Mizzi's proposal for Malta's federation with Italy to Dominic Mintoff's proposal for Malta's integration with Britain nearly half-a-century later. How far, if at all, was Mizzi's federation plan what Dennis Austin wonders that Mintoff's integration plan may have been; that like Mrs Todgers' embracing of the Miss Pecksniffs "there was affection beaming in one eye and calculation shining out of the other"?<sup>18</sup>

After Borg Olivier's bid for a higher constitutional status for Malta in 1953, and the floating of the MLP integration proposal, the Nationalists were defeated and Mintoff became prime minister for the first time in 1955. In 1933 the self-government constitution had been withdrawn months after the Nationalists had suggested Dominion Status. But integration suggested a plausible alternative, a workable proposition. It takes two to tango, as they say, and here they were tangoing integration in the mid-fifties.

The MLP's shift from integration (when this came to grief in early 1958) to independence, is traditionally portrayed in 'nationalist historiography' (if any such exists) as a reversal, a contradiction, a somersault, a madness. True, to an extent. Mintoff had kept his options open, however seemingly contradictory and self-opposing. He did not have a fixed line, he had as many lines to play as he thought might suit. Maverick? Perhaps. Opportunist? Perhaps. Split personality, schizophrenia, well: Mintoff, like Strickland and Savona before him, sought to make the best of the imperial situation by tweezing out Maltese interest from the amalgam, and protecting the amalgam, the duck that laid the golden eggs. He was actually after the eggs but he liked the duck too. Once he got his hands on to the eggs he found this was not gold, but an alloy. Betrayed, he went for the axe.

A crucial development was the "Break with Britain" resolution of 30 December 1957 approved by the Maltese parliament. Intended chiefly to ward off impending dismissals from the Dockyard, this resolution was moved by Mintoff and seconded by Borg Olivier. Both leaders delivered themselves well in memorable speeches. Unanimity at last. An historic moment. Integration was dead. And so, the MLP went from 'Be British' to 'Pay Up or Go Home!' From waving Union Jacks to the National Colours tailored into uniforms for six year olds marching in *Brigata* formations, playing bugles and drums, with the traitors! Those opponents of Integration, those enemies of the people! Traitors all. We get more of Malta is Mintoff, Mintoff is Malta. Mintoff liberator, saviour, redeemer, governor and archbishop, king and pope rolled into one. Resignation - a true and final one this time. Thus 28th April, 1958. Magnificent turn-around. A new life begins - rebaptised in nationalist rhetoric. Malta first and foremost! Discarding any camouflage now, the cat was out of the bag. "British get out! Malta demands independence".

"It would be pointless at this stage to analyse the various contradictions in your letters" wrote Mintoff to Lennox-Boyd on 1 October, 1958. "Our main example is your attitude to the whole question of independence. A week ago you did not exclude it as an aim. You now describe it as "quite unrealistic" - even though in order to meet your views and your defence requirements we had made known our willingness to consider proposals that would define "immediate" as a date more than three years ahead.

"When we consider the far shorter timetables fixed not so long ago for the transfer of power in the vast territories of India, Burma, etc., we are forced to conclude that H.M. Government are not willing to take seriously the aspirations of the Maltese people for a permanent solution to their constitutional problems..."<sup>19</sup>

And to prove it? Huge mass meetings idolising Mintoff at the height of his popularity. Demonstrations, riots, sing-songs. Anything for the cause. "*ŻMIENIL-JASAR SPIĊĊA. L-INGLIŻI JEW IHALLSU JEW JITILQU*" roared Is-Sebh in its front page of 11 April, 1958 dedicated solely to those eight words.

De Gray had to rely on his forces to maintain order.<sup>20</sup> The comrades (such as Leli *l-Huta*, mentioned repeatedly by Mintoff) fuelled now with Maltese nationalism of the purest kind, manned the barricades, and Mintoff's travelling to preach brain not brawn to the fighters of the revolution was to no avail. Was he actually there when the going got most sticky? Or had he sought refuge in Notary Joe Abela's father's house in Dingli, with an improvised *Point de Vue ħobża* for supper? To De Gray, who notwithstanding Mintoff's vilification of him, was acting on Governor's instructions to maintain public order, Mintoff remains in very low esteem. From this year's *Times* forays we learned that commandos were not used after all, and that Mintoff's date 30th April instead of 28th April (about which Alfred Sant put out a fat book by that name) was "a clerical error". (Presumably the reference to a suggested exchange of Malta for Eritrea in 1940, instead of 1912, was another one).

1958 sets us well for the last lap in the quest for independence. We shall regard the 1958-1964 period as tightly sewn up. We shall argue in the next chapter that the MLP has had a noteworthy role in our quest for independence, especially in the post-1958 period, and that it was sheer folly of Mintoff not to stand beside Borg Olivier and the Duke of Edinburgh on the podium in Floriana on 21 September 1964 to acknowledge the cheers of all the Maltese there gathered together with dignitaries from all over the world.

<sup>1</sup>See G. Maioli, "1940: perchè morire per Malta?", in G. Maioli and M. Polo: 10 Giugno 1949 "Guerra" (Fratelli Melita Editori, La Spezia, 1988), pp. 103-163.

<sup>2</sup>Interestingly enough, the decision to set up an organising committee for establishing this union was taken in a meeting held at the La Vallette Band Club, an acknowledged Nationalist stronghold as well as a central and established social venue in Valletta. The original plan of this Union's leaders was to steer a course independent of partisan politics.

<sup>3</sup>After Mintoff's party at the end of sixteen years in office transferred power to the PN for the first time in May 1987, Attard Kingswell became Adviser to premier Eddie Fenech Adami on the Dockyard. Attard Kingswell guided the GWU into the ICFTU, established its premises and had its Workers Memorial Building in Valletta erected, as well as secured its finances. He participated directly in the talks that took place concerning both integration and independence.

<sup>4</sup>This writer knows of one worker, Ovidio Vella, who was present in Gavino Gulia square in 1949 when Mintoff impugned Boffa's stay "with his daughter" in England: that worker was one who left the meeting, unedified by the up-and-coming leader's chronique scandaleuse.

<sup>5</sup>The story is told of an architect who once told Mintoff that if he wished to join the Kazin Malti he couldn't go there wearing shorts. No sooner had Mintoff become Minister of Public Works in 1947 that coincidentally the poor architect found himself in the soup!

<sup>6</sup>J.A. Mizzi wrote thus: "*Li hu interessanti hu li Luns kien ippreparat li joffri lil Mintoff £18-il miljun fis-sena. Mintoff kien talab £30 miljun. Imma Luns iddeċieda, wara li ltaqa' ma' Mintoff, li minn jheddu jnizzel is-somma għal £14-il miljun fis-sena. Lord Carrington kien qalilna off the record li meta Luns semma dik is-somma "There was the biggest explosion since Krakatoa." Imma Mintoff aċċetta s-somma - u tilef £4 miljuni fis-sena għal seba' snin għax ma kienx jaf jikkontrolla lilu nnifsu". See Reflect on Things Past: The Memoirs of Lord Carrington (Collins, London, 1988) esp. p.244*

<sup>7</sup>Although Mintoff came out on top, intra-party dealings continued to be tough and inhospitable for critical minds, which is why a love-hate attitude seems to characterize contemporary attitudes to Mintoff among many MLP supporters, especially those who have known him at close quarters. There is derision moderated by admiration in comments made separately to this writer this year about Mintoff by three ex-Ministers of his party, in private conversation. Mgr Robinson and the 1931 royal commissioners come to mind!

<sup>8</sup>See Henry Frendo: "Milestones in the Development of Mass Communications in Malta", in G. von Lojewski (Ed): **Manipulation of the Mass Media** (AZAD, Sliema, 1978), pp. 19-30.

<sup>9</sup>See e.g. G. Hyzler: "Messagg' lin-Nazzjon", and "Għaliex twaqqaf il-Partit ta' Azzjoni Demokratika", in **In-Nazzjon**, no.1, 17 May, 1947, p.1

<sup>10</sup>Parts of its text are quoted in J.M. Pirotta: **Fortress colony; The Final Act** (Studia Editions, Valletta, 1987), pp. 273-274. This volume provides an account of the 1945-1954 period.

<sup>11</sup>For exchanges of correspondence and statements on these issues, in addition to parliamentary debates, one can see **Patria**, 31 May 1952, 16 May 1953, 20 June, 1953, 27 June 1953.

<sup>12</sup>M. Strickland: "Malta: A Commonwealth Issue: Aspects of Home Office Proposal", in **New Commonwealth**, 29 Apr 1954, reproduced in M. Strickland: **A Collection of Essays on Malta 1923-1954** with Appendices submitted to the Members of the Round Table Conference, London (Progress Press, Valletta, n.d. ? 1956).

<sup>13</sup>**Times of Malta**, 14 July 1955 enc. OPM/904/55.

<sup>14</sup>The MLP delegation was composed of Mr Mintoff, Mr Cole, Professor Mamo, Mr Kingswell, Mr Firman, Dr Bologh, Mr Seers and Mr Bruce. The PN delegation comprised Dr Borg Oliver, Dr

Frendo Azzopardi, Dr Ragonesi, Dr Ganado and Professor Fitzgerald. See the Report of the Malta Round Table Conference, 1955 cmd. 9657, H.M.S.O., London; the report was presented by Eden to Parliament by Command of Her Majesty in December, 1955.

<sup>15</sup>Dr G.M. Camillieri was injured in the head by a bolt, thrown at him by a Mintoffian during the PN's anti-integration meeting at Qui-Si-Sana in 1955. The PN's legal adviser Prof. Fitzgerald was present and saw the attack. In the words of Dr Albert Ganado, who was with Prof. Fitzgerald, volleys of stones were being thrown. According to Carmelo Caruana, during the Integration campaign MLP supporters began sometimes wrapping missiles such as bolts and stones in coloured paper - to look like confetti; or perhaps to lessen the blow! G.M. Camillieri passed away in August 1989.

<sup>16</sup>Mabel Strickland actually sued Danny Cremona for incitement through the use of such Stalinist phraseology as "enemies of the people" on the Rediffusion station, after which she had received some threats. See *Il-Berqa*, 8 Feb, 1956, p.8.

<sup>17</sup>Ellul Mercer/Laycock, 2 March 1956, and the Strickland correspondence, are contained in OPM/168/56.

<sup>18</sup>Henry Frendo: *Party Politics in a Fortress Colony: The Maltese Experience*. op. cit. pp. 154-155.

<sup>19</sup>Official documents of the talks held in London between the delegation of the MLP and the UK government delegation in Nov.-Dec. 1958 were published by the MLP in 1959 under the heading **Malta Demands Independence**.

<sup>20</sup>Vivian De Gray, born in England in 1913 of English parents, came to Malta with them in 1920 (at the age of 7) and lived here every since. He joined the Malta Police Force in 1934 as an Inspector and then became a Superintendent. He became Acting Commissioner of Police in December, 1955 and was appointed Commissioner on 1 June, 1956 when he would have been in Mintoff's good books. He left office in 1971 when Mintoff returned to power, having led the Malta Police Force as a Commissioner for nearly sixteen years.