

Chapter VI

OLD WINE IN NEW BOTTLES: POLITICAL PARTIES AND THE GRANT OF RESPONSIBLE GOVERNMENT

'An old order of things is tumbling down and another order is being set up, not, as of old, on its ruins, but on a completely new foundation'; so wrote the *Voce del Popolo* in 1919, commenting on a moving performance of Girolamo Royetta's *Romanticismo* at the Manoel Theatre:¹ that 'magnificent demonstration of patriotism which reached its climax at the scene of Mazzini's oath and at the cry of Vitaliano Lamberti "Now is the time!"'² Just like the red and white ribbons being worn in button-holes, the crowded meetings of the *Assemblea Nazionale* were representative and symbolic. The *Giovine Malta* hall was 'packed with people, of all classes and social standing, of no political party, but of one creed, and that creed Nationalism'.³ Elated by a demonstration outside his residence in celebration of the achievement of self-government, Sceberras told the crowd that the time had come for all parties to sink all political differences and work the new constitution in a loyal spirit.⁴

Purging the past of all its ills and, for a moment, anticipating a changed world after years of waiting and suffering, this euphoria was a catharsis, a short-lived dream because conflict is endemic in society and the solution lay precisely in cultivating political parties as a rational mechanism whereby to channel and regulate differences of opinion in an orderly manner within the radically transformed constitutional order that was about to start functioning.

Ministerial attitudes are not developed overnight. You cannot blame the officials or someone else or the past, but you have to face the duties and responsibilities of your own decisions, to formulate policy on your own and to bear the responsibility of your decisions and of their consequences. Politicians, like officials, must escape from the strait-jacket in which they may find themselves as a result of past experience and tradition. Whether the institutional or psychological factors in that experience and tradition are examined, it is clear that such escape will not be easy.⁵

Rather than expecting political differences to vanish, it was much wiser to concentrate on the means best tuned towards their resolution. Indeed Refalo's main worry soon was that too many political parties sprang up:

Perhaps you have heard it said with a sense of apprehension, as I did, that there are too many political parties in the field for the forthcoming elections. That may be so; but it must be agreed that opinions, methods and aims may differ in politics as they differ in private life. This notwithstanding, and whatever the divergencies of opinion may be amongst the several political parties, the new Constitution is bound to work well so long as every party will meet each other on one solid ground; and that solid ground is love of our country . . .⁶

Ever since the autumn of 1919, when it became known that internal self-government would be granted, political activity had been intense and party passions were on the increase, embittered, in particular, by Strickland's bid for power. Clashes between nationalist and Strickland supporters became frequent, marring the political scene which, for nearly thirty years, had been free of incidents of inter-party violence. Indeed partisan violence had, so far, been rare: apart from police interference (a £10 bribe to a pro-Savona journalist in 1888,⁷ the hired gang to disrupt De Cesare's meeting in 1894)⁸, or clashes with the police or military (especially the *Sei Maggio* 1891⁹ and the *Sette Giugno* 1919), the most notable but not serious incident of inter-party violence was probably that involving Mizziani and Savoniani in 1893 when the P.U. alignment broke down.¹⁰ Now Enrico Mizzi himself came to blows, in Valletta's main street, with the miller and Chamber of Commerce official A. Cassar Torregiani, M.B.E., a Stricklandian.¹¹ Writing from the 'Head Office' of his Constitutional Party, Strickland complained that his opponents were hiring 'undesirables' from Valletta and transporting 'strangers' to country constituencies to break up meetings by blowing mechanical horns and whistles; he warned Plumer that injunctions to his party's supporters not to retaliate could not be 'relied upon indefinitely'.¹² At the same time, however, elected members were condemning Strickland and his supporters for stone-throwing incidents and physical assaults on candidates: at one meeting in St. Julian's, M.A. Borg¹³ of the newly-formed Labour Party was struck in the face, the chemist Giuseppe Vassallo (a Panzavecchian) and a police inspector were hit by stones.¹⁴ Mizzi accused Strickland's party of 'a fierce anti-Italian campaign', saying they had begun a campaign 'recruiting the worst elements from the slums' and even had recourse to 'terrorism and the actions of hired ex-convicts to fight the Nationalists', to instigate the people against Italians resident locally and to create hatred against Italy, 'the glorious Nation friendly and allied to England'.¹⁵ Strickland claimed that in allowing a government school to be used by the Farmers Union (a pro-nationalist trade union which he called 'a political organization'),¹⁶ the government were discriminating against his party by allowing electioneering facilities to his opponents. But Plumer denied the truth of this allegation, saying how after a lecture on a non-political subject by a priest at the Siggiewi school, electioneering speeches had been made inappropriately by some members of the audience.¹⁷ Strickland himself had been allowed to use the school at Qala, Gozo, for cinema exhibitions, subject to a pledge that nothing political was said inside the school: 'that pledge was kept', wrote

Strickland; 'that cinema exhibition was a real boon to the village and was useful in making the people understand the greatness of the British Empire'.¹⁸

Four parties lined up to contest the 1921 elections. There was Panzavecchia's party, called by its old, attractive title *Partito Popolare*, but under the aegis of a body (in function rather like the *Comitato Patriottico* had been with regard to the P.N.) called the *Unione Politica Maltese* (U.P.M.); and Enrico Mizzi's *Partito Democratico Nazionalista*, which only contested the Gozo district. The U.P.M. and P.D.N. were regarded as two sections of the same party, the P.N.; appeals from both sections poured in for 'an open alliance' and it was allegedly 'only the threat of resignation by some of its prominent members' that kept the U.P.M. from 'openly joining hands with its avowed enemy' the P.D.N.¹⁹ After some heated exchanges, Dr. Augusto Bartolo's Constitutional Party (C.P.) and Strickland's Anglo-Maltese Party (A.M.P.) united, retaining the name of Bartolo's party but under Strickland's leadership. Panzavecchia's U.P.M. had disregarded Bartolo's overtures for a U.P.M.-C.P. 'coalition'.²⁰ The Labour Party (L.P.) in Malta, as in Britain, emerged from the trade union movement, especially the dockyard unions – first the Imperial Government Workers Union, and subsequently the three local branches that were affiliated to the British Workers Union (following the initiatives of Matthew Giles an English trade unionist).²¹ 'Admiralty employees, past and present, constitute for all practical purposes the Labour Party in Malta', noted Rear Admiral Brian Barttelot. 'They are loyal, progressive and form perhaps the most hopeful element in an Electorate which has not yet found its bearings'.²² The Admiralty's district intelligence officer, reporting in 1920, similarly saw a Labour Party in the nascent trade union movement at the dockyard:

They have formulated a policy which is essentially pro-British, its chief point being that the future official language shall be English. The party has thereby as a matter of course come into conflict with the *Comitato Patriottico*; the *Comitato* is now without a leader, its abstentionist policy obsolete, and in the unpleasant position of finding in the new labour party an organization arising out of its own activities, which it is absolutely unable to control. The members of the *Comitato* are all pro-Italian though many of them deny this, and they are now occupied in endeavouring to intimidate and discredit the new labour party through their organ the 'Voce del Popolo'.²³

The first steps to establish a Labour Party in the strictly political sphere were taken by members of Workers Union Branch No. 3, representing employees in the private sector and the self-employed, with the help of some well-known *professionisti*. The chief initiator of *La Camera del Lavoro*, what soon became the L.P., was Giovanni Bencini, a landowning philanthropist who had just been editor of the *Comitato's Voce del Popolo*, and secretary of Mizzi's *Giovine Malta*.²⁴ Another founder-member, M. A. Borg,²⁵ had been the *Comitato's* assistant secretary. The *Hmar* editor, Guglielmo Arena,²⁶ also a founder-member, admired Fortunato Mizzi, Sigismondo Savona and Panzavecchia, saw the Maltese as being 'by blood' closest to Italy, and

quoted approvingly Ugo Ojetti of the *Corriere della Sera* as saying, after an interview with Fortunato Mizzi, that the Maltese were 'attached to the British flag, to the language of Italy, and to the Religion of the Pope'; but he considered 'separation from England' and an internationally guaranteed 'independence' to be 'a fine dream indeed':

Malta contains neither large tracts of arable land nor mines of any kind, and has to rely for the support of its population almost exclusively on the resources of its harbours: but in order that the harbours may give the best return the Island should be in the hands of the greatest maritime power in Europe – and the greater the distance between that Power and the Island, the better for us, as the need of keeping coal deposits, stores, docks and arsenals, etc. would be the greater.²⁷

Salvatore Zammit Hammet, the Imperial Government Workers Union delegate at the *Assemblea Nazionale*, was another founder-member; he later joined the U.P.M. Dr. Pier Giuseppe Frendo, who chaired the L.P.'s first general committee meeting on 15 May 1921, had a few years earlier contested election to the Council unsuccessfully as an anti-abstentionist of the Mizzi variety; he was the son of Dr. Cristoforo Frendo whose *Fede ed Azione* had been suspicious of Strickland and had supported Savona during the marriage question.²⁸ Dr. (now Sir) Filippo Sceberras, formerly a Mizzian, subsequently an Azzopardian, and lately president of the *Assemblea Nazionale*, became honorary president of the party. The first president of the party's executive, who effectively became party leader for several years, was a lawyer and retired R.M.A. colonel, who had been awarded an M.B.E. for his service in the war: Sigismondo Savona's son, Willie. Willie's choice of party and the prominent role he took in organising it from the start (he had been vice-president of the general committee) suggested that 'the party of Savona' and 'the party of Panzavecchia': notwithstanding alignments and re-alignments, had never quite been the same; they had utilised each other's appeal in a rather lasting arrangement.²⁹

Willie Savona's position indicated a direct line of descent comparable to that evident in the nationalist ranks, thus showing further what ties and pressures family connections and traditions possessed in Maltese politics. If Ceylon had an 'uncle-nephew party' (the United National Party, so called by its opponents),³⁰ Malta may be said to have had 'father-son' parties, considering that both the P.D.N. and the L.P. had leaders who had followed in the footsteps of their fathers. Certainly, both Willie and Enrico were different men from Sigismondo and Fortunato: Willie's party later allied itself with that of Strickland, Sigismondo's personal enemy; and Enrico abandoned *Astensionismo*, the doctrine laid down by his father in 1903. But clearly enough both could be associated closely with what had taken place earlier.³¹

In the Legislative Assembly elections – 76.1% of electors (20,634 out of 27,104) voted – the U.P.M. polled 7,999 votes (14 seats); the C.P. 5,183 votes (7 seats); the L.P. 4,742 votes (7 seats); the P.D.N. 2,465 votes

(Gozo's four seats). In the election of seven general members to the Senate – by a more restricted electorate, in two electoral divisions – the U.P.M. won 4 seats (including Panzavecchia, Pullicino and Howard); the L.P. 2 seats (Professor Mgr. (later Sir) Michele Gonzi (1885–), who became bishop of Gozo in 1924, archbishop of Malta in 1944; and the banker Alfons Maria Galea, a noted philanthropist and prolific Maltese language author); the C.P. one seat (Col. Achille Sammut, C.B., C.M.G.). The Senate elections, in which 82.2% of electors (2,800 out of 3,405) voted, were not contested by the P.D.N. The remaining number of senators – representing the church, nobility, Chamber of Commerce and T.U.C. – were mostly nationalists, but the T.U.C. delegates were both labourites: Savona (who failed to be returned as a representative of the Valletta district) and his colleague Zammit Hammet.³² The U.P.M. and C.P. presented more candidates than the L.P. The P.D.N. had the highest proportion of lawyers (three out of its four candidates), the C.P. the lowest; otherwise the professional element was most conspicuous in the U.P.M., which also had the largest number of ecclesiastics; whereas the C.P. had far the largest number of candidates who were not graduates (more than one-third) and who had not distinguished themselves in any sphere in public life. The two independent candidates, one in the Senate, the other in the Assembly election, both fared badly.³³

The manifestoes of the four parties were similar, except with regard to the language question. They agreed that Roman Catholicism should be declared to be Malta's official religion (a guarantee which the constitution's clause on religious toleration had excluded); that such lands as were no longer necessary for military purposes should be handed over to the civil government; that, in view of the unemployment and displacements following the war, and the growth in working-class consciousness, the labour problem should be tackled. All parties – except Strickland's – were, in varying degrees, pledged to a *pari passu* policy in the educational field.³⁴ The most characteristically Mizzian was the P.D.N. who wished to apply *pari passu* in all grades of schools, being ready to send a delegation to London to negotiate a further extension of constitutional autonomy especially with regard to language provisions.³⁵ The U.P.M. was prepared to adopt a career-training scheme, an approach similar to Clauson's 'Siamese twins' policy:³⁶ special classes were to be established to cater for the needs of those wishing to take up specialized trades or to emigrate. The L.P. took a distinctly Savonian line: Maltese to be taught for two years in elementary schools, English up to the fourth standard, English and Italian from the fifth standard upwards, both languages to be obligatory at the lyceum and university. The C.P. promised to give 'equal facilities' – a mild restatement of Strickland's 'free choice' policy – and also to assist private schools until more school accommodation would be provided – an ambivalent stand, considering that certain private schools, such as St. Ignatius College, were most pro-English.³⁷ The C.P., whose leader had been much identified with

taxation earlier, said they would propose no new taxation³⁸ and, furthermore, that civil servants and the police would be safe-guarded from 'political interference'. The other parties however all proposed some fiscal measures. The U.P.M. wanted a re-adjustment of the tax system 'on the basis of its just incidence on the tax-payers in proportion to their means'; the P.D.N. to 'de-centralize' the administration, reform the tax system and abolish vexatious police regulations; the L.P. to promote local production by an *ad valorem* duty on imported manufactured articles, to tax capital amassed by foreigners (on their leaving Malta), and to consider introducing income tax. All parties wanted to introduce a workers' compensation act, the U.P.M. adding to this insurance 'against misfortunes' and emphasising technical instruction. The two parties closest to each other in the sphere of social policy were the L.P. and P.D.N., one drawing their inspiration from Britain, the other from Italy, but both prepared to be radical: specifically mentioning compensation acts, 'national' or 'workmen's insurance', old age pensions or widows and orphans pension fund, trade union and factory acts or legislation as to 'a Council of Workmen Leagues' and a kind of arbitration tribunal (*Probi Viri*) 'to whom all questions between capital and labour should be referred'. The L.P. and U.P.M. – both professing 'Christian Democracy' as their ideal or guide – expressed themselves in similar words regarding compulsory education under the 'guidance' (L.P.) or the 'control' (U.P.M.) of the church. The P.D.N. was distinctive in the legal field, suggesting the abolition or limitation of capital punishments, the re-organization of the penal system, reform of the commercial and maritime codes. The L.P., P.D.N. and U.P.M. specifically mentioned the need of improving shipping facilities; the L.P. in particular would endeavour to establish a ship-repairing industry. The C.P. emphasised tourism, wanting to make Malta 'a tourist centre and a field of archeological research'.

It is difficult to know how far the electors were voting for the party manifestoes; there can be no doubt however that they were voting for parties, especially since for the first time voting was by proportional representation. An official of the Proportional Representation Society, John Humphreys, was impressed by the 'intelligent' voting that took place: noting how, notwithstanding the high number of illiterate voters (41.5% or 8,577 in the Legislative Assembly elections), the low percentage of invalid votes was a record – only 0.77% – whereas in similar elections in Ireland and Canada percentages of invalid papers ranged from 1% to nearly 3%.³⁹ Humphreys also observed that 'many citizens recorded their preferences on personal rather than on party grounds';⁴⁰ but an examination of preferential voting shows clearly that electors were voting for parties rather than for personalities. So far as the voter was influenced to choose the party of his favourite candidate, the man became the party: for example, Lieutenant Colonel Michael Dundon, a local notable who was a political *inconnu*, was elected on the first count in the Cospicua-Vittoriosa district;

but his L.P. 'superior' Dr. Pier Frendo⁴¹ received 238 of Dundon's 302 second preferences, most of which thus went to the party.⁴² Similarly, when Mizzi was elected on the first count for Gozo, his 458 extra votes – all transferable ones – helped to elect his three colleagues on the second count; the three C.P. candidates in the district, who included Enrico's uncle Dr. Lewis F. Mizzi,⁴³ only got nine second preferences between them from Mizzi's vote.⁴⁴ Again, when Strickland was elected with over two quotas for his home district (Birkirkara, Balzan, Lija, Attard, Gargur, Naxxar, Mosta, Mellieħa),⁴⁵ his 731 extra votes – all transferable – elected immediately his party colleague Walter Salamone, who had obtained only 19 first preferences.⁴⁶ Much depended on the district being contested: Strickland also successfully contested the Valetta district, where he was undoubtedly the best known personality, but Dr. (later Sir) Ugo Mifsud, a newcomer who however was president of the *La Valette* band club and secretary of the *Casino Maltese*, did better than he; Mifsud's second preferences went mostly to U.P.M. candidates, with Colonel Willie Savona benefiting rather more from Strickland's transferable votes than from Mifsud's.⁴⁷ Some candidates were inseparable from the party: the classic case was probably Antonio Dalli who was elected, on the first count, for the third district⁴⁸ – where he had never been defeated since 1895, i.e. when the P.P. itself had come into being.

Apart from the incidence of violence (heckling, booing, fisticuffs, stone-throwing), there was a strong *déjà vu* aspect about the whole election campaign and the political parties taking part. The U.P.M. and C.P. leaderships were old enough, Panzavecchia having contested his first election, as a Mizzian *Antiriformista*, in 1883, thirty-eight years earlier, and Strickland having made his first appearance as a member of Fortunato Mizzi's P.N. in 1886, thirty-five years earlier. The P.D.N. and L.P., led by Mizzi and Savona respectively seemed to be almost ghosts from the days of the P.N. and R.P., led by the other Mizzi and Savona, their fathers. In fact these were comparatively young parties: Mizzi was the doyen of the student body while Bencini, Arena, Zammit Hammet were all young and enthusiastic. The U.P.M., which had long been the natural party of opposition, was still the largest party; but (as in the 1916 and 1917 general elections) they won most seats without obtaining a majority in the overall vote,⁴⁹ and (as used to be the case with the P.N. under the 1887 constitution at the time of Savona's P.P.) they were more strongly supported by the special than by the general electors.⁵⁰ Neither was the U.P.M. as elitist or unrepresentative as governors and C.O. officials would have liked to suppose, nor was it sufficiently strong in the country at large to govern on its own. Panzavecchia, Mattei, Dalli and Pullicino, all of whom were returned in 1921, had long been leading figures – first of the P.P. under Savona; then of the P.N. under Mizzi; then of the *Comitato Patriottico*. Panzavecchia was canvassed as 'the man of the people' who had founded the P.P., fought alongside Sigismondo

Savona and Fortunato Mizzi, and led the *Comitato Patriottico*. His moderation, it was alleged, was 'neither servile nor timorous', as his party represented all classes: 'the worker as much as the doctor'.⁵¹ But Enrico Mizzi still would not bow to Panzavecchia's leadership or inspiration. The U.P.M., said Mizzi's paper, was 'composed largely of the *bourgeois* element of the most intransigent and conservative type', remained attached to 'its antiquated and eccentric ideas' and would not 'cede any ground to favour the working classes'. Contemplating 'great reforms to better the life of the working classes without injuring the acquired interests of the middle class', Mizzi's party saw the L.P. as 'another extreme party' because 'they only thought of benefiting the working classes sometimes at the expense of the other classes':

someone, then, would have a revolution, imposing a socialist regime to dethrone from its present position the *bourgeoisie* who hold that power which they acquired after unheard of struggles and indescribable sufferings.

Basing its programme on further improving the constitution, defending Malta's religion, safeguarding Latin civilization, and uplifting the long forgotten working classes who were now destined to have 'a most effective role in the administration', Mizzi's party did not consider Strickland's party to be worthy of the people (as the other three parties were): the C.P. was 'notoriously imperialist, that is, born, constituted and destined necessarily to go against the interests of the people in defence of those of the Empire'.⁵²

The traditional significance of personality politics in electioneering, of regional and parochial attractions, and, perhaps above all, of leadership styles, made for rivalry and diversity as much as for constancy and sameness. The U.P.M., evidently a 'town and country' party, obtained a majority in four out of the eight districts: these were mostly the urban and suburban areas around Valletta (Valletta, Sliema, Floriana, Hamrun), where the percentage of illiterates was lowest, and the rural seventh district (Notabile, Rabat, Dingli, Siggiewi, Qrendi, Mqabba, Żurrieq, Bubaqra, Safi, Kirkop), where (except for Gozo) the percentage of illiterates was highest.⁵³ The L.P. was by far most successful in the Three Cities, where the U.P.M. was relegated to second place, the C.P. to third. In the Senglea district – until recently 'the Citadel of the Abstentionists' – the L.P. won 3 seats, the U.P.M. one only. In the Cospicua-Vittoriosa district, they won 2 seats, the U.P.M. and C.P. got one each.⁵⁴ The dockyard vote in this pro-English region clearly preferred 'the party of Savona' to 'the party of Panzavecchia' once they had a choice. Italian had never been rated highly in the competition for employment with the Royal Dockyard or in associated jobs: indeed by 1920 Italian was not even being taught in Senglea schools – parents understandably objected to its being taught as it was not included among the subjects of examination for admission to the dockyard. This question was implied when the elected members protested unanimously in

1920 that the existence of 'our Italian language' was threatened by 'a scholastic system created on purpose to bastardise the rising generation', inveighing against the 'liberticide and denationalizing policy of the Government'.⁵⁵ But the P.N. had not established much grass-root support in this region; the P.P. had been more successful, both Panzavecchia and Mattei hailing from Senglea. In 1901, when the P.N. was probably at its most effective as a national force, a meeting held outside Rock Gate for the inhabitants of the Three Cities was not well attended.⁵⁶ In Vittoriosa the best known nationalist had probably been Evaristo Castaldi, in Cospicua, there were minor figures such as the legal procurator F. S. Musù during the 1890s, but Dr. Salvatore Grech and F. S. De Cesare, both from Cospicua, had tended to support Savona only for so long as Savona had supported the government. There was, as it were, a 'Valletta' party, encompassing the capital, suburbs, towns and farming villages to the North-West and South, a party of the notables rather than of the plebs; and a 'Cottonera' party, on the other side of the harbour from Valletta, which was a more industrialized and thickly populated district in direct contact with the British navy and services rather than with the administration, courts and commerce, although certainly not any less parochial in social structure and orientation. In terms of votes, the U.P.M. was second in the three districts where it was not first; the L.P. was third except in the Three Cities area, where it did much better than either of the other two parties. The C.P. only obtained a majority in the Birkirkara-Balzan district due to Strickland's personal triumph,⁵⁷ but its vote was evenly spread throughout the country and it polled the second highest amount of votes. Strickland could justly assume the role of Leader of the Opposition.

The C.P.'s remarkably successful performance is striking if seen in the light of past animosity towards Strickland. It was due, partly, to the amalgamation with Bartolo's party. At first, Strickland seemed to have no more than two principal aides in his Anglo-Maltese Party, Col. Achille Sammut,⁵⁸ who had been abroad and whose five sons had fought in the world war – his 'great desire was to see Malta well governed and equipped to take her place in the British Empire'⁵⁹ – and, more importantly, Dr. Lewis F. Mizzi, who failed to win a seat in the election.⁶⁰ Lewis Mizzi – by an irony of fate Fortunato's brother – had left Malta as a young man over forty years earlier, taking up residence in Constantinople where he had been editor of the *Levant Herald* and president of the International Bar of the Consular Courts. A staunch anglophile who believed 'British justice and its straightforward spirit' to be 'the most rational and the very best of all', Lewis supported 'our grand Maltese language' (which he compared to Persian) and admired 'Joseph' Muscat Azzopardi,⁶¹ one of the first noteworthy contributors to the Maltese language literature.⁶² Bartolo, an affable character, similarly described himself as a 'Britisher' and he tended to see Malta as another Gibraltar: 'the rock of Malta – a tiny speck all but completely lost amidst the

vastness of that classic sea . . . the key and emblem of England's naval supremacy'.⁶³ Bartolo had been active in politics and journalism while Strickland was away in the Caribbean and Australasia. Although always on the loyalist side, he had nevertheless supported the claim to responsible government. His daily *Chronicle* newspaper (re-established after 1919 through a substantial compensation from public funds) was an undoubted asset. Strickland had a certain charisma, a vitriolic personality. Tireless, inventive, supremely ambitious, he could make impressive claims about his worldwide administrative experience and contacts in high places. At the Colonial Office he was regarded as not having given 'any marked proof of sound judgement either in Malta or elsewhere'.⁶⁴ An article of his in the *Malta Herald* was seen there as 'a most appalling production for a man in his position'⁶⁵ but it appears that the *Malta Herald* truly believed that Strickland had open access to the corridors of power in Westminster, right up to the prime minister's office.⁶⁶

Many of the newly-enfranchised voters, in their twenties and thirties, had no recollection of life under Strickland's administration, however much the other parties strove to remind them. Strickland, wrote a nationalist correspondent, was 'the antithesis of democracy': 'A people who forget deserve the pack-saddle'.⁶⁷ But, on the other hand, Strickland had left Malta reasonably prosperous in 1902.⁶⁸ And although the depression that followed was blamed largely upon his administration,⁶⁹ hygienic reforms (such as the drainage extension) and monumental works (such as the breakwater) were seen to be to his credit. With the grant of the 1921 constitution, the major opposition grievance of Strickland's time in office had practically disappeared; it seemed as if the *Sei Maggio* and the police state belonged to a different era altogether. The P.D.N.'s commitment to strive for greater autonomy – reminiscent of Fortunato Mizzi's view in 1887 of representative government as a step in the direction of complete autonomy⁷⁰ – earned them strong criticism in the Maltese pro-British press. What were 'the National ideals' now, asked one writer:

almost an independent state. . . . We know that they are blind and paid followers of some dreamers on the near Continent . . .⁷¹

Just as the grant of representative government had led people to think about responsible government, so the arrival, even the prospect, of internal self-government had made the idea of independence plausible as a possibility, but feared as an eventuality: feared especially by those who depended – or thought they depended – on the British for their livelihood. Many workers were afraid that Britain might cede Malta to another power, possibly Italy, and they rather favoured, in that case, some association with 'the rich, industrious and democratic America';⁷² even a foremost Dimechian such as Salvu Agius – one of those most responsible for inciting the masses to revolt in 1919 – tended towards such an alternative.⁷³ Building on this loyalty

(or insecurity) Strickland's party were anxious to portray the nationalists, especially Mizzi, as disloyal. Speaking at a tea party at Strickland's estate (where refreshments were later served and a band played 'God Save the King') Lewis Mizzi revealed that, when he had been Mizzi's counsel in 1917, he had suggested to Governor Methuen that Mizzi should be pardoned and sent to Libya. Describing his 'confounded nephew' as a 'fanatical fool', Lewis mentioned 'peaceful penetration and pro-Italian propaganda' which, he alleged, were the work of 'private units and societies'.⁷⁴ 'No man can serve two masters – the King and Enrico Mizzi', wrote Strickland.⁷⁵ Mizzi was once scornfully described by *Chronicle* as 'Malta's De Valera'.⁷⁶

Meanwhile, encouraging the study of Maltese, Strickland publicized his theory 'of common Phoenician ancestry of the Maltese with the main section of the British race'.⁷⁷ By 1921, there were rather more people who could speak English than Italian – many could speak both – and more than one-third of the population could write Maltese or another language.⁷⁸ All this was to Strickland's advantage, and greatly due to his 'free choice' policy. He had been 'very angry' at Clauson's 'Siamese twins' approach in 1914, seeing this as 'Clauson's betrayal of his policy'.⁷⁹ Strickland tried to have the 1921 constitution restricted so as to ensure that the Malta Legislative Assembly would be unable to make the simultaneous teaching of English and Italian obligatory; but Winston Churchill agreed with Lieutenant Governor Robertson that it was 'inadvisable to attempt to fetter the new Government of Malta by making the Letters Patent more rigid, and that the safeguards provided for the English language go as far as is convenient'.⁸⁰ As Maltese emigration was now increasingly directed to English-speaking countries, rather than the Mediterranean littoral as before, the use of English to a prospective emigrant had increased. The emigration committee formed in 1919, under Joseph Howard's chairmanship, considered the assisted emigration scheme to faraway English-speaking lands: in 1919–1920 about 10,000 emigrated; in ordinary times only about 1,500 had emigrated annually.⁸¹ Successful emigrants encouraged relatives to learn English, as did the C.P.:

From Australia as from Canada, from Tasmania as from the United States, the cry reaches us: 'Learn English! Learn English!'⁸²

The war had caused hardship and rancour but it had also served to create new links and friendships, such as football games between Maltese and British teams: once the island had a new constitution, the Anglo-Maltese tie again became prominent. Strickland could rely on former loyalties, both among the upper classes and business community as well as, especially, among the lower classes; the spontaneous celebrations to commemorate Ladysmith had afforded ample evidence of the residual loyalty and affection at popular levels.⁸³ Many Maltese, observed the senior censor. Major R. D. Fox, O.B.E., considered that the English were un-

sociable and overbearing in their demeanour, few would make any allowance for 'our national psychology': some said 'you will not meet us on equal social grounds'; the 'lower classes of Maltese however' did 'mix up with the English'.⁸⁴

Strickland had money. 'The struggle had always been conducted here without money as the motive power', commented *L'Idée Nazionale* (to which Mizzi had contributed before), 'but he has decided to conduct the electoral campaign with money, money which he is throwing about by the handful from his motor-car'.⁸⁵ Strickland imported a modern printing press and started a vigorous prize-giving newspaper organ, in Maltese, called *Progress*, 'For Maltese workers who want an English education': in one issue *Progress* could have two £10 prizes for politically motivated essays against the other three parties and those, such as the Gozo bishop, who were considered to be nationalists.⁸⁶ 'Whoever controls the principal newspaper', Strickland had written privately in 1908, 'would, if elected members were given the full power of the purse, become "de facto" Governor of Malta, responsible only to those who paid him, or to himself, if he is financially independent'.⁸⁷ The weekly U.P.M. and P.D.N. organs, both in Italian and too high-brow, made a pathetic comparison with the propagandistic *Progress*, although *Malta* was a major asset on the nationalist side even if it did not 'permeate very far down'.⁸⁸ The L.P. did not have a newspaper of its own before 1922;⁸⁹ however Strickland took care to counter-act the influence of the labourite trade union paper *Il Haddiem* (The Worker) with a pro-C.P. publication called *Il Haddiem Malti* (The Maltese Worker).⁹⁰ For 'a large number of the population' the vernacular press was 'the sole means of obtaining information', observed Lord Plumer:

Being generally credulous and not sufficiently educated to have opinions of their own, these people accept as authoritative and implicitly believe what they read: the task of the thoughtless agitator is, therefore, at any time an easy one, and especially now, when unemployment and poverty have created a difficult situation.⁹¹

'It was Sir Gerald Strickland who brought us the 1887 constitution', said *Progress*.⁹² 'The Constitutional Party is more in favour of the worker than Savona's party itself', said *Progress*.⁹³ With his extraordinary career Strickland was well poised to capitalize on the one man myth: 'Only he can do us good, and nobody else', said *Progress*,⁹⁴ in a terminology reminiscent of that of *Malta Taghna* during the marriage question when Savona had been hailed as 'the Redeemer' and 'our Master'.⁹⁵

The quality which most of all impresses the crowd, wrote Michels, is celebrity:

It suffices for the celebrated man to raise a finger to make for himself a political position. . . . In the popular view, to bear a name which is already familiar in certain respects constitutes the best title to leadership.⁹⁶

The fusion dynamic had in the past rendered dependence on one 'national'

leader at a time desirable. To combat a seemingly impenetrable permanent government, the stimulus to unity became irrepressible; and so people had tended to rally behind a well-known politician in an alternating succession of personality-parties. Only for relatively short periods had there been a fully-fledged two party opposition: most notably perhaps in 1888, when Fortunato Mizzi as P.N. leader and Sigismondo Savona as R.P. leader had faced each other directly. Now that Maltese were to regulate their own affairs under a parliamentary form of government, parties could be more rational and constructive in their attitudes. But old habits die hard; and the ostentatious Strickland was *sui generis*. Mizzi too was had strong personality however and he was instinctively caught in the same net.

A symbiosis of Maltese political history, the 1921 general election crowned the veteran and opened up the future. Among the members elected in 1921 there were two established political personalities (Panzavecchia and Strickland) two leaders who were themselves the sons of former party leaders (Mizzi and Savona) and five future prime ministers: Chev. Joseph Howard, O.B.E. (U.P.M., 1921-1923); Dr. Francesco Buhagiar (U.P.M., 1923-1924); Dr. Ugo Mifsud (U.P.M., 1924-1927; P.N. 1932-1933); Count Sir Gerald Strickland (C.P., 1927-1930) and Dr. Enrico Mizzi (P.N., 1950). The election also epitomised the strains of Maltese political thought in evidence ever since 1880, especially with regard to the language question, and established a similar battleground for decades ahead. Apart from the so-called language question, differences between the parties were not extreme – Malta was a small place and there was much overlapping in the social structure – but, because of the clash of cultures, and the excessive partizanship that this sustained, people could say the same things in different languages and seem more removed one from the other than they really were. Political divisions in the country cut across conventional class distinctions since they were chiefly between the pro-English and/or pro-British supporters, high and low, and the nationalist supporters, also made up of heterogeneous elements. The individual's exposure to a greater 'English' or 'Italian' environmental influence was probably the determinant factor in voting, but of course there was a complicated network of parochial, familiar and personal ties, occupations, interests, rivalries and jealousies which directly or indirectly affected party allegiances. Thus the 'pro-English' and 'pro-Italian' tags, somewhat transparent in reality, expressed instincts of hostility as well as contrasting attachments to party, attitudes to government and outlooks on life. They seemed to be so vital to those involved in the parochial or interparochial back-biting that went with a 'twitch of the tongue' philosophy, but they were often devoid of ideological content, being geared to a substantially illiterate, fanatically religious and staunchly partizan electorate.

Education continued to be ripped apart by different interpretations as to what constituted a 'national' or else a 'practical' instruction, and was further

complicated by the increasing association of the Maltese language with true Maltese nationality, hence the desirability of eliminating Italian and substituting English for it. The language issue was 'the one controversial subject in Malta', wrote Plumer in 1924, and it had been 'deliberately and mischievously kept as a controversial matter for political purposes':

Malta being situated, as it is, close to Sicily and Italy, it is natural that the educated classes generally should wish to be conversant with Italian for purposes of trade, commerce and social intercourse, but any desire expressed to acquire a knowledge of the Italian language has been misinterpreted into a wish to assume Italian nationality. The two things have no connection whatever with each other.

Strickland's methods, he added, had not been calculated to inspire esteem and affection; he was 'not popular except with his immediate supporters'.⁹⁷

The working of responsible, or indeed constitutional, government was seriously hampered by Strickland's rise to power in the 1920s, at the same time that fascism began to rear its head in Italy. Strengthened by his election as M.P. for Lancaster in the Tory interest in 1924 and by his elevation to the peerage in 1928, Strickland could use Italian fascism in the same way that *Riformisti* and British decision-makers had earlier used Italian irredentism: to strike at the nationalists by accusing them of sedition and disloyalty. But the Italian Fascist-Nationalist society established in Malta in 1923, with the Italian consulate as its headquarters, was (as the Italian consul Luigi Mazzone warned) a dubious venture in the face of expected strong British opposition and the apparent apathy of the Maltese people in general for the cause of Italian nationalism: the early meetings of the society were poorly attended, and as the fanaticism of 'the small nucleus of Maltese Fascists' tended to repel rather than attract most of the local population, Mussolini was eventually forced to lower his sights and be content with indirect and cautious propaganda beamed at the Maltese. The matter occasionally threatened to become a formal Anglo-Italian issue, but not during Fascism's early years.⁹⁸ Nevertheless this was grist to Strickland's mill. The Maltese government's early success in mastering the problems with which they were faced was won in spite of difficulties of 'an extraordinary nature', reported Robertson at the time of the first general election to be called by the U.P.M. under the 1921 constitution:

Any hope of forbearance or assistance, any hope of securing a sympathetic or even an orderly Assembly was frustrated from the first by the action of the Leader of the Constitutional Party. . . . Hardly had the Ministers been appointed when they were assailed by Count Strickland not merely with the criticism which might be expected from a political opponent who disapproved of their policy or actions, but with violent invective and personal abuse of a character which, one hopes, is without parallel in other Parliaments of the Empire.

No question was too trivial to serve as a pretext for an interpellation, a motion for adjournment or a resolution, all used to hurl at ministers irritating charges of incompetence, maladministration, and deliberate dishonesty, added Robertson. Not the least galling of the annoyances which ministers

had to tolerate was 'the constant assumption that loyalty to England and the Monarchy is not to be found outside the ranks of the Constitutional Party, and that they themselves and all who support them aim at union with Italy'. Considerable deference was at first paid to Strickland in view of his claims to wide administrative experience; ministers seemed to find it difficult to resort to the drastic measures required to facilitate the course of business. The Speaker (from 1923 to 1927 Notary Salvatore Borg Olivier) was too lenient and too readily overborne. There was an exaggerated respect paid to the utterances of the press and a corresponding dread of their effect on the credulity of the public:

Although twice suspended and once compulsorily removed from the House, Count Strickland has continued to defy the rules of procedure and set an example which . . . will make the enforcement of order in the Legislative Assembly a matter of grave difficulty in the future.⁹⁹

But in a eulogistically chronicled biography of Strickland, in *Maltese*, published by Progress Press in 1932, E. P. Vassallo painted a completely different picture of his leader. A 'man of character', of 'great experience', of 'discipline', who since childhood had associated with 'great and wise men', whose energy was infectious, Strickland had founded and led a political party through thick and thin notwithstanding 'the dishonest and infamous wars and persecutions': in the wars against him, Lord Strickland had always fought at a disadvantage, because he always behaved like a gentleman and never wanted to lower himself to the level of his enemies and fight in a dishonest manner like them. Never servile or obsequious, always dutiful and conscientious, Strickland had not exchanged his patriotism for anything:

To us Maltese Lord Strickland is a mirror wherein we see the true reflection of patriotism. Lord Strickland's deeds have shown us enough what true patriotism should be like.

With his administrative experience Lord Strickland had in a few years changed the destiny of Malta: in the past Malta had always been denied her true nationality and her language, but Lord Strickland gave them back to her.

With his ability, he kindled a great flame of true Maltese Nationality and taught us never to be ashamed to say that we are Maltese, as he himself has always done, on every occasion, wherever he was, he always said: 'I am Maltese and I am proud of being Maltese'.

Strickland's name would always be tied to the history of the Maltese people especially for the 'liberty' that his endeavours had won for them. Had it not been for Strickland,

we would still be thinking like our great-grandparents and we would still be possessed by that clique who, for their own interests, always kept the people as a slave condemned to utter ignorance, a clique who from the earliest times led the people by the nose and made use of them.

'There was only one Lord Strickland', concluded Vassallo in big print, 'and it will be a long time before we shall have another one like him'.¹⁰⁰

NOTES

- 1 *Voce*, 12 Mar. 1919.
- 2 *Voce*, 5 Mar. 1919.
- 3 *Voce*, 19 Mar. 1919.
- 4 Plumer/Milner, 17 Dec. 1919, 158/413.
- 5 H. V. Wiseman, *op. cit.*, pp. 205–206.
- 6 C.G., 19 Sept. 1921, 158.2546.
- 7 *Supra*, ii.60, ftn.346.
- 8 *Supra*, iii.77.
- 9 *Supra*, iii.68–69.
- 10 *Supra*, iii.76–77.
- 11 E. Mizzi, 'La Condotta della Camera di Commercio', *Malta*, 4 Sept. 1920.
- 12 Strickland/Plumer, 12 Sept. 1921, enc. Plumer/Churchill, 28 Sept. 1921, 158/425.
- 13 *Supra*, v.169.
- 14 C.G., 19 Sept. 1921, 158.2525.
- 15 *Ibid.*, col. 2526.
- 16 As section 7 (1) (d) of the 1921 constitution had expected there would be T.U.C. representation on the Senate without first ensuring there was a T.U.C. at all, the Farmers Union, the *Società Operaja Cattolica San Giuseppe* of Senglea, the *Unione Cattolica San Giuseppe* of Valletta, and the Malta Naval Benefit League, were at first excluded from the dockyard-dominated T.U.C. that was formed. The Workers' Union (which had over 3,000 branches in Britain) held that benefit societies should not be included with trade unions; but the Panzavecchia party protested, desiring 'to obviate the danger of a monopoly, on the part of any local Association', wanting the T.U.C. to be 'a true, extensive, general and genuine representation of Maltese labour'; enc.1–2, Robertson/Churchill, 30 Aug. 1921, 158/425/44382. The Malta Civil Service Association (which like dockyard unions was affiliated to British unions) and the National Union of Teachers were excluded from the T.U.C. apparently due to the Colonial Regulations.
- 17 Plumer/Churchill, 28 Sept. 1921, 158/425.
- 18 Strickland/Plumer, 12 Sept. 1921, enc. *ibid.*
- 19 D.M.C., 4 Sept. 1921, p. 3, cols. ii–iii.
- 20 *Il Corriere Popolare* (Organo Settimanale dell'U.P.M. sostenitrice del Partito Popolare Maltese), 25 Aug. 1921, D.M.C., 1 Sept. 1921.
- 21 District Intelligence Officer rep. for Aug. 1920, enc. Naval Staff, Intelligence Division/C.O., 28 Sept. 1920, enc. 158/421/48098.
- 22 Barttelot reply to Admiralty query with regard to allowing dockyard employees to stand for parliament, 9 Aug. 1921, enc. Bonavia/Churchill, 16 Aug. 1921, 158/425/42100.
- 23 'Malta Local Information', Director of Naval Intelligence/C.O., 9 Feb. 1920, enc. 158/421/7085. Panzavecchia had temporarily resigned the presidency of the *Comitato Patriotico* for health reasons.
- 24 See H. Frendo, 'Minn La Camera del Lavoro ghal Partit tal Haddiema', *Ir-Rivoluzzjoni Maltija*, *op. cit.*, pp. 46–48.
- 25 *Supra*, vi.184.
- 26 *Supra*, v.169.
- 27 'Nationalism', *Hmar*, 3 May 1919.
- 28 *Supra*, ii.49, iii.77.
- 29 *Supra*, iii.78.
- 30 W. Howard Wriggins: *Ceylon* (Princeton, 1960), p. 106.
- 31 Malta also had an 'uncle-nephew' party since Col. Roger Strickland (1905–1975) became C.P. leader after his uncle's death in 1940. Indeed we may speak too of a 'father-daughter' party: Gerald's daughter Mabel (1899–) was a leading C.P. member and an M.P. (1950–1953, 1962–1966); she runs her father's Progress Press, including two influential pro-British newspapers in English, and nominally still heads the Progressive Constitutional Party (founded by herself in 1953, this returned no members in the 1953, 1955, 1966 and 1971 elections and is now practically defunct.)
- 32 *Supra*, vi.198, ftn. 16. A. Mifsud, writing from Senglea on behalf of the Malta Workers Union Branch No. 1, said that all the trade unions in Malta had had 'the initiative from

- H.M. Dockyard employees, which were also 'the soul of this movement and the most developed and typical organizations at present'; Mifsud/Micallef, 9 June 1921, enc. Robertson/Churchill, 14 June 1921, 158/424.
- 33 J. H. Humphreys, 'Report on the first general election of General Members of the Senate and of the members of the Legislative Assembly', M.G.G. supplement no. LIV, 11 Nov. 1921, enc. 158/425/9889; *Lists of Ministers and Results of General Elections held under the 1921 and 1947 Constitutions* (Valletta, 1162).
- 34 1921 electoral programmes, enc. 158/425/9889.
- 35 Section 57(2) of the constitution regarding equality of English and Italian could be stretched to give different priorities in using either language.
- 36 *Supra*, v.187.
- 37 *Supra*, ii.23, 37.
- 38 Strickland was trying to get as much as he could of his property 'out of Malta in case the pro-Italian elements get too much power in the near future'; Strickland/Amerly, 31 Mar. 1920, 158/422/19907.
- 39 J. H. Humphreys, 'Report on the first general election', *op. cit.*, p. ii, p. iv.
- 40 *Ibid.*, p. v.
- 41 *Supra*, vi.186.
- 42 *Ibid.*, p. xiii.
- 43 *Supra*, v.164.
- 44 *Ibid.*, p. xvi.
- 45 *Supra*, iv.123.
- 46 *Ibid.*, p. xv.
- 47 *Ibid.*, p. xi.
- 48 In 1903 Qormi and Żebbuġ were added to Floriana, Hamrun, Pietà, while Msida ceased to form part of this district.
- 49 *Supra*, v.162, 165.
- 50 *Supra*, iii.79-80.
- 51 *Corriere*, no. 15, 8 Sept. 1921.
- 52 'Il Nostro Programma', *L'Eco di Malta e Gozo* (Organo Democratico Nazionalista), no. 1, 15 July 1921.
- 53 The percentage of illiterates in the Valletta district was 12.2%, in the Notabile district 64.9%; J. H. Humphreys, *op. cit.*, p. iii.
- 54 *Ibid.*, p. v.
- 55 Pullicino *et al.*, 6 Nov. 1920, enc. 158/420/59230.
- 56 Grenfell/Chamberlain, 19 June 1901, 158/337.
- 57 *Supra*, vi.189.
- 58 *Supra*, vi.187, 191.
- 59 D.M.C., 6 Sept. 1921, p. 3, col. ii.
- 60 *Supra*, vi.189.
- 61 *Supra*, v.151.
- 62 Methuen/Harcourt, 18 Feb. 1915 158/389/11763; L. F. Mizzi: *What is the Maltese Language* (Progress Press, Valletta, 1923).
- 63 *Malta and Gibraltar* (ed. A. Macmillan, Lond., 1915), p. 9.
- 64 Ellis min. 6 Apr. 1910, on Strickland/Cox, 7 Mar. 1910, 158/369/9744.
- 65 Flood min. on Robertson/Churchill, 18 Aug. 1921, conf., 158/425.
- 66 'Gozo and the Forged Letter', M.H., 16 Aug. 1921.
- 67 *Corriere*, no. 16, 15 Sept. 1921.
- 68 *Supra*, iv.125.
- 69 *Supra*, v.145-147.
- 70 *Supra*, ii.50.
- 71 D.M.C., 23 Sept. 1921, p. 8.
- 72 *Hmar*, 3 May 1919.
- 73 *L'Unioni Maltija*, 17 May 1919.
- 74 D.M.C., 6 Sept. 1921, p. 3.
- 75 M.H., 16 Aug. 1921.
- 76 D.M.C., 17 Aug. 1928.
- 77 G. Strickland: *Malta and the Phoenicians*, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

- 78 *The Census of the Maltese Islands* (M.G.P., 1921) showed (p. 36, para. 239) that there was, for the first time, a diminution in the number of persons able to speak Italian only; but D. H. Lawrence was hardly impressed: 'and they really *don't* understand English', he found. D. H. Lawrence/Catherine Carswell, 28 May 1920; *The Collected Letters of D. H. Lawrence* (ed. H. T. Moore, Lond., 1962), i.632.
- 79 Ellis min. 15 Jan. 1918, 158/399/323.
- 80 Churchill/Robertson, 8 Sept. 1921, 158/424.
- 81 Howard rep. 10 Feb. 1921, enc. 158/423/8117.
- 82 D.M.C., 12 Jan. 1914, p. 3.
- 83 *Supra*, iv.123-124.
- 84 Minutes of Evidence taken before the Commission of Enquiry', *op. cit.*, enc. Plumer/Milner, 25 Sept. 1919, 158/412.
- 85 'The Eternal Language Question in Malta', D.M.C., 29 Sept. 1921.
- 86 e.g. *Progress*, no. 27, 21 Oct. 1921. *Progress* 'Giurnal tal Partit Anglo-Malti' (no. 1, 22 Apr. 1921) became 'Giurnal tal Partit Costituzionali', no. 21, 9 Sept. 1921.
- 87 Strickland/Crewe, 23 July 1908, 158/360.
- 88 *Supra*, iii.80.
- 89 *Labour Opinion*, no. 1, 22 June 1922.
- 90 *Il Haddiem* became the official organ of Workers Union Branch No. 1 in July 1921; *Il Haddiem Malti* appeared twelve days later with the motto 'England and Malta for ever'.
- 91 Plumer/Milner, 3 June 1920, 158/418.
- 92 *Progress*, no. 10, 24 June 1921, p. 1, col. i.
- 93 'It-Tliet Partiti', *Progress*, no. 24, 30 Sept. 1921, p. 1, col. iii.
- 94 *Progress*, no. 16, 22 July 1921, p. 1, col. ii.
- 95 *Supra*, iii.85.
- 96 R. Michels, *op. cit.*, ch. 4, 'The Cult of Veneration among the Masses', pp. 78-80.
- 97 Plumer/Thomas, 19 Apr. 1924, conf., 158/434.
- 98 A. Cassels: *Mussolini's Early Diplomacy* (Princeton, 1970), pp. 86-87.
- 99 Robertson/Thomas, 27 June 1924, conf., 158/434.
- 100 E. P. Vassallo, *op. cit.*, p. 420.