

## **4** Collaboration and Resistance: A Nationalist Movement on Deck

The title of this chapter introduces us to various new developments that begin to characterise a national history from the 1870s onwards. It is a complicated period, the study of which has not been widely diffused; many Maltese even today harbour impressions and prejudices that linger on from colonial times. Yet it is an immensely formative period, pregnant with life-signs and with problems for the future. Looking back, we can identify courage and optimism in the birth of a home-grown nationalist movement to resist imperialism and colonialism as practised in Malta; but equally we can see much pessimism and collaboration which rendered this already difficult task - a nationalist resistance - still more difficult. Robinson and others have argued convincingly that it is ridiculous to try to understand imperialism as an entirely foreign body, thrown onto the subjected like a cloak; it certainly was not so in Malta where the cloak was woven and fashioned out into many a dress and often enough worn with pride, shown off as a mark of superiority, of acceptability or of survival. The underlying additional difficulty in the case of Malta - as this writer has shown extensively in other writings - was that the island had a strategic importance which, in the British perception, could barely allow it to breathe let alone spring into an independent existence. Having been independent for a quarter-of-a-century now, today's Malta may look back upon independence as a foregone conclusion, an inevitable development, an assumption wrapped up in history. Nothing could be

further from the truth. There was no easy assumption of inevitability in the Maltese mind and still less so in the British one. It is only now that we may be approaching the time to draft conclusions.

The problem of definitions (which Edward Said and others pointed out) is still very much with us: was it progressive to be a collaborator on the government side and to seek to change things in accordance with what the government saw fit to describe as reform? Or was it to be a progressive in an exactly opposite sense, by rejecting such impositions or innovations as lacking in moral justification and cultural foundation? In other words, was to be a reformist in actual fact a reactionary position, and to be an anti-reformist a reformist one? Put it differently again, who were the liberals in this fortress? Those who upheld the colonial jargon of enlightenment as preached in the mother country or those who saw through the silver tongues of functionaries who did not - who could not - put their preachings to the test outside of their own native shores? And what did conservatism mean in that context? To spread the glorious British empire to the four corners of the earth as a trade emporium and a civilizing mission (read Kipling at his best), or to stand up to it in defence of dignity and honour and interest in the periphery? Or were these merely rival conservatisms? One, using imperialism as a buttress to its nationalist ego by spreading its wings far and wide, and the other the conservatism of those who groped for their body and soul, grasping their sense of tradition and belonging with both hands, refusing to let this fly away and to be replaced by another's? Who was the more original and authentic: the military commander who strode ashore thinking he owned a people he had never set eyes upon before, or those people who, bewildered by the new sight, asked themselves who they themselves were, what could the newcomer expect from them? How would you deal with this new situation? Hide? Reach out? Hiss? Fight? Applaud and enlist? Those seemed to be the options.

They are compounded by difficulties of all kinds. Freedom from fear had to be accompanied by freedom from want, just as wealth has to be created before it can be shared. But the British colonial system was not terribly well geared either to spreading freedom or to distributing wealth or indeed to creating it, least of all in Malta where there was neither gold nor copper, neither rubber nor oil.

Now in 1870, two or three generations after 1800, nobody remembered the French, except grand-mother. "Braret", who? The question at issue is no longer possession; it is penetration.

A new deal has to be struck, one further up the road: how to ensure good behaviour by the subject race. In their interest (of course); the needs of Empire come to be regarded by many as complementary and even as identical. Maltese and Imperial interests thus become one and the very same thing: to possess is to be possessed. Who thought otherwise was a renegade and a traitor. There was no place for such disloyal elements, least of all in nerve centres such as the Dockyard, where

“disloyal” workers were to be flushed out. We have to recognize that from 1870 onwards the clash of interests takes on a further dimension as it becomes a clash of cultures. Cultures and civilizations, so far as these may actually be encapsulated and defined, have different qualities, are historical products in many ways, represented by languages, ethnic groups, religions, geographical habitats, industrial and agrarian bases, and so on. Hence the clash. But the clash only comes on the cultural plane when one culture begins manifestly to seek to impose itself upon another, to penetrate and to seek to dominate it. People may learn to live with different masters, less so with different owners. The sensation of existing, of not being, becomes still more repulsive and unbearable.

And Maltese were not Mongols; nor indeed was Queen Victoria the Khan. Here property begot independence. Ownership was a legal term and was absolute, but it did not refer to people, to their languages, their beliefs and religious practices, their timeless heritage, and their inheritances.

Take the so-called Language Question. Essentially this was not so much a question about which or how many languages to learn as about who governs, who decides what languages to acquire and to employ. Now who does that in what you consider to be your own country, with whose authority, in whose interest, since when, for how long? Naturally, the matters in dispute hark back to the sovereignty question of the turn of the century, which we have already pointed to. To anglicize is seen by the mainstream political elite as adding insult to injury. Anglicize? Us? But we are not Angles! Ah, who then are you, British subjects possessed and ruled by Their Majesties? Who indeed. Arabs? Italians? Britishers? Phoenicians? Catholics? Peasants? Sailors? Slaves? Migrant parrots?

Yet the misrepresentation of all that went on, often so cruel, is still rampant; often enough this is simplistic, inherited, content-less, transferred, manipulated, propagandistic, denigrating and, more simply today, it is plain ignorance. “Names like ‘Joey’ and ‘Charlie’ even had to be changed into ‘Giuseppe’ and ‘Carlo’ exclaimed one student in disbelief, in an essay about pre-1933 Malta.

Before we go into all that further, however, we need to identify why the 1870s are a water-shed. There are various reasons. In European history 1870 marks the unifications of Italy and of Germany - two new competitors for Britain in the league of nation-states. One mainly in central Europe, the other mainly in the Mediterranean. In the footsteps of Great Britain (and France), both these “new” countries covet empires of their own, even if smaller ones. So far as Malta is concerned, the more seemingly dangerous one to Britain is undoubtedly Italy. Whether British fears of Italy in relation to Malta are real or imaginary did not matter so much when it came to formulating policy, as we shall see. Something else of the utmost importance happens at about this time. The Suez Canal is opened in 1869, revolutionising the world’s trade routes.



Free trade, that one time panacea of world affairs, begins to give way to competitive contests and tariffs; increasingly informal empire and indirect rule are questioned. In Malta above all. Yet the concern was not *prima facie* a commercial one.

What was this we had here, a British possession off the Sicilian coast using Italian as its official language? And to boot, a British possession where the Roman religion held sway undisputedly, making life impossible for enlightened Protestant missionaries, Anglican sojourners, non-conformists keen to debunk the pagan statues of idolatry and the pyramidal hierarchies of ecclesiastical officialdom? Was this not a British possession that had been largely left to its own devices with its own Codes of Law quite unrepresentative of the English spirit; and with "Italian" newspapers that openly criticised, even vilely attacked British governors, generals, admirals and commanders. Besides, who was paying for this state of affairs? What were the economies that could be made, how could revenue be improved, harbour facilities bettered, the health of the troops assured? Malta was not a place where one could dispense with loyalty and allegiance. To carry on as usual, to muddle through, was no longer enough: there had to be change.

"Change!", decreed the British general. "Hold tight!" implored the Maltese lawyer. "Transform!", said the British strategist. "Resist!" rang the Nationalist retort. "You form part of the British Empire and you must adapt yourselves accordingly!" "We are who we are and if you don't like it you don't have to stay!"

In simple conceptual terms, such were the fundamental demarcations of conflict in the culture clash. *Bien entendue*, culture and politics: who governs, who decides, whose country. But to conceptualize was not enough. You also had to convince, to mobilize, to organize, to 'go-get'. Hence the pull towards more change, new departures, unexplored paths.....on both sides.

After a relative calm of over forty years, Malta in the late 1870s is examined with not very fine tooth combs by no less than three royal commissions. The difference in their mental frames and approaches contrasts markedly with those of the 1836 commission of Austin and Cornwall-Lewis, whose work we have already looked at. Whereas in the nascent liberal spirit of the 1830s, the commissioners had sought to preserve with due consideration and respect such traditional customs which they judged beneficial and natural - such as, for example, the greater importance and utility to a Maltese of Italian rather than English, as they had concluded - the commissioners of the late 1870s coincide with a flurry of Tory preoccupation with overseas questions and empire under Disraeli. 1878, when the commission campaigns hit Malta, is the year of the Congress of Berlin settling the Russo-Turkish war, and the consolation prize of Cyprus for Rule Britannia. Briefly, we get three of these investigations: one by Rowsell, director of navy contracts; another by Keenan, who ran the National Education Board of Ireland for the British; and an elderly crown agent for the colonies who had served in the army

commissariat, Julyan. They come up with a lot of ideas - and prejudices - some of which were or seemed quite interesting on paper, less so in the practice, whereas others were stunning and even outrageous. Rowsell, in his desire to make economies, suggested abolishing or greatly reducing the wheat tax, imposed by Maitland, which was the main source of revenue in the Island, and instead introducing taxation measures; one bright idea he had to assist the finances of the colony was to abolish its age-old University and whoever wished to study could go to London. (Napoleon had recommended Paris.) Julyan found "too much charity" in Malta - sick people were even entitled to free hospital treatment if they could not afford to pay, imagine! - and much administrative reorganisation was necessary, he found. Keenan wanted a thorough re-education: the two most useful languages to the Maltese, Keenan told them, were Arabic and English. Maltese school teachers within a year had to greatly improve their knowledge of this latter language - their English, especially its pronunciation was not good at all, he discovered - or else they would be sacked or retired. "Liberally pensioned off". Tough luck. The language of the Maltese schools henceforth would have to be "English, and English only" - taught through the medium of Maltese, the local vernacular, on the Indian system. The writing was on the wall when in a meeting with Keenan, at which these Maltese teachers were being quizzed about their linguistic and pedagogical competence, the teachers simply got up and walked out.

There are many "ifs" and "buts" to argue about in various points made by the investigators, but the above is meant to capture the mood that imbued them, and the one they encountered. Apart from an Anglophile reformist element, mainly identified with Sigismund Savona who later became Director of Education and Rector of the University, the prevailing reaction to "the unholy trinity of commissioners" was one of hostility and contempt mixed with apprehension and anxiety.

Savona believed those who had come to depend for their livelihood on the British, such as dockyard workers, should make the most of the opportunity; the British presence was grist to their mill in every way, and vice versa. This utilitarian disposition was regarded as opportunistic and self-negating by the bulk of educated opinion. Already in the August 1870 election campaign, *L'Elezione ossia Avvertimenti agli Elettori* had taken the measure of Savona and his group in these words:

*"Noi alludiamo al candidato Maestro, precettore e linguista, Sigismondo Savona; il quale, con un manifesto tessuto con studiate, ambigue e maliziose parole, ebbe la sfacciataggine di dichiarare, che nessuno fuor di lui rappresenta i sentimenti delle masse degli elettori!!! Quali siano i sentimenti di questo candidato, che presume di essere l'incarnazione dell'opinione pubblica Maltese, lo si però facilmente conoscere dallo stesso suo manifesto, il quale è zeppo di lodi ed adulazioni per il Governo Inglese, verso del quale, egli dice, intende stringere viemmaggiormente i vincoli che legano questo al medesimo.*

*"In poche parole il Signor Savona pretende di rappresentare il pubblico Maltese col mostrarsi adulatore ed anglo-manno. Ed il pubblico intelligente Maltese, il quale non ama certamente le adulazione e le servilità, e che non possiede affatto del sangue simpatico per la*

*razza anglo-sassone, non potrà rispondere alle cicalate del Savona, se non con un solenne fischio”.*

L'Elezioni revealed that under the direction of the Crown Advocate as well as some members of the clergy and the aristocracy, a “League” had been formed to promote Savona together with the businessman and newspaper owner F.S. De Cesare (of Cospicua).

In 1880 we are no longer peeling the apple but knifing for the core and the seed. By the same token, the resistance movement that rises is no longer interested in academic arguments about sovereignty transfer and legal entitlement, or even in petitions and delegations to the governor. In addition to all that, we have a popular mobilisation of opinion, of will, in the streets and in the papers, in the Council and in the coffee shops; electioneering campaigns in towns and in villages; lobbying in Malta and in London, and in Rome; even in Dublin. In its second number in July 1880 **Il Diritto di Malta** lambasted Savona and more so De Cesare, defending itself against attacks in the emerging local Angloophile press (such as **Public Opinion** of Savona, and **Il Risorgimento**, of De Cesare):

*“All’erta! grida il novello Don Chisciotte, all’erta popolo, all’erta Governo! unitevi tutti, armatevi di mazze e di bastoni, di picche e d’alabarde: chiudete le porte delle quattro città, barricate i venticinque casali, proclamate lo stato d’assedio, marciate alla testa di 10,000 bajonette, arrestate...arrestate **Il Diritto di Malta**, dilapidatelo, torturatelo, afforcatelo. Sì, afforcatelo, perchè ha un nome tratto del **Diritto**, giornale ministeriale d’Italia, perchè ha per motto: **auspicium melioris aevi**, perchè cita un passo del Mamiani ed un altro del Filangieri, perchè dice che la **Democrazia Inglese fusa nel Cobden Club** conculca i diritti di questa popolazione, perchè afferma che la politica di Gladstone è nobile, perchè osserva che non è colpa dei Maltesi se non credono più al loro Governo, perchè pensa che i Maltesi (come testè *ex cathedra* i signori Savona e De Cesare) non hanno finora ottenuto altro che illusorie e spesso draconiane riforme, perchè infine, o enormità senza esempio! opina che sotto tali scobfortanti circostanze, i Maltesi non possono vivere, almeno col pensiero, in un avvenire che sperano meno triste e più degno del loro passato”.*

By the turn of the century many things had happened which even to the generation of 1860 might have seemed unthinkable.

On the deck of this man-of-war – peeping through port holes, looking down the chimneys, slithering up the railings – a nationalist party is born. Early days, we are in 1880, five years before the Indian Congress Party is formed. By 1885, this **Partito Nazionale** is a movement with a leader (Fortunato Mizzi), a daily newspaper organ **Malta**, a party secretary (Benoit Xuereb), a national club in Valletta (its first secretary is Eliodoro Barbaro), and the capacity to muster crowds of (according to police reports) up to 30,000 in the capital’s main streets with bands playing and banners flying (as in June 1884, soon after the railway would have made communication from various villages and outlying towns easier). We begin to have behind-closed-doors political meetings planning strategy - such as they could reasonably contemplate - and then making their presence increasingly felt in the Council; manifestoes and declarations insisting on internal self-government, boycotts, resignations, re-elections. Exasperated by the military intransigence of a

governor such as Lintorn Simmons, we have idiots and scoundrels elected to sit with him in Council sessions, where these honourable gentlemen introduce the Maltese language as a form of official address. One was a brothel keeper who allegedly lived on the immoral earnings of his wife. The General was taken aback.

The ploy worked, it made news, and in London it would have invited some gossip in the bar of the House of Commons and during lunch breaks at Westminster. These Maltese had turned naughty, what are we going to do with them? Of course we can never give them representative government, but it seems we cannot take away what we had given them. Let them stew in their own juice, suggested one decision-maker; give them some responsibility, enough rope to hang themselves with, as it were. Meanwhile, more protests, resignations, re-elections often uncontested, translations of hard-hitting editorials from the **Malta** newspaper (Italian to English of course, translators worked overtime).

Many a ruse is thought out to take the carpet from under the nationalists' feet, but none work. One was to emphasise the property rather than the education qualification in giving the franchise, in the hope that more less educated voters who however were financially better off would support the Reform Party and ditch the nationalists, who were believed to be supported mainly by educated persons. Too much education and all this by a self-interested professional elite who represented nobody but themselves, had to be stamped out, if possible. How to stamp it out? Money would tell. It doesn't. Stiff upper lips didn't work either. Discrimination and exhortations for loyalty and the abhorrence of disloyalty especially among workers in the Dockyard hurt, but that didn't really work either; in any case many of those had neither enough property nor enough education to be given a vote. The appeal to personal interests as an official policy for stamping out resistance and attracting collaborators produced more reversal than support; so far that didn't work.

The Mizzi party thought the colonial system was rotten, the military administrators incompetent and disinterested in Maltese affairs, the economy tied in a stranglehold to imperial interests without creating new sources of wealth generation, hence there was poverty; and who truly cared about the mass of the people, as such, whatever their station in life? It is true that the nationalist movement in Malta as elsewhere was mainly middle class in its leadership, but less so, on the whole, in its motivation in so far as it saw the national interest as embracing the general welfare. It was not indifferent to the special needs of the labourer, as a good reading of **Il Diritto di Malta**, the party's first organ in the early 1880s, will demonstrate irrefutably: "*L'operaio che, lottando coi pericoli, colle fatiche, coi dolori, non trova mezzo di sodisfare a' suoi più imperiosi bisogni, vedendosi abbandonato dagli uomini e perseguitato dalla sfortuna, stanco di soffrire si ribella alla sua sorte, si dà al vizio ed all'ozio che lo trascinano alla galera... È inutile illudirsi; ne abbiamo la prova evidente; i privilegiati vogliono che l'operaio viva e muoia povero, e finchè li lascerete fare da padroni...*"

Mizzi's party wanted no Colonial Office interference in internal affairs and by 1886 was demanding "complete autonomy" in internal affairs. It wanted a wider franchise, with educational attainment (not property) as the chief criterion for eligibility. They wanted the church to be independent of the state. Although there is much lip-service to Catholicism as an ingredient of nationalism, which it was, nevertheless many situations and positions indicate that, at heart, the PN was more secular, critical of the tendency of the ecclesiastical hierarchy to ally itself closely with the colonial *régime*. When in 1885 there seemed to be an exception to this general rule - the nomination of a French-speaking Maltese bishop not known for his Anglophilia, Antonio Maria Buhagiar - a storm of protest erupted. What now, a bishop sympathetic to the nationalist cause; a worse sin could not be committed in Malta. Cyprus was a lost cause in that respect, but Malta not so. Sure enough Buhagiar got thrown out, as far away as the Caribbean - where he died soon after arriving. Unlike the Gozo bishop Pace, who was later knighted, Buhagiar had never shown favour to the *régime*. Pace therefore was made archbishop. Let it be said - is the door-post listening? - this bishop was no friend of the nationalists at all; though he tried using them as best he could when he later had a problem with the colonial administration and Protestant protesters about mixed marriages.

In the late 1880s "Anglophobes" and "Anglophiles" come together in the quest for representative government, and here the young Gerald Strickland della Catena lent a valuable helping hand, writing letters to **The Times** (of London) from his Cambridge digs, and coalescing with the grand old man himself, the **Pater Patriae**, to proceed to London for talks. Draft constitutions, more letters and resignations and re-elections, fear of increasing church sympathy (that man Buhagiar!) for the nationalist ideal.

In 1887 the unbelievable happened: flags flew and bands played on deck, as crews lined up for the salute. Malta had representative government.

Come the next election, in 1888: Strickland stands on the PN ticket. Result: Mizzi's PN: 14 seats. Savona's Reform Party: 0.

This time round we have a majority of elected members on the Council and even an experiment with a miniature cabinet in the form of three of these in an Executive Council (with a salary of £300 yearly). There are many areas of reserve, of course, and the Governor is in the chair. But still. Until only a few years earlier such a constitutional status for Malta would have been dismissed as an utter impossibility.

Can the nationalists now govern, can they circumnavigate Scylla and Charybdis? Perhaps with Strickland's help? Tut tut, in a year's time Strickland has done a Dingli. He now begins to work at being 'the government' himself. He becomes Chief Secretary, the lynch pin and factotum of colonial administration: tempter and teaser, broker and deliverer, initiator and executor.

Our story is replete with ironies. Who would you say becomes Strickland's chief rival? Wrong; Savona. Mizzi reckons he had achieved his political aim and

therefore retires from active politics voluntarily, returning to what was left of his legal profession, but continuing to edit *Malta*. He leaves behind a yawning vacuum in the 'parliamentary' leadership and a succession of Councillors who shine and fade intermittently. The main challenger for the Leader of the Opposition job is Savona. Wasn't Savona Rector of the University; the Director of Education? So he was indeed, until Malta was to obtain representative government. Then he resigned and went into politics with his Reform Party humiliated but undeterred, especially after Mizzi's departure. A Dingli in reverse, his slogan now was that representative government was not good enough. Boo the PN constitution! Fight for real self-government! But was this not the same person who just earlier was telling London to abolish the constitution altogether and to have the governor rule on his own advised by counsellors? Well, yes, but now that the British had agreed to give in to the PN's request, he thought he might as well return to the hustings and do better than they. Goodbye Governor.

Had the roles changed in an alternating succession? Yes and no. Because Savona in 1880 had been the last whiff that set the so-called **Anti-Riformisti** on course. When, having fought an election campaign saying he would not betray the electors' confidence by accepting office, Savona accepted the plum job of Director of Education no sooner had he been returned, the scorn of the emerging opposition network knew no bounds. It was just after that *volte face* that the **Antiriformisti** took root - to combat Savona who was seen as the protoplasm of colonialism: reared in the regiment as army schoolmaster, schooled and trained in London, and finally promoted to high office in the most sensitive area of all: "re-education". In other words, there is a constancy and a continuity in the Savona posture of 1889: it is anti-PN. Even if he is saying the opposite of what he had previously held, he is nevertheless having it out against the old foe.

If no longer the urge for a counter-culture, we have here certainly the yearning for a counter-party, if only as a means to power and plurality. More kindly, one can argue simply that only fools do not change; others change, change over and change back again. The searching question was credibility. What did the electors -those with votes - make of all this? Credibility Savona never quite regains on a national scale, however hard he tried to ally himself now with the bishop, as a Papist champion; then with Mizzi himself for a couple of years as a **Unionista**; and subsequently with Monsignor Panzavecchia in the **Partito Popolare** formed in 1895. All this however is not to undermine or undervalue Savona or his followers. His base was and remained Valletta (especially perhaps after the introduction of electoral districts). A brilliant speaker, an excellent wielder of the pen, especially in English, a clever operator, organiser and administrator, a self-made man with ideas about social reform and progress that sought expression Savona also was a power-monger and, it would seem, a ruthless one. Possibly he was disgusted by certain aspects of Maltese politics and for a moment wondered if government could effectively survive when

faced with unrelenting opposition. If so, however, he quickly converted back to the other pole, demanding more power for the people. Was he unwittingly a mimicry, puffed and emptied in the curious manner described by Alfred Zimmern at the start of this book? That malediction would have afflicted others before him no less than after him.

While it may be too much to draw precise parallels between Savona in 1886 - 1888 and Mintoff in 1956-1958, some comparison is unmistakable and unavoidable. Direct rule or self-government! Integration or Independence! Either with you or against you! So at any rate the music flows; *Jew nejja jew maħruqa*, as a Maltese proverb would have it. In between, we have Stricklandism - another tricky pregnancy we need to brood on awhile.

Gerald Strickland (1861-1940) is arguably the single most influential personality in Malta during this century; his rise to power is already entrenched well into the preceding one. Strickland was a child born under a star. His father, a Royal Navy officer, came from a wealthy and established Catholic family, owning much property including Sizergh Castle in Westmorland. Consequently young Gerald, silver spoon in mouth, went on the Grand Tour - just to have a look at the world, and do a Jules Verne - before going up to Cambridge, for his university studies. Such a start in life can help as well as hinder one's personality development - on the one hand, you ride high; on the other hand you never struggle in the thick of real life. Coping can be less a consideration than success. And the expectation, the need to succeed can be a millstone around your neck. On the positive side, young Strickland was ushered into the world in style, and he could think in terms of achievements and high office, of marking times and deciding destinies. He was not an "*isolano*", or at least he should have had enough opportunity to get out of such a frame of mind. But surprisingly Strickland seems to have been a child of tiny Malta more perhaps than anyone so far has dared suggest. His pettiness and pique, suspicions and highly-strung temperament seemed to be rather more Maltese than English qualities. This feeling about him we come across time and again in the views expressed privately by Englishmen, true blue Englishmen, pedigrees who had not come out of wog wombs. And yet, to the extent that this person was Maltese, he hailed from the *crema della società*: the local aristocracy. Was it perhaps the sensation that he was too good for Malta, too big for Malta, hence the arrogant persistence to have his way regardless of what others felt and thought, which so characterises his entire political career, here and overseas?

Strickland has to be understood not only as a child of wealth and privilege, but also as a son of the times: a man who could claim ready access to two worlds, two centres of gravity, two cultures even: a dominant one (in his mind, at any rate) and an inferior one: a mother cow and the baby suckling. The latter needed the former to survive, to grow, but never to become a mother cow in turn. Perhaps a golden calf. In him - and not surprisingly, to him - Britain and Malta were one, inseparable and

Pro-British  
Maltese.

(if he had his way) very nearly indistinguishable. Which is what the Phoenician theory was all about: the Phoenicians, having settled on the Celtic fringes of Britain as well as in Malta, gave the Maltese an ethnic edge which put them on the western side of the Channel; they were not (God forbid) an appendix to the Italian peninsula, a nail to the boot. The Maltese, Strickland believed, had to become as English as possible in everything, and it was his grand mission in life and in time to make them so, to render them English - as he said - in speech, in thought and in fact.

We are living here at a time when nobody dreamed that the British Empire of yore would come to grief the way it did: banish the thought from even the most seditious mind. Hence to plan ahead in that way was like walking into an infinity, another "Reich of a thousand years" (and actually a "Reich" that lasted much longer than the Hitler or Mussolini versions of reincarnated historical glories, mainly because it was markedly different from either of those inventions). There were the doubters, the discontents, the dreamers. Stricklandians would dismiss these with a wave of the hand as irrelevant, destined to oblivion. Malta's manifest destiny was not (as the doubters and dreamers would have it) to belong and be one with Italy, the Latin Mediterranean and Continental Europe; it was instead to be a gem of Empire, lining the studied routes of trade and commerce, a spring-board to adventure and prosperity, progress and civilization, industry and wealth. The fount of this future would be London, the emporium of the world, Albion the Mother of Parliaments.

This Stricklandian projection was not merely stemming from a profound conviction: it was also a great source of power and strength, which Strickland fondled and employed to the hilt. He was a perfect combination - the operator with two hearts, speaking English as his native tongue and Italian as an accomplishment; an Englishman and a Roman Catholic; born in Malta of a Maltese mother but of English stock with a great family tradition and status behind him at home. Here too were potentially all the makings of a disaster, of a pompous pretender who was ultimately neither fish, nor flesh nor fowl. We now know that Strickland's career in Malta and elsewhere in the Empire, and later on in the British Houses of Parliament, was not too well regarded on the whole. But at the time, above all to many Maltese dependents of British employers (and that was most of the working population) he was demi-god, potentially at any rate. The more exalted he was, the better could he bridge the distance separating these two nations and races: he was seen as a pitkál, a ħuttáb, a middle man and fixer. He could stand tall with the burdens of office weighing gracefully upon his shoulders - the first (and last) Maltese ever to become Chief Secretary, and in the entire history of the British Empire and Commonwealth surely the only former colonial Governor ever to become Prime Minister of a onetime colony "governed" by himself. A Guinness record. In Malta, where else. Let us try to understand Strickland in context. Much of our problem rests with the inhabitants of the fortress colony themselves, as these had gradually been churned out by the long, pace-setting British presence in the island.

There is only a limited comparison between Savona and Strickland. The former was a local, even if he had had the rare privilege of being sent off for two years to Battersea College in London, to train as a regimental schoolmaster. But he was a child of Valletta, born of modest Maltese parents, self-made if on the climb, his native language was Maltese even though he loved and possessed English, his wife and children were Maltese, even if reared in the British military tradition; most significantly, he never wielded the sort of power that Strickland came to have, first as Chief Secretary, than as Governor, and later as Prime Minister. We may justifiably toy with the term *Stricklandism*, as a way of doing politics, and as a vision of ethno-cultural direction, a method of "wheeling and dealing" as well as an underlying equivocal affinity and belonging.

Strickland was in power in Malta from 1889 to 1902 and again from 1927 to 1932, a total of 18 years on the face of it. However through his membership of the Commons after 1924, and later the Lords until his death in 1940, he continued making his mark on Maltese affairs *via* London. And since the 1920s *via* his press in Valletta, the first and most modern printing press that the island had seen, Stricklandism was in full swing, whether Strickland was or was not in office. The pro-British and Imperialist position, and what was far more serious and hurting, the adamantly anti-Nationalist and anti-Italian position, throbbed on with rancorous drive, and right through the thirties and forties leading to the dissident's ultimate punishment: exile. So when we talk of Stricklandism we are really meaning a much longer period and a far deeper influence than would be suggested simply by the years Lord Strickland actually spent in office here. **Il-Berqa** was particularly important (until ousted from the stationery stalls by **L-Orizzont** in the early sixties). Moreover, Strickland was (many thanks to his wives, especially the second one who according to the Italian consul Silenzi was worth between £4,000,000 and £5,000,000) the wealthiest man in the island. And one of the wealthier persons in the world, at the time.

In Malta, where the ordinary man would do anything for some money - boys dived into the sea by the score, deep down to the bottom for a penny, and as far down as it took, with bleeding noses, for a sixpence! - this buying capacity was of the utmost importance, a great, direct, corrupting exercise utilising and organising human misery for partisan ends. In an election campaign in the twenties and thirties, Strickland was said to write out a cheque for £5,000 to De Petri, the Party Treasurer, who in turn would assign one Griffiths, from Cospicua, to do the distributing to bullies and hands, obtaining receipts from all those whose services were being commissioned. The receipts ensured the accountable distribution of the monies, and presumably were useful records for the party to keep too. You never know! The nationalists apparently had this going on too but on a smaller scale, because next to Strickland they were paupers, and would not dive for sixpences only because they were too proud to lend themselves to that. A Gasan is one whose name cropped up

on the Nationalist side. Such scuffles and skirmishes as took place in these campaigns are not comparable to what Malta was to witness in the seventies and eighties.

Compared to Strickland, Mintoff ruled Malta far longer, longer than anyone else in modern times: 1955 to 1958 and 1971 to 1984 as Prime Minister, that's a full 18 years; but before that, especially from 1949 onwards when he embarked on his intra-party struggle, and afterwards, with a protégé for a substitute, he retained an overbearing influence on government and later on party affairs. Again here then we may say that the influence of Mintoffism extends for much longer than 18 years. Forty at least! In Strickland's footsteps, Mintoff took care to organise a good press (while the Nationalists droned on in Italian or Italianised Maltese alphabets). Strickland had roped in the Labour Party as a footstool, Mintoff did that to the General Workers Union, formed initially in 1943 as an independent labour union. Its more outstanding leaders - Miller, Cilia, Moses Gatt, Sceberras and Attard Kingswell - continued to resist as they could being swallowed up whole by Mintoff's party, but in the end Jonah succumbed to his fate. Digestion occurred, when statutory fusion took place in 1978 officially incorporating the General Workers Union into the MLP. That was more than a *Compact*; it was an amalgamation. A step further! The main base of support remained the dockyard area, where the British had always been most vigilant and the witch-hunts for nationalist workers remained most intense and ruthless. Nothing much seems to have changed in that respect.

Among the comparisons to be made between Strickland and Mintoff we find the phenomenon of dependence yearning which riddles Maltese political history. We wish to challenge the currently assumed and festooned mentality or presumption of everyone wanting independence: all young people today are told by the respective parties and Television is about who wanted independence more and who wanted it less. How far in fact did Maltese people on the whole truly desire to be independent, fully independent? We find indications all along that they were never terribly keen on it. We shall get back to Mintoffism at a later stage, when we discuss the Integration campaign, and the continuum with Stricklandism may become clearer. Yet this dependence-independence dichotomy, could be traced back and further back.

To conclude our bit on Strickland, we should say that Strickland was also an innovator. Usually with power to the elbow, he nevertheless had some great projects which fired the imagination of his constituency and which Malta for one reason or another needed - a breakwater, at the turn of the century, was built when he was in charge (partly with imported workers); he conceived of the need for a general hospital (St Luke's); he wanted airport facilities extended to make Malta "the Clapham Junction of the air"; he saw the need for transshipment facilities for something like what today's Marsaxlokk project would have been in those days perhaps; for quays to protect shipping, as at Mgarr, Gozo, and other fairly simple

changes that were new to Malta, such as bicycles for postmen. When first made this proposal had raised a laugh in the Council Chamber! And Lady Strickland is remembered for the Phoenicia Hotel - Malta's first modern tourist facility - and the St. Edward's College endowment for a public school on English lines, intended for Maltese pupils. Strickland's chief problem was that he would not take no for an answer, he would rather ride roughshod over the feelings, even the legitimate feelings and rights, of others, sometimes contemptuously and daringly. Nationalist veterans even today believe that Strickland rather than Mintoff is the one responsible for sowing the first seeds for a crazy polarisation which became the scourge of contemporary Maltese society. His way of dealing frequently irritated the London officials: they thought he was insolent, insensitive, over-bearing, tactless, too pushy.

The so-called "Church-State" dispute of the late 1920s and early 1930s was held even by the 1931 British royal commissioners to have been largely of his making. The commissioners noted that "nearly every action to which a sinister implication could be given was attributed with increasing force to Lord Strickland alone, as the dominating power in the Constitutional Party - a party which received on almost all points the full support of the Labour Party". And concluded thus:

It is useless to disguise the opinion that Lord Strickland was a dominating and aggressive force, with a manner calculated to cause irritation and annoyance and with methods of attack which involved personal animosity on the part of many of those who were attacked, leading to a tendency for the whole Island to be divided into very embittered cliques. We think that these feelings and views were carried too far: and that the attribution to Lord Strickland of all the proceedings of the Government, supported as he was by so many strong adherents, assigned too much to him alone the responsibility for actions to which objection was taken".<sup>1</sup>

The Apostolic Delegate, Mgr. Robinson, went further. Strickland, he said, wished, "at all cost to make the church subservient to the State and to reduce the Bishops and priests to the position of mere employees of the Government". Strickland, he added, showed "no regard whatever for the law, nor for the rights and feelings of the clergy and of the Catholic people". And further still:

"Reliable witnesses do not hesitate to say that at the present moment Malta is being subjected to a reign of terror and despotism. The Opposition in Parliament is disarmed, its press gagged, the law-courts threatened, justice suspended, the Constitution in danger, the Country in a state of ferment and the Church and Religion openly affronted and attacked. The same witnesses state that, although Lord Strickland poses as a champion of British Imperial prestige, in reality he is acting contrary to the best traditions of the Empire, and injuring its true interests..."<sup>2</sup>

Padre Carta, an Italian who found himself in the centre of controversy, emerges as a fairly holy man, assigned to root out indiscipline in his order, which he sought to do with dignity as instructed by his superiors. But the two ecclesiastics in question, Padre Micallef and Padre Grech, played politics, saying they were being persecuted because they were Stricklandians. All this talk of indiscipline, what was afoot? On paper we are never told, but a contemporary has confided to this writer that it was common knowledge at the time - or so rumour unquestioningly had it - that these two Franciscan Conventuals had standing affairs with ladies who visited

them in their rooms. More, the ladies would come in through a door on the roof-top, then make their way down through some latch or other backdoor into the rooms of the reverend gentlemen. Camillo Bonanno, who left Malta in the early thirties and whose memory in Rome is as lucid as ever, vividly remembers the circulation of these rumours at the time, but of course proof eludes us. In so small a place, such billing and cooing did not go unnoticed or unheard. This quite novel theory would suggest that we may well have the roof-top ladies and their Franciscan lovers to thank for the origins of that acrimonious "politico-religious" dispute leading to what must be one of the greatest storms in a teacup ever. Strickland took the bait, consciously or not, and even intervened to prevent the embarkation of one of the disciplined religious men on the ground that he was being "exiled" for political reasons! And yet Carta had kindly enough agreed to send him to Sicily rather than Scotland because our "roof-top lover" said Scotland would be too cold for him. It was perhaps no great wonder after all that the Vatican declared Strickland *persona non grata*.

A strong rival version, however, is that all these two monks were guilty of was keeping late hours playing billiards at the King's Own Band Club down the street from their convent in Kingsway!

Or were such rumours nothing but calumnies emanating from Nationalist circles, in the same league as Terinu seeing Strickland in a freemason's apron? (But see A. Koster's recent rehash of H. Smith's Strickland biography published by Progress Press, **Lord Strickland Servant of the Crown**.)

Here we had everything **but** a theological or even a religious dispute; these were dirty politics in more senses than one. But the fact remains that we got religious sanctions and censures, all of medieval Rome descended on this bastard child of La Sacra Religione. Mortal sins, condemnations, punishments. Hell-fire, devils tearing your bones to pieces with nasty-looking forks. Precedents for future reference. Nor were these isolated instances. At least twice in the previous century the ecclesiastical hierarchy had staunchly resisted "interference" with alleged injustices in aspects of the church's own financial and pastoral administrative networks. The most obnoxious was that involving Archbishop Sir Pietro Pace when he threatened with excommunication not only Dr Goffredo Adami, who was proposing a motion about some unjust measures involving orphan girls entrusted to the Curia's pastoral care, but any and every elected Counsellor supporting Adami. Poor Adami, not relishing the thought of excommunication he eventually gave up. Pace, incidentally, was the same bishop who excommunicated Dimech, banned the PN Daily *Malta*, and engineered the papal reference to Fortunato Mizzi as a dangerous man (*inimicus homo*).

Problems in the Senate partly concerned voting by the two ecclesiastical Senators in view of the fact that a finance bill was defeated. But these, as Senators, were under no obligation to support the Government. The problem was two fold:

what powers of review should an upper House have, and should ecclesiastics be politicians. Further complications concerned the appointment of T.U.C. councillors who supported Strickland and the exclusion of others that did not, and the legality or rather the illegality of such dealings. A judgement unseating Senators appointed by the Government was given by the Court, presided over by Sir Arturo Mercieca, and confirmed as correct by the Privy Council. Legislation itself thus became an issue - if the parliament was illegally constituted, its acts would all become null and void at law. The advent of Strickland to power had thus unsettled Malta and aroused much turmoil. Just before the 1932 elections he did apologise publicly to the Bishops, who accepted his apology: so the censures against him and his supporters were finally withdrawn.

What has all this got to do with independence? Not much. We are engulfed here not so much by the urge for any independence as by the entrenchment and consolidation of dependence in its various manifestations - secular and clerical. On the "secular side", the prospect being pushed by the pro-British party, which increased its vote steadily from 1921 to 1927, was everything but independence. More dependence, more survival. How could you cut the hand that fed you? Those suggesting otherwise were enemies of the workers. Spies perhaps of a foreign, alien power! Pro-British was to be free. Dependence was insurance. And in matters "religious", the church hierarchy threw its weight about with impunity; even, one might suggest, unnecessarily in a self-defeating way causing much strife that might have been avoided.

After the constitutional breakdown of 1930, which as we have seen was largely blamed on Strickland even by the British inspectors, and a taste of roughriding during 1927-1930, there was a good chance the nationalists would have been returned anyway. As it was, their victory could always be latched to the ecclesiastical censures, and thus they could be deprived of the moral high ground in the commanding majority they achieved in 1932 (21 seats to 10 for the Constitutionals and 1 for Labour). True or false (possibly false) Lenten Pastorals and grave sins provided a good pretext to the habitually anti-nationalist power to seek to undermine or dismiss the PN's victory.

In 1933 self-government - attained after a long, hard struggle in 1921 - was revoked; and in 1936 it was more formally laid to rest. Only months after arguably the largest nationalist electoral victory achieved this century - the only two-thirds majority government in our Legislative Assembly - the British took the constitution away lock, stock and barrel. Reason: a Mizzian ploy to give marginally more importance to the teaching of Italian (not by any means to the exclusion of English however), and alleged financial mismanagement. The Strickland camp now hoped they would succeed the Nationalists; Strickland got busy championing constitutionalism as in 1886 but this time to no avail. By the time self-government returned in 1947 he was dead and so was his Party.

Ponder awhile the cruelty of this new predicament. By a proclamation of Harry Luke, Lieutenant-Governor, dated 2 November 1933 and ending with the words "God save the King!" Malta's entire cabinet was dismissed less than two years after it had been elected by popular suffrage. Those sacked by Harry Luke were Sir Ugo Mifsud, Nerik Mizzi, Giovanni Adami, Carmelo Mifsud Bonnici ("*il-Gross*") Salvatore Borg Olivier and Giuseppe Micallef. Before we run away with the idea that this unusual sacking was simply for the all too commonly alleged and publicized reasons, it is instructive to read what A.J. Dawe and Harry Luke had to say privately about the concocted plan to do away with Responsible Government in Malta, which had only been resitituted by Letters Patent dated 25 April, 1932. Their main fear was having "a form of government which is unfitted to function in 'any grave emergency'", which would not "carry with it the sense of security necessary in the present difficult period". Briefly, here is a first reason they mention in correspondence at the time, now available from archival sources: "The international situation during the course of the last few months has brought into special relief the importance of Malta as a unit of Imperial defence and Communications". "A calm civil population unexicted by political controversy" was likewise necessary.

Internationally, 1932 saw the abandoning of free trade and the re-introduction of full-scale protection, with a Conference in Ottawa attempting to establish Imperial trading policies; these measures led to the resignation of several Liberals from the British Government and strained relations with the Irish Free State, where De Valera came to power and land purchase repayments to the British Government were stopped. Nationalism - colonial and otherwise - was rearing its head everywhere in 1932; and a number of assassinations took place: the Japanese Premier, Tsuyoshi, and the French President, Doumer, both met a violent death. Most significantly perhaps was the challenge represented by national socialism in Germany, when in 1932 the NSDAP became with 230 seats the largest single party in the Reichstag; and in Britain, Mosely founded the British Union of Fascists. The Japanese-punitive expedition against China from Shanghai further stretched the premises for the peaceful regulation of internal affairs which the League of Nations had been established for. Most pointedly of all, probably, was the example set by the Statute of Westminster in 1931 whereby British Dominions became sovereign states under the British crown, and as we shall see, Malta's aspiration to join that league. Nothing very dramatic occurred in Italy in 1932, although Malta was agog with *italianità* sponsored by Rome.

What was going on in the Maltese nationalist camp? The representative government obtained in 1887 had been revoked in 1903, shortly after Strickland's kick upstairs to the Leeward Islands as governor. This succeeding constitution had left the nationalist movement aghast and they inveighed against it, and the British, in the strongest language. In 1886 Fortunat Mizzi had been urging Maltese patriots to "break your chains"; now what could he do? There was a feeling of helplessness and

almost an anger that in such a well-guarded place it would be utter folly to seek or to permit violent outbursts. Thus the violence was limited to language. Europe, the appeals read, could never permit such treatment of a European people in the twentieth century. In sending such petitions and appeals to London, suitably translated into English, British officials commenting the covering letters would pass snide remarks, ridiculing the native yellors. As if Europe cared about them! As if Britain could not do what it pleased in its possessions!

"The threat of the abolition of the Constitution was repeated *ad nauseam*", editorialized **Malta** in June 1903, "but the same had been deprived of any effect by the frequent abuse of the Constitution itself which had been reduced *de facto* to nothing before it was abolished *de jure*..." The fact, at any rate, will remain manifest to Europe and to the whole world, that Mr Chamberlain wished to punish this country simply because the Elected Members did not act in accordance with the wishes of the Government, from which fact it is deduced that the Council in Malta can exist only on condition that it does what the Government wishes. And this is the strange notion that Mr Chamberlain has of a Constitution for Malta. Hurrah for British Liberty!"<sup>3</sup>

This man Mizzi, the "Dr M" of yore, could plead to his heart's content: on the other side, nobody was prepared to listen. Abstentionism, as an opposition policy, stemmed from this confounding situation: no representative government, no cooperation. Resist, boycott, disdain, hate. *Melitensium Amor, requiescat in pacem*. Half way through this unequal tussle, we get world war one. Carrots for collaborators, iron chains for opponents. Francesco Azzopardi suggests returning to the Council as a palliative, in the hope that in that way some good could be achieved. The P.N. splits on the issue, with the Mizzian wing firmly against collaboration. In 1914 Manwel Dimech is shipped off to Egypt, and in 1917 Nerik Mizzi, an elected councillor, is court-martialled and nearly silenced, but he survives to fight another day.

Dimech's line in his paper **Il Bandiera tal-Maltin** was that if Britain left us we should fend for ourselves, no more no less. In words that were more blunt and easily intelligible to the populace, Dimech was reiterating the elder Mizzi's position, the demand for complete autonomy as of right. But of course Mizzi was head of a party and the senior politician in the country, whereas Dimech, an ex-prisoner, was minor fry by comparison. He was freer to be bolder in his language and he was. Malta's greatest enemy, he wrote, was Strickland.<sup>4</sup> The younger Mizzi in 1912 had recommended a federation of Malta with Italy, allowing full use of the harbours to Britain and other powers. There was a suggestion Malta might be exchanged for Eritrea. Such deals were always controversial but not impossible when powers dealt with possessions much as players can do with a pack of cards. Mizzi was a thorn in Britain's side, as he seems to have despaired of his father's apparently useless efforts to obtain Malta's rights through parliamentary and legal means. Nerik

therefore wished to break the mould and he came up with this proposal in an article in *La Rassegna Contemporanea*, a Rome journal. It was a suggestion he was to pay for dearly for as long as he lived. In 1942 the leading proponent for his deportation to Uganda, without charge, with 46 others, was Roger Strickland, supported by the Labour Party. Only a relatively new and young councillor then voted against the deportations, Giorgio Borg Olivier. When that vote was taken Ugo Mifsud, the former Nationalist PM, had just died of a heart attack suffered while speaking against exiling Maltese. Nerik Mizzi was already under arrest.<sup>5</sup>

Matters first came to a head bloodily after the war in 1919. Wilson's fourteen points, the nationalist struggle in Egypt (Saad Zaghlul was himself deported to Malta in March 1919), in Ireland, in India (the Amritsar massacre at this time), in Palestine, and the unyielding Maltese nationalist undertakings for self-government, increased hopes that finally Malta would get its due. In addition, there were threats of massive discharges from the Services, especially the dockyard, scarcities, bread was bad and expensive. As in 1886 and in 1946, a "National Assembly" was set up representing all constituted bodies to draft a new self-government constitution. It was meeting at the *Giovine Malta* in Valletta when crowds, gathered in support and in anger at the general situation, were fired on by British troops. There were wild scenes, including pelting, looting and manhandling; but the dead were all Maltese. They were given heroes' funerals, and a national bond in blood was consolidated that day. The event remained known as the *Sette Giugno*, a symbiosis of Maltese nationalism uniting past struggles and future aspirations. Partly as a result of these events, and partly as a consequence of the long constitutional struggle and the end of the war, Malta got self-government in 1921. The first cabinet, the first head of Ministry, the first parliament proper. There were reserved matters. It was a diarchy in fact - with a Maltese and an Imperial Government - and it was bicameral with an upper and lower house.

Given the position of Malta in imperial thinking and strategy, this new departure was a milestone.

To suggest that the *Sette Giugno* means nothing but a riot by criminal elements, or an unfortunate panic reaction by some scared soldiers who feared for their lives (and poor Major General Hunter Blair's career was disrupted), is ill-informed or cynical. If Lorenzo Deyer was killed accidentally while watching the drama unfold outside the *Chronicle* offices, that does not divest him of his innocence or of his sympathies. He became "a hero" even if he had not sought to be one.

A spate of letters in *The Sunday Times* (of Malta) this year have poohed-poohed the idea that the *Sette Giugno* is worth commemorating at all, suggesting that it is practically a non-event, or even an occurrence to be ashamed of. Well, it is not so. Its timing, its nature and its aftermath give it qualities that render it an historic event of note in our little calendar, especially that recording the period of British rule over Malta.

Here is a period poem by Luigi Billon entitled "Ai Martiri del VII Giugno" which evokes the national sentiments provoked by the *Sette Giugno*, to honour which a monument was first erected at the Addolarata in 1925:-

Alle sacre cruenta urne recenti  
Dè martiri della Patria e del dover  
Mesto e pietoso, sopra le frementi  
Ali del patrio amor, voli il pensiero.

Ci dicon le campane, oggi, fratelli, —  
Quasi voci pioranti miserere —:  
"Pace ai caduti: sui fraterni avelli  
Vegli la Croce, echeggino preghiere!"

Pace a chi cadde coi polmoni infranti  
Dal reo furor d'improvvido moschetto,  
Pei diritti della Patria sacrosanti  
Baldo esponendo a rischi estremi il petto!

Da quel sangue inaffiato, ecco verdeggia,  
A Malta auspicio di migliore età,  
Sotto il vessil che i mari signoreggia  
Un primo germinar di libertà.

Pace ai caduti: agli orfani figlioli  
Scorra l'obolo patrio e alle consorti,  
E piamente i tetti ne consoli:  
N'esulteranno anche nell'unra i forti.

Ne parli ai tardi posterì la Storia,  
Ne viva il pio ricordo in ogni core,  
E di perenne aureola di gloria  
L'anime n'incoroni il Dio d'Amore

E stretta all'Arte ne perpetui i nomi  
La Maestà del bronza e del granito,  
E al mondo insegni come in cuori indomi  
Qui ferve ancor l'eroico sangue avito!<sup>6</sup>

A comprehensive history of the *Sette Giugno* still needs to be written but in the meantime we know enough about what happened to realise that the excesses of handfuls of looters and wildcat elements in stressful and agitated crowd scenes, does not canopy over everything else that had been happening in the social and political

spheres. That is not to excuse but to understand. True there were dockyard workers, some of whom were not known pacifists: these tend to act *en masse* because they form a proletarian concentration. However, none of those killed was a dockyard worker. Nor apparently were any of our victims "prototype" manual labourers, with the possible exception of one. Much more significantly no one of those killed was a criminal or had a criminal record: these were not the hip-shooting *squadristi* and gangsters that Maltese today think of when they sense political violence in the air. The worst legacy of Mintoffism cannot be allowed to blur an earlier history which was essentially different in spite of apparent similarities in certain respects. It is a fact that the uproar caused by the *Sette Giugno* facilitated and possibly accelerated the grant of self-government, although a new and improved constitution would have been granted anyway, in the changed times after the war. Heroes? Spectators, interested onlookers, silent marchers sympathisers, unlucky victims, crushed by a superior aggression. No British soldier suffered the same fate. The self-defence argument therefore, if we have to be apologetic, is riddled with holes. Panic could be pleaded, what sort of justification is that when other means of maintaining order could have been available. For want of space and not to deviate from our main concern, we cannot here enter into the merits and demerits of the *Sette Giugno* but we have said enough to show that this event has a significant place in the road to our independence. It continued to be held a national event, certainly by the nationalist movement, and subsequently or intermittently also by other parties. Indeed in its wake we had a realignment of political forces and a noteworthy growth of participation in public affairs, for instance by mutual benefit societies and fledgling trade unions. One of our foremost unions, the Malta Union of Teachers, was founded in 1919; workers' union branches at the Imperial Dockyard also emerged at this time with the help of British trade unionists (such as Matthew Giles).<sup>7</sup>

Much more serious constitutionally was the revocation of self-government in 1933, a still more grave repetition of what had happened thirty years earlier. Shortly after a camouflaged request for Dominion Status had been made! Here we must stop to ponder what constitutions in Malta meant. In the colonial repression to which Malta was subjected for whatever reason of policy, constitutions were putty in the hands of their makers and takers. A fraud. A temporary palliative. A make believe. There was no solid foundation, no real body politic here, only pieces of paper that passed for basic laws for as long as Big Brother thought fit. An apprenticeship. In what? Forms and norms, yes. But substance, full-bloodied commitment, self-expression - that depended on how London might view the situation. To look behind your shoulder was the order of the day. Think again. See where your interest lay. Interest! Survival! Immediacy! Minnows and sharks, dwarfs and full-sized men. The humiliation was a recurring process, dehumanising and debilitating. To say constitutions were a sham did not help, it could simply demoralise those on the losing side still further. Yet the roars had to a thunder forth: you cannot do this to

us! Such strong language was shunned by others, almost erased from our past. Preferable to forget. Let bygones be bygones, and other typical Maltese aphorisms. Let us pretend that all's well that ends well. But perhaps it is time to wake up now, to be straight, to be free, to engage and to self-examine. Some will stand-off, make polite signs of disagreement and express distaste. Others may fish for party political advantage, thus to lampoon, to slogan and to further enlighten the people. Among those reared and doctored under earlier dispensations there will be easy prey. = *mittina*

The inter-war period is still under a cloud. A stigma hangs over it. Not much of an exorcism has taken place at all. Right up to the late fifties, if not later still, Maltese who were exiled without charge (and illegally) were still being derided in the pro-British/Labour section of the press as renegades, traitors, disloyal elements. In other words, the colonialist definitions held and were employed with all the force they commanded. As if nothing had changed. As we shall see, there is a new departure in 1958, one that needs looking at. But even more recently there have been wild accusations of 'fascism' levelled at those boldly enough opposing the colonial *régime* in Malta, a military dictatorship. What price fascism then? In Maltese political development, *Italianità* long antedates the emergence of fascism. So does the usually hollow change of irredentism. Cultural nationalism was the bastion of the resistance, the core that allowed for a good segment of the people to say 'no', when to do so was dangerous, these were Maltese who whatever their beliefs would stand up to be counted even at the cost of life and limb. Fascists? *Renegades?* Who actually says so, and with what motivation? In 1927 Winston Churchill in Rome declared that if he were an Italian he would be a Fascist. He did, but he could say what he liked because he was on the right side. On the right, you could say anything. The problem was disloyalty, suspicion of disloyalty, suspicion of the possibility of disloyalty.<sup>8</sup> A disloyalty in the mind, or the secretly tuning in to Italian radio before Rediffusion, starring Edwina Mountbatten, was introduced to counter-act it. Ah, disloyalty! Imagine disloyal workers even in His Majesty's dockyard, Admirals warned publicly about such workers, such menaces. How to punish these, how to hound and to harass them, perhaps to dismiss them, perhaps to exile them. Good, then we shall have loyalty, all the flock together faithful and true, the civilizing mission will be complete and the dockyard its social model, Malta a democracy and the Maltese happy with a great constitutional set-up. The loyal workers' movement will have triumphed over evil — those disloyal bourgeois trouble-makers who wouldn't take "no" for an answer and keep mum.

This whole stigma of nationalists-fascists-traitors has to be cleaned up, and the old imposed definitions looked at critically. We have seen Italian historians, like De Felice and Del Boca, and non-Italians, like Mack-Smith, struggle to unearth what the Fascist phenomenon actually was and represented; similar, painful attempts to unravel National Socialism and to understand it have been made by several German

scholars – Dahrendorf, Bracher, Broszat, as well as non-German ones, such as Bullock. If in the Maltese case Italian Fascism is a wound, let us bathe it: it needs air and light. Pertinent definitions are required, not the imported terms flung in our faces by one party or another, one country or another. Resistance to colonialism was a Maltese movement! Circumstances changed; international relations changed and influenced it; but nevertheless the primary concern was freedom from arbitrary, military rule. Italy was seen, mainly, and on the whole generally, as a potential ally in that progression, as an instrumental aid and a comforting thought, an intermediary that could possibly wangle an agreement with Britain acceptable to the neighbourly Malta. As had happened at the turn of the century when Visconti-Venosta and Sonnino had intervened successfully with Chamberlain in Rome against an already announced language substitution decree. Change of flag? That was not the point, nor the direction of political thought on the nationalist side. On the anti-nationalist side, there was one flag, the Union Jack (possibly with the red and white colours tucked somewhere in the corner). Those same colours featured on the ‘pro-Italian’ side as well, and possibly more so too. We have to understand the odds these people were up against. In the mid-thirties, Malta was in an agitated state, on the verge of a war. Several expulsions of Italian residents, surveillance and counter-surveillance of suspected agents, bugging devices and evesdroppers everywhere, witch-hunts, paranoia, xenophobia. Near-programs against Italian residents in Valletta. More anti-aircraft guns: another aerodrome; more troops and recruits; gas mask trials; flares lighting up the night with searchlights penetrating the dark sky, hovering around, pointing to target, real and imaginary, from one point to the other and back again, and again, and again. Almost daily, repeatedly. Firing practice. Freedom? A word that had no place in real life. Fascism? Change of Flag? Hobson on a cleft stick. And what about all those Italian singers, pianists, actresses, Montessori, Dante Alighieri, Umberto Primo, Istituto di Cultura, a school even in Raħal il-Ġdid, close to the Royal Dockyard: the height of infamy; and the *fascio*, the *avanguardia*, all these trips to Italy for free, discounted train fares for student visits, and student exchanges; uniformed children marching to bugle and drum. *Chi troppo la stira la strappa!* The boy scouts and girlguides would be outdone and by whom - by an alien competitor for the same apple’s eye. Who else might Nerik Mizzi have a word with but Mussolini? In 1934 and again in 1938. When the clamour threatening sanctions for Abyssinia calmed down, Britain once again sought Italy’s hand - if only to keep Mussolini from Hitler’s embrace. Mussolini was officially not too badly regarded in Britain, and in Malta he was praised by Strickland and Augustus Bartolo (who wished to meet him). But those were loyalists, they were on side, they could say and do what they liked. Hence Freedom. Thus freedom. “*Il-Kodiċi taċ-ċomb għall-Maltin*”, Dimech would say, “*u dak tal-karta strazza għall-Ingliżi*” – a colourful rendering of two weights and two measures philosophy.<sup>9</sup>

One final word before we get to the post-war period and to-day. If the search for heroes or martyrs is still on, there is one whose credentials cannot be easily faulted. His name: Carmelo Borg Pisani. He knowingly (and in foolhardiness) gave his all for a cause in which he heartily believed, Italia! Lawrence Mizzi has recounted the tale with honesty and grace.<sup>10</sup> Malta, to him, was unredeemed Italian soil. Linked by geography, history, tradition, folklore, sentiment, art, custom, literature and language, religion, everything except the British intrusion which had denaturalised and dehumanized the place. So many believed. Several Maltese and Italo-Maltese fought on the Italian side inspired by that ideal; there was only one Borg Pisani.

On his return from exile Nerik Mizzi confided to Giuseppe Ragonesi that many Maltese still wished to retain Italian culture in Malta. That in 1945. After so many Mussolini portraits and busts hidden in gardens and backyards or thrown into the sea! So there were Maltese "fascists", yes: colonial nationalists, Italophiles, anti-Britishers, freedom-fighters in their own convoluted ways, people nursed in conventional *amour propre*, not so much ideologues as anti-lackeys, individuals who often had much learning to back up their sentiments as well. Enigmae and lost souls, crying in a wilderness, a back-water. Of these, some went off to Italy, and stayed there. Those who still survive today prosper. Occasionally singing "Maltesina" in their hearts: "*Voglio ritornare a Malta...*" But Italy's part in the war finally emarginated talk of "*il barbaro del nord*"; there could hardly be a preference for "*il barbaro del sud*". Much came to depend on which side of the fence you happened to be on, or were thought to be on.

The following Maltese nationals, deported by order of William Dobbie in February, 1942 were on the wrong side of the fence, so much so that no charge or trial were needed; nor were lock and key in their own country sufficient; nor was the raging Mediterranean war a deterrent to shipping them off to Africa. Their names:

Guido Abela, Albert Bajona, Alfred Bencini, Vincent Bonello, Vincent Caruana, John Casabene, Charles Chetcuti, Joseph Cini, Giulio Cortis, Emanuel Cossai, Frank Curmi, Anthony Farrugia, Charles Farrugia, William Farrugia, Paul Felice, Charles Formosa, Emmanuel Galleri, Herbert Ganado, Henry Gatt, Salvatore Gatt, Albert Gauci, Daniel German, Joseph Grech Marguerat, Edgar Laferla, Carmelo Lateo, Edgar Lateo, Jos. Laudi, Orazio Laudi, Salv. Laudi, Georges Leprè, Enrico Mizzi, Joe W. Naudi, Charles Saffrette, John Sammut, Jos. Scicluna, Edgar George Soler, Vic. Savona, Sir Arturo Mercieca, Lady Mercieca, Alexander Stilon de Piro, Miss Liliana Mercieca, Mgr. A.V. Pantallersco.<sup>11</sup>

A concluding thought. As this writer intends to show in a substantive study being prepared on Italy in the British Mediterranean, among Maltese nationalist activists in the 1930s were sometimes to be found *fuorusciti*: Italian anti-Fascists. Disloyalty, not dictatorship, was what worried the British in Malta.

<sup>1</sup>Malta Royal Commission 1931 Report (H.M.S.O. London, 1932). While doubting whether “there could be any peace and harmony” as long as Strickland ruled, Robinson also acknowledged Strickland to be “an individual of strict and even rigorous personal morality” who maintained that to be a good Catholic “one also had to be a convinced anti-clerical”.

<sup>2</sup>Quoted in *ibid.*, p.46

<sup>3</sup>Among the most burning issues in Malta at this time were education and taxation policies; 1901 had seen the organization of public protest meetings outside Valletta. On all this see **Party Politics**, esp. Ch. IV and Ch. V.

<sup>4</sup>See Henry Frendo’s articles and books on Dimech e.g. **Birth Pangs of a Nation: Manwel Dimech’s Malta, 1860-1921** (Valletta, 1972), and complementary works published by Gerald Azzopardi of the MLP. In the 1970s Mintoff’s party “appropriated” Dimech while the PN looked on speechlessly.

<sup>5</sup>The General Coordinator of Malta’s XXV Independence Anniversary celebrations, Chev. Paul Naudi, a former Director of Information, was present in the Council Chamber when Sir Ugo collapsed and was carried away.

<sup>6</sup>This poem was read out during a commemoration of the seventieth anniversary in Siggiewi. See Henry Frendo’s address. On that occasion in **Il-Poplu**: “*Poplu Wiehed: Is-Sette Guigno sebghin sena wara.*” On 8 June 1989 **The Times** (of Malta) reported this particular event, attended by thousands of people, in one line. **In-Nazzjon** and **L-Orizzont** both carried special supplements about the *Sette Guigno*.

<sup>7</sup>On this see e.g. Henry Frendo: **Ir-Rivoluzzjoni Maltija tal-1919** (Valletta, 1970) especially the section on trade union formations. See also the correspondence following this preliminary study when first published as a series of articles in **Il-Hajja**.

<sup>8</sup>On this read Ray Bondin’s **Deportation 1942: The Internment and Deportation of Maltese Nationalists** (Valletta, 1980) and Marengo’s review of it “**The Winter of ’42**” in **The Popular Movement for a new Beginning** (Valletta, 1981), pp. 41-43. See also the Ganado and Soler auto-biographies.

<sup>9</sup>See **Party Politics**, p.112, on this. Dimech was referring specifically to the Colonel Hewson case which led to the 1899 language substitution decree, later repealed following Italy’s brokerage.

<sup>10</sup>**Għall-Holma ta' Hajtu** (KKM Valletta, 1980). A second edition was published subsequently.

<sup>11</sup>Three non-Maltese then resident in Malta also went with them, a German (Ladislau Klein) and two Britons (Eric Maitland Woolf and Ifar Gabel).