



ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL STUDIES

Volume 4

1987/1988

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1988

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL STUDIES

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ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL STUDIES is published annually by the Faculty of Economics, Management and Accountancy of the University of Malta.

While the Journal gives preference to empirical studies concerning the economic, sociological, industrial and managerial issues related to the Maltese Islands, articles on theoretical aspects in the disciplines referred, and having a direct application to the Maltese Islands, will also be considered for publication.

Price (1987/88): Lm 1 per copy. Postage not included.

Front Cover: Designed by P. Agius

Malta University Press – Msida
1988

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CHURCH AND STATE INTERVENTION IN FEASTS AND RITUALS IN INDEPENDENT MALTA *

Adrianus Koster

INTRODUCTION

The Maltese population has always loved feasts and rituals.¹ The local Roman Catholic Church has since late medieval times played a central role in these festivities. Boissevain has admirably described these ceremonies in the way they were celebrated just before independence.² The same author has pointed to the ever increasing scale of two community rituals, e.g. the Good Friday processions and the village *festi*.³ In this paper I would like to emphasize another aspect of feasts and rituals.

Ever since Malta became independent many attempts to interfere with various religious ceremonies have been made by different groups within the Roman Catholic Church, each of them claiming to implement the consequences of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). The Socialist Government that was in power between 1971 and 1987,⁴ also interfered several times with the celebration of religious feasts. This may be seen as a consequence of its policy to curtail the influence of Church and clergy.

It is interesting to show why and how various factions within the Church and the Mintoffian government tried to interfere with several religious feasts and rituals. This is the subject of the present article.

After a brief overview of Maltese religious feasts and rituals I will show how various ecclesiastical authorities and the Mintoffian government tried to interfere with the celebration of some *rites de passage* and community rites, especially the village *festi*. We will notice how the Socialist Government has staged alternative community rites, I will conclude to point at the importance of the masses as useful allies for the parish priests to keep the *status quo*. Finally a short comparison with Kertzer's findings in the North Italian communist dominated *quartiere* of Bologna, Albora,⁵ cannot fail to give the impression that in the sphere of religious feasts and rituals Malta is still a tiny Catholic paradise.

CATHOLIC MALTA WITH ITS FEASTS AND RITUALS

According to the Constitution 'the Religion of Malta is the Roman Catholic Apostolic Religion'.⁶ Religious observance is general. Masses

are well attended, even on weekdays. The number of those receiving the Sacraments is high.⁷

The Church is nearly always present at the various rites of passage a person may pass from the cradle to the grave, such as baptism, first holy communion, confirmation, marriage and funeral.⁸

As far as community rites are concerned, most of the highlights of the Maltese civic year are based on the liturgical calendar. Of the fourteen public holidays listed in 1976, twelve were holy days of obligation. This is not to say, however, that many religious feasts in Malta do not have important secular aspects as well.

Ascension-day is known as *Lapsi*, the traditional opening of the swimming-season. The votive procession on the local St. Gregory's Day (first Wednesday after Easter) is followed by merry-making in the fishing-village of Marsaxlokk. On the eve of the feasts of St. Peter and St. Paul, known as *Mnarja*, thousands of people go to Buskett gardens where they spend the night frying and eating rabbit and listening to folk-singers, with an exhibition of agricultural-produce and animals to look at in between. This event has always been very popular: it was often even stipulated in ancient marriage-contracts that the groom should take his wife to *San Girgor* or to Buskett for *Mnarja*.⁹

In summer, it is almost impossible to spend more than a few days in Malta without seeing a procession. These processions can be distinguished according to the prevailing mood, which may be one of mourning, of joyfulness or of solemnity. There are two mourning processions, one of the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows and the other on Good Friday.

The procession of Our Lady of Sorrows, which is held a week before Good Friday, has a votive and penitential character. In many localities the statue of Our Lady of Sorrows is followed by a great number of people, often barefoot, in fulfillment of some vow. Good Friday is held in quite a few parishes.¹⁰ Groups of life-size statues representing episodes from the Passion of Christ are carried around. In between the groups of statues, individuals dressed in contemporary costumes, evoke biblical scenes. Some of the statues are followed by people carrying large wooden crosses or walking barefoot with iron chains around their ankles, as they had vowed. Members of the clergy, children, choirs and brass bands playing funeral marches complete the procession.

In some parishes foreign tourists can watch the procession from chairs hired from the Catholic Tourist Council. Often, the foreigners prefer to stand, jostled by local people whose houses are not along the route or who have come from other parishes. In many parishes nowadays the whole procession is explained to the public by means of a loudspeaker system the moment the various statues and participants leave the church.

This explanation is always in the vernacular, but brief summaries are sometimes given in English, the second official language of Malta, or even in German.

By contrast with the sorrowful character of Good Friday, the Easter processions which are held in a growing number of parishes, are joyful in character: the fasting and mourning focused on Christ's suffering and death, are now over. The statue of the Risen Christ, often carrying a pennant in his hand, is carried around at a fast pace, accompanied by the music and band marches. The statue is greeted with applause, confetti and fireworks. In Cottonera the bearers often run, making the statue bob up and down. This creates the impression of Christ waving at the public.

The procession in honour of the local patron saint on his *fešta* is a great occasion for merry-making. The statue is accompanied by a brass-band, and is subjected to a 'tickertape parade' with confetti thrown from windows and balconies in the narrow streets of the town or village. The main streets and the church are lavishly decorated and illuminated; the bells are peeling and all kinds of fireworks are ignited. Some *festi* are of more than local importance and are attended by Maltese from all over the islands.¹¹

Solemn processions are held on Corpus Christi and the feast of the Sacred Heart, when the Blessed Sacrament is accompanied by the boys and girls who have just received first Holy Communion; children seven years old in newly-bought finery.¹² The procession which since ancient times takes place in Żejtun on St. Gregory's Day, and which is customarily led by the Archbishop, also has a solemn character.¹³

Though the solemn processions never fail to attract large crowds, it is especially the *fešta* processions that watched by the people from the open windows of their houses (often decorated with pictures of the Saint or some religious episode), or sitting in chairs in front of their homes, together with relatives and friends invited for the occasion. Show is inextricably mixed up with the basic religious character of *fešta*, which provides an opportunity for ostentation, not only in clothes and finery, but also in respect of furniture and other household possessions, which are prominently displayed in the frontroom, with windows wide open, for the admiring gaze of the many passers-by in the street.

INTERVENTION WITH RITES OF PASSAGE

Church Intervention as a Consequence of Vatican II

There have been a number of changes in the Universal Church, and consequently in Malta as well, in the celebration of baptisms and weddings.

Baptism now takes place in front of the congregation during Mass as soon as the mother is fit to attend church again. In former days, baptism used to be administered in a private ceremony soon after the baby was born and without the mother being present. According to Boissevain the role of the godparents has become less significant and they are nowadays also supposed to be chosen from among the parishioners instead of influential persons. But sometimes the more well-to-do resist the levelling practice of baptism during mass for several children at once, rich and poor together.¹⁴ Personally, I have the impression that, as far as godparents are concerned, the practice now is to choose the mother of the wife and father of the husband or vice versa to be godparents, at least for the first two children. From the third child onwards people still may ask influential persons (or other close relatives); parochial boundaries do not seem to exclude people's acceptability as godparents. I also noted that many people, rich and poor alike, like to ask a relative or a friend who is a priest (or already ordained a deacon and on his way to priesthood) to perform the baptismal ceremony.

As far as weddings are concerned, the priest no longer waits for the couple at the altar, but meets them at the churchdoor, preceding them to the altar. This brings the clergy closer to the people and I heard nobody resent this. Traditionalist fathers still prefer to walk their daughter down the aisle with the priest and bridegroom waiting at the altar and present her there to the groom. More often than in the past couples prefer a priest and a church other than their own, which may show a strong bond with the priest and church of their choice, though it is always possible that some churches will be chosen for reasons of prestige or because of the proximity of the hall where the wedding reception is held, rather than personal attachment.

State Intervention after the Proclamation of the Republic

The proclamation of the republic in December 1974 terminated the previous privileged position of The Roman Catholic Church in Malta and had direct consequences for the Church-State relations. The dismantling of the Church's powers could now commence.¹⁵

One of the first legislative measures after the proclamation of the Republic was the amendment of the Burials Ordinance so that every Maltese citizen became entitled to burial in the Addolorata cemetery (the main cemetery in Malta) and interment there could no longer be denied to persons who, according to Canon Law, placed themselves outside the pale of the Catholic Church.

The very fact of such legislation indicates the importance of the Church in Malta. The way in which it acted in the past in exercising

its spiritual monopoly and factual hold on the cemetery must have inspired the legislator, as we will see.

One of the main grievances of the MLP against the Church authorities during the so called 'politico-religious' conflict of the sixties was the fact that those Mintoffians, who were interdicted by the Church, could, in case of a sudden death, be denied by their parish priest the right to a proper Catholic burial. This was the most powerful weapon in the hands of the Church, considering that the afflicted were buried without the usual cortege preceded by the processional cross and without a priest to conduct the rites, in fact buried in unconsecrated ground segregated from the rest of the Addolorata Cemetery by a high wall and having its own separate entrance. The stigma this carried was social as well as religious.¹⁶

No one challenged this amendment, which was clearly meant to undo the power of the clergy in this respect. However, they can still refuse to perform the Catholic burial rites.¹⁷

The passing of a Marriage Bill caused much more consternation as it directly challenged the monopoly in this field of the clergy. Hitherto Canon Law had been indiscriminately applied to all Maltese with respect of marriage. Consequently, civil marriage and legal divorce did not exist.

The new Bill provided for the introduction of civil marriage. Ever since, ecclesiastical marriages are valid only if all provisions of the act are observed; this means that Canon Law ceased to have effect as part of the Maltese marriages law and that new rules apply to banns and the registration of ecclesiastical marriages. All Catholic Malta protested and priests in their sermons fulminated against the new law, but in the end there was nothing to do but demur and the law prevailed.¹⁸

The law hardly changed the celebration of marriages in Church. After the Nuptial Mass the couple are required to sign a declaration in front of a public registrar, who has attended the mass, in a room next to the Church. Even staunch opponents of the Government do not fail to instruct photographers and filmers to record the signing of the declaration, though I heard several times comments such as 'Mr. Mintoff's bloody registrar', which is not very appropriate for such good Catholics.

The number of plain civil marriages, without a Church ceremony, is negligible. Often one of the spouses is a foreigner, sometimes both are.¹⁹

At present, the marriage law seems to have been more or less reluctantly accepted. In their electoral programme of 1976 the Maltese Christian Democrats, the *Nationalist Party*, only promised, if elected to power, to amend the marriage law in order to reintroduce Canon Law as far as marriages were concerned.²⁰ But they were defeated in 1976, and in 1981 they did not mention Canon Law, only speaking of 'making

religious marriages also valid from a civil point of view'.²¹ When, in 1987, after another term in Opposition²² the PN was returned to the Government, a similar statement was made in the address by the Acting President of the Republic on the opening of Parliament.

Intervention with Community Rites

Postconciliar Reforms in Daily Mass

The liturgical renewals in the Universal Church meant the introduction of altars facing the people and the use of the vernacular in mass. As far as Malta is concerned these changes were heartily welcomed by the large majority of churchgoers.

Quite a few elderly and middle-aged priests regretted the loss of Latin and the beautiful Gregorian chant in mass, which made it so easy in cosmopolitan Malta for Catholics of different nationalities to join in. However, those priests generally thought that the advantages, which enabled the lay-people to participate more intensively in mass and understand what was going on outweighed the loss. They admitted these changes brought the clergy closer to the people, but they seemed to agree with this.

Not all lay-people were enthusiastic. A few middle-aged intellectuals were not. These people had learnt Latin at school and used to participate in mass. They seemed to be allergic to change, perhaps because it affected their status in the congregation and they blamed Pope John XXIII for what they called the 'deterioration of the Church'. They showed an extreme veneration for Pius XII, 'a Pope you could rely on'. One of them told me:

'Before the Council a bishop was a bishop and a priest was a priest. I loved to go to church in those days. Now I just go there to fulfill my obligations. I don't like to go to church any more. They have spoilt everything that was beautiful.'

Often a coalition of these conservatives together with some lovers of genuine Church music succeed in having the Pontifical Mass of the patron saint of the community in Latin, but that is only once a year. Masses said by the archbishop on Catholic feasts are also in Latin, but there will always be participation of lay-people in readings and prayers and this will always be in Maltese.

The relaxation of the abstinence rules for mass and the increased possibilities for taking Holy Communion a second time a day, in case of feasts, has positively influenced the taking of Holy Communion during mass, which is very popular in Malta.²³

Government transfers Carnival

As soon as Mintoff was returned to power he interfered with the date of Carnival. Already in 1957 Carnival had been transferred from its traditional date preceding Ash Wednesday and Lent to the weekend after Easter. This transfer had been ordered by Mintoff's previous government.²⁴ According to a few informants the arguments in favour of this transfer were tourism (though this was hardly developed in the fifties, A.K.) and the weather. So far I've not been able to trace the reactions of the Church (separation of Carnival and Lent), but I assume that this transfer was not very popular as it was undone in 1959 after the resignation of the MLP government. The fact that the weather happened to be inclement during the celebration of Carnival in 1957 and 1958 may also have helped to put the dates or its celebration 'back to normal'.

From 1972 onwards Carnival again has been transferred, this time to the second week of May, so that more tourists will be present to witness it and the weather will be better.²⁵ Nobody seems to have bothered about this transfer, probably because the fasting during Lent had been abolished a few years earlier and therefore the 'need' for Carnival had been greatly reduced.

Carnival is nowadays celebrated by parades with floats and band marches in Valletta. Costumed companies perform their dances in the Palace square. Indoor dances and balls may be held in some places. It seems that the traditional 'merry-making' that accompanied Carnival had already disappeared before its transfer. Already as early as the twenties the authorities forbade the wearing of masks in public as 'it was impossible to identify those who insulted the clergy and members of the upper classes'.²⁶

In the late sixties the local Carnival Committee tried to encourage the staging of some Carnival activities in towns and villages besides Valletta as it had long been felt that the concentration of the Carnival festivities in Valletta was extinguishing the flame of the Carnival spirit throughout the island.

There are various factors contributing to the decline of the popularity of Carnival in Malta and, consequently, its celebration. Two of these concern the ever increasing cost of materials for the companies' costumes and the absolute reliance on subsidies by the Carnival Committee for bands and most companies to participate.²⁷ This has seriously affected the standard of Carnival entries and reduced the competitive spirit as well as the spontaneity of the merry-making. Now that most Maltese are literate they also don't need Carnival as an outlet of their criticism against the authorities or the clergy as nowadays the local government and opposition press fulfill such a function with fervour.

In 1977 the Socialist Government reduced Carnival to just one weekend and abolished the two traditional free afternoons on Carnival Monday and Tuesday. This measure was scarcely resisted; it seems that Carnival was not particularly popular and only functioned as a tourist attraction.²⁸

The decrease in importance of Lent also affected the Carnival which was closely connected with it. This is just another indication of the importance of Catholic ritual to the Maltese population.

Note: Carnival was transferred to the weekend preceeding Lent by the present Nationalist government in 1988. (Eds.)

Restriction of Ritual in Government Premises

Since 1987 priests are no longer allowed to say mass and hear confessions during school-hours in government schools. The Church did not officially protest and the Nationalists did not promise to undo this in their 1981 and 1986 electoral programmes. Some private grumbling of members of the clergy and their supporters occurred, but the situation has just been taken for granted.

Early in 1981 the government announced that from now on no permission would be given for the traditional lenten sermons (often accompanied by a mass) to be held in government premises. These premises should also be omitted by the parish priests during their annual Easter blessing. Parastatal companies followed suit. This measure was probably in retaliation against the closing of Church owned hospitals by the civil authorities; the government also threatened to do the same with the public schools, one of the bulwarks of the Church in education. The Church did not protest officially, it seems that hardly any one protested.

Government tackles the Parish Priests: Candlemas abolished

In February 1972 the parish priests learned that the traditional Candlemas ceremony had been suddenly modified. The ceremony symbolized the close links between Church and State. It originated under the Knights of St. John.²⁹ Each year on 2 February (Presentation of Jesus in the Temple) all parish priests presented the Grand Master of the Order of St. John (the Head of State) a blessed candle as a token of respect for the highest authority of the islands. As there was (and still is) no local government in Malta we may assume that the Knights used the parish priests for the implementation of their measures at the local level. Later the British Governors adopted the function of the Grand Masters and addressed the parish priests at the Candlemas ceremony on important state affairs, so that they, as the traditional leaders of the villages and towns, could inform their parishioners.

In 1972 Sir Anthony Mamo, Mintoff's newly appointed Governor-General had been instructed by the government not to speak in the occasion. This led to disenchantment among the parish priests and many others. After the proclamation of the republic the Candlemas ceremony was abolished by the government a few days before it was due to be celebrated in February 1975, 'as its original goal had ceased to apply'. The Archbishop and parish priests expressed their regrets and thenceforward staged their own ceremony during a Pontifical Mass in St. John's Co-Cathedral.

The disappointment of the parish priests can easily be understood as from now on the government no longer recognized their civil leadership. The abolition of Candlemas was a manifestation of changed Church-State relations. Except for the parish priests and their staunch proclerical supporters not many lay-people really missed Candlemas; it was a private ceremony and it did not really affect them. The new public ceremony, which has replaced it does not seem to be particularly well attended.³⁰

Infighting within the Church about Black Damask and Good Friday Processions

Although Vatican II did not pronounce itself about paraliturgical events, it was often used by certain factions within the Maltese Church as a legitimation for certain 'reforms'. For instance, an overzealous local liturgical commission, consisting of some progressive clergymen, considered the black damask, which adorned many Maltese churches during Holy Week, an anachronism. They argued that before the liturgical reform the celebrant on Good Friday used to wear black vestments. As the new liturgy put more stress on Christ's Resurrection than on His Death the Vatican reform changed the colour of vestments from black to red for the Good Friday liturgy. Consequently, according to the commission, the black damask should be abolished as well. However, many priests and laymen did not agree. In their opinion black damask for Holy Week could provide a special atmosphere, quite different from *festa* time, and still not speak out mourning. As one of them explained to me:

'The bridegroom wears black not because of mourning but just for the occasion.'

However, under pressure from the liturgical commission, the archbishop did insist on the abolition of the black damask, albeit reluctantly. So much so that he gave permission for gradual abolition. Some parish churches went along, but many resented this change. The parishioners were proud of their black damask, which had been very expensive, and

did not want to give it up.³¹ The parish priests were put under pressure and could not implement the change. Although this change was not imposed by the Vatican, I have often been told by the local lay-people and priests (!) that they kept the black damask in spite of Vatican instructions. They seemed to be proud to resist Rome in this way, and at present the archbishop wisely does not insist on the abolition of the black damask, which still continues to be used.³²

The liturgical commission also caused consternation with another suggestion. The traditional Good Friday processions should be transferred to Palm Sunday, because the length of these processions interfered with the Church services on Good Friday afternoon. The adoration of the cross and the kissing of the crucifix in these services takes a rather long time. The archbishop did not order such a transfer, but the more modern bishop of Gozo³³ perhaps was too rash and ordered the transfer to Palm Sunday. Before he knew it the bishop thus became involved in the conflict between the *partiti* of Rabat, the only town of his diocese and the target of the supporters of St. George. It took years before the conflict was solved and the compromise that was reached included the return of the procession to Good Friday.³⁴

The emphasis now laid on Christ's resurrection instead of his suffering has certainly not negatively influenced the Good Friday processions in Malta,³⁵ but it may have positively influenced the popularity of the Easter Sunday processions, which are gradually spreading over the island and attracting growing audiences.³⁶

The abolition of the obligatory fasts during Lent and on Fridays seems to have been well received. Nowadays only Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are official days of fasting and abstinence, but many devout Catholics also abstain from taking meat or alcohol and from smoking on Our Lady of Sorrows.³⁷ The termination of fasting during Lent has not affected the popularity of the traditional Lenten Sermons in Malta. They seem to enjoy an ever increasing popularity.

Relatively minor changes have been smoothly accepted, such as the transfer of the traditional Easter Vigil from midnight to the early evening of Holy Saturday.

INTERVENTION AROUND AND ABOUT THE FESTI

The Vatican tries to simplify prelate's insignia

Although an attempt of the Holy See to simplify the vestments and regalia of canons and parish priests does, strictly speaking, not belong to feasts and rituals, these matters are so interwoven that treatment in this paper is justified. The Vatican attempt was successfully sabotaged by the threatened prelates with the tacit approval of the bishops and

overt encouragement of the faithful who were definitely not prepared to give up this pomp.

Centuries ago the canons of the Cathedral Chapter of Malta obtained the right to the personal title of monsignor and the wearing of a mitre. When the latter privilege was abolished in the early seventies, newly created canons had to do without it. This was deeply regretted, not only by some of the monsignors, but also by the faithful of their parishes. There the highlight of the year is the feast of the local patron saint, the *festa*, and often monsignors are invited to conduct the most important solemn celebration, the translation of the relic, the Pontifical Mass and the procession. In the eyes of the parishioners nothing is better for the status of their feast than a fully appavelled monsignor, wearing his mitre, his shoes with silver buckles, and all other signs of his high dignity. Some parish priests refused to invite 'new' monsignors for their *festi*, which cost these unfortunate dignitaries a bit of their status as well as a fee for services rendered. Other parish priests were more broadminded and did invite them nevertheless, perhaps because they wanted to teach the faithful that mitres were not that important, but I vividly remember the reaction of one of the fanatics to a 'new' monsignor leading 'his' procession without a mitre:

'For me this is not a real procession. A monsignor without a mitre is no monsignor at all. He might as well lead the procession stark naked.'

The situation did not last long. In 1976 the parish priest of Zabbar was appointed canon in the Cathedral Chapter, the usual way of pensioning off a parish priest.³⁸ To the surprise of many, however, this 'new' monsignor did wear a mitre at his first official appearance after his 'promotion'. When I asked some informants among the clergy for an explanation they suggested that Mgr. Zarb might be an exception to the rule because he was not just a canon, but also the archpriest of the Cathedral. However, new appointees to the canonship after Mgr. Zarb happily followed the latter's example and started wearing mitres right away. By and by their predecessors also appeared in public with mitres. Recently I was told that the archbishop had officially obtained permission from the Holy See for his monsignors to continue wearing mitres.

Together with the mitres the Holy See had also imposed the abolition of the traditional *muzzetta* (mozetta) for parish priests. This meant that parish priests appointed after 1975 had just to appear on festive occasions in a nice cassock, while those appointed earlier were allowed to wear the *muzzetta*. Most of the newly appointed parish priests (and their parishioners) did not like this, but some of these priests managed to obtain an honorary canonship in one of the many collegiate chapters of Malta.

Thus they could wear the *muzzetta*, as it had not been abolished for canons. The situation changed after the archbishop had accompanied Pope John Paul II to Poland in 1979 and noticed the many mitres, *muzzetta*, etc. there. The archbishop used this as an argument to obtain permission from the Holy See to reintroduce not only the mitres for the monsignori, but also the *muzzetti* for the parish priests appointed after 1975. I have been told that the archbishop insists parish priests wear the *muzzetta* whenever he visits them. Thus a certain difference in style at the Vatican after the last change in the papacy has certainly been welcomed in Malta.

Mgr. Zarb was an excellent position to provoke the wearing of the mitre. It may have cost Archbishop Gonzi all his persuasion to make powerful parish priest Zarb accept his 'promotion', maybe the dignitaryship of archpriest of the Cathedral was part of the 'deal'. It was generally known that Archbishop Gonzi held his Cathedral Chapter in high esteem (all prelates were appointed by himself) and did not like the abolition of their privileges. Archbishop Gonzi needed the support of both the Chapter and the parish priests in order not to be forced to step down (he was in his late eighties) because he had long exceeded the age-limit of seventy for ruling bishops. So a policy of internal leniency, while giving the Vatican the impression of complying, was the best. The Maltese nunciature was vacant in those days, so who could complain in Rome? Mgr. Gonzi's successor is not extremely popular with his clergy. In allowing mitres and *muzzetti* he wisely has not antagonized them.

New Vatican Theology on Saints repulsive to the Maltese

It is interesting to note that the new theological outlook of the Roman Catholic Church since Vatican II has been more towards Christ and less towards the saints, whilst among the saints the position of the Virgin gained some extra prominence. In Malta this did not lead to the renaming of churches and parishes, as has been the case sometimes in the past.³⁹ However, nine out of the fifteen parishes newly created since the Second Vatican Council are dedicated to Our Lady, two to her 'spouse' St. Joseph, one to Christ himself, one to St. John of the Cross, one to St. Augustine (a parish long before its official creation already in the care of the Augustinian Order), and one to St. Pius X.⁴⁰ Thus a strong tendency towards dedication to the Virgin and the Holy Family, to the detriment of 'lesser' saints, can be distinguished.

One might expect that the new theological outlook mentioned above and the removal of certain saints from the revised liturgical calendar of the Roman Catholic Church would have certain consequences for the celebration of their titular feasts in Malta. As far as I know this concerns St. Nicholas of Bari, patron saint of the parish of Siggiewi, and St. George,

patron saint of the oldest parish of Qormi and one of the two parishes in Rabat, Gozo. Both have been removed from the calendar. St. Catherine of Alexandria, patron saint of the parishes of Zejtun and Zurrieq, did not only undergo the same fate, but also had to accept the following crushing verdict:

‘..... Not only is the *Passio* of St. Catherine totally fabulous, but also nothing can be affirmed as certain of the very person of St. Catherine.’⁴¹

Mgr. Gerada, one time Coadjutor Archbishop of Malta, undoubtedly lost a lot of goodwill in his native town of Zejtun when, invited to deliver the traditional panegyric of St. Catherine during the Pontifical Mass on her feast day, he referred to the above mentioned doubts about her existence.⁴²

A quite different attitude was shown by the late Reverend Professor Seraphim M. Zarb, O.P. and was much more appreciated in Zejtun and Zurrieq. Father Zarb, an established scholar in biblical studies and dogmatic theology, did not forget how St. Catherine once won his heart as the patroness of Dominican students. As a gallant knight he used his encyclopaedic knowledge of hagiology for his weapon, and sharpened his pen to undertake a series of articles on the origins and development of the cult of St. Catherine. These articles, together with the art historian Mario Buhagiar’s articles, written at the invitation of Zarb, in the cult of St. Catherine in Malta, are now published in one volume by the St. Catherine Musical Society of Zurrieq and the Zejtun Parish Council.⁴³ Father Zarb once told me that not only did he disagree with the new *Calendarium Romanum* (1969) on St. Catherine of Alexandria, but also on St. Nicholas. The latter’s history and that of St. George have never been challenged by the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship in Rome. That may be the reason why so far no sons of Siggiewi, Qormi or Rabat (Gozo) have come forth to defend their beloved patron saints. Along with others their feasts did not remain obligatory to the Universal Church, but only to local Churches. This has not prevented their *festi* to be celebrated with the usual Maltese pomp and splendour until this very day.⁴⁴

The Maltese episcopate took care in the new emphasis in Catholic theology by creating mainly parishes devoted to the Holy Family after Vatican II. The already existing devotion for the Virgin in the Maltese Islands was a favourable condition for this measure. A lesser devotion to some (existing or non-existing) saints without a ready alternative might lead to decline of their *festi* and thus indirectly make the clergy lose its grip on the (especially rural) masses. Besides, *festi* are lucrative sources of income for many members of the clergy (Masses and other special

church services as confessions, the procession) and they provide them with the opportunities to wear their prestigious vestments, mitres, etc., as we have seen above. A fine *fiesta* gives prestige to the parish priests of the organizing parish. Therefore it is easy to understand why there have not been many protagonists for a change in devotion to some saints and the abolition of devotion to non-existing saints.

Government abolishes Religious Public Holidays

Mintoff's government had just started its second term of office, when it felt strong enough to reduce the number of public holidays from fourteen to six, all the abrogated feast days being Catholic days of obligation.

As I mentioned above, of the fourteen public holidays listed in 1976, twelve were holy days of obligation: St. Paul's Shipwreck, St. Joseph, Good Friday, Ascension Day, St. Joseph the Worker, St. Peter and St. Paul, the Assumption, Our Lady of Victories, All Saints, the Immaculate Conception and Christmas Day. Of these May Day and the 8th of September were also celebrated by the State. There were only two wholly secular feasts, New Year's Day and Republic Day, the latter's introduction having led in 1975 to the suppression by the Government of Epiphany (6th January) as a number of public holidays because it was not considered desirable to add to the number of public holidays. Consequently, the archbishop cancelled Epiphany as a day of obligation and ordered its celebration moved to the nearest Sunday.

In 1977 the feast of St. Joseph was abolished as a public holiday, just a few weeks before its celebration (19th March). In Parliament the Prime Minister announced on 16th March that the Government had been informed by the Vatican that St. Joseph, Ascension Day, Corpus Christi, St. Peter and St. Paul, All Saint's Day and the Immaculate Conception were no longer to be observed as days of obligation. In the case of St. Paul the obligation to hear mass would remain, but it would not be a sin to work. As a consequence the above feast days and September 8 would no longer be public holidays.⁴⁵ The bishops confirmed that the feasts mentioned by the Prime Minister were no longer days of obligation, but remained as days of devotion on which the faithful would do well to hear mass. On those days the hours of mass in all churches would be the same as on Sundays.⁴⁶

Many people, the clergy included, grumbled, but Mintoff with his move at the Vatican had outwitted the archbishop. Even if the latter had wanted to, there was now nothing he could undertake.

A minority of the workers protested against this restriction of their rights, but their industrial actions failed. Not only public holidays were abolished, from now on the government would refuse the necessary

permission to have these religious feasts celebrated on weekdays. As it motivated its measure by the need to increase national productivity, most probably it was afraid that celebration of these feasts on the traditional days might lead to peaks of sick-leaves. Now most of them have been transferred to the next Sunday. This means that quite a few Sundays are no longer available for the celebration of village *festi* and therefore many of them must share their celebration on the remaining Sundays of Summer; thus a decrease in the possibilities of keen festagoers to watch their competitors from other villages. Theoretically this could lead to a decrease in inter parochial rivalry, but I doubt if this will ever happen.

I have the impression that now church going on these previous feasts is not as substantial as the clergy would desire.

In a way the Nationalists seem to have accepted the *fait accompli*, as they mention in their 1981 electoral programme that the ecclesiastical authorities have accepted the transfer of these feasts. They only promise to restore these public holidays, which 'are a vital link with our cultural past', such as St. Paul's Shipwreck, St. Peter and St. Paul (*Mnarja*), Our Lady of Victories and the Immaculate Conception.⁴⁷ So they accepted four abolished public holidays (St. Joseph, Ascension Day, Corpus Christi and All Saint's Day). Of these only St. Joseph was celebrated as a secondary feast in Rabat. This feast was added to the list of feasts to be restored as public holidays in the Nationalist electoral manifesto of 1987, while St. Paul's Shipwreck had just been reinstated by the Labour Government before its celebration on the eve of the election.⁴⁸

Of these feasts the Nationalists wanted to reinstate as public holidays *Mnarja* which used to be tremendously popular (see above), while the others belong to the category of parish *festi* of more than local importance.⁴⁹

It is interesting to note that the Nationalist Party used 29 June 1982 (*Mnarja*) as a starting point of its campaign of civil disobedience and passive resistance, meant 'to restore democracy'.⁵⁰

The party issued directives to observe the feast or *Mnarja* as a public holiday. Consequently workers should not go to work, parents should not do any shopping on that day. Employers should give their employees a paid holiday and double pay to those workers whose service was essential. The government warned it would take all the necessary measures against those obeying the directives. However, the party was satisfied with the response to its directives. It said the measure of success was higher than had been expected. Thousands of people, waving Maltese national flags and Nationalist Party banners, invaded the sandy beach of Ghadira, where the party had organized a popular outing.⁵¹

Government lifts Restrictions against Secondary Partiti

A peculiar institution in Malta is that of *festa partiti*, divisions within a local parish, embracing the supporters of the titular saint and the supporters of a secondary saint, who has assumed almost equal social importance. This fascinating phenomenon of Maltese social life is still far from extinct in spite of many efforts of the Church authorities to restrict the celebration of the secondary feast as much as possible. Therefore certain decorations of the church are not allowed on the secondary feast and only a limited number of village streets around the church was allowed to be specially decorated and illuminated. The route of the procession of the secondary saint was also much smaller than that of the patron saint. These last restrictions were always enforced with the loyal help of the Malta police.

Suddenly, in August 1975, the government announced that it was no longer prepared to instruct the police to enforce these restrictions. This announcement can be seen as a reflection of the changing power-balances between Church and State. However, also a particular reason was repeatedly given to me. The announcement came just a few weeks before the celebration of a particular secondary feast. One of the senior ministers is president of the band club supporting the feast.

According to Boissevain and Gullick supporters of the secondary feast are more often members of the lower classes than supporters of the patron saint.⁵² Hence this measure can also be seen as an indication of the shift of power towards the working class, which certainly occurred since 1971. Although the Church still continues its policy of restricting the secondary feasts, they certainly have grown since 1975. The supporters of the primary feasts don't like to be outdone and therefore have been keen to expand the festivities of the patron saints as well. This measure helped to expand both primary and secondary parish feasts in Malta.⁵³

Bishop and Prime Minister deplore excessive use of Fireworks

One can imagine that the Maltese parish feasts with their conspicuous consumption of food, drink and especially fireworks did not fit in with the new approach of the universal Catholic Church after Vatican II. The following recommendation of the archbishop seems to reflect this mentality:

'Let us compensate for these reductions in Obligatory feasts by good works, above all by financial aid to the many families who are in want and whose number we fear will increase; let us assist these unfortunate families. And while writing the recommendations we recall to mind recommendations made by us on more than one occasion by word of mouth and in writing, to cease the wasting

of money during parish feasts on excessive pyrotechnics, which, besides ending up in nothing and disturbing many people, give a bad impression of the country to the many foreigners in our midst, causing them to be scandalized and to form an unjust judgement of the Church.

At least, let some part of the money spent on fireworks be given to the poor and needy families of the Island.

It is necessary that this fanaticism should come to an end, and everyone should help to ensure that it disappears from the Island's feasts.⁵⁴

It would be unfair to say that the archbishop's recommendations have not been followed at all. In many parishes nowadays there is a special collection during the *fešta* for a deserving cause (poverty has practically disappeared from Malta because of increased social services). Many parish priests nowadays attach great importance to the spiritual aspect of the feast, much more than before. The liturgical celebrations are updated and well attended (open air masses, folk masses, etc.). This in its turn has increased the scale of the *fešta* celebrations. In the meantime fanaticism has far from disappeared and the (subsequent) use of fireworks has ever been increasing over the last fifteen years.⁵⁵

As the amount spent on fireworks and the quality of the fireworks directly affects the prestige of the parish priest and the clergy resident in the parish we can hardly expect any enthusiasm of them to curtail fireworks. But the archbishop had an unexpected ally.

Already in the fifties opposition leader Dom Mintoff fulminated against the excessive use of fireworks. It was a waste of energy and money and often explosions in the village fireworks factories cost a few human lives.⁵⁶ Mintoff can be proud that since 1971 he realized almost all his ideas of the fifties and sixties. But as we have just seen above the fireworks continue at an ever increasing scale.

There have been Government efforts to suppress fireworks, which led, according to Gullick, to

'..... fireworks being made in the homes and not factories, and to displays of illegal fireworks.'⁵⁷

In spite of Government restrictions on fireworks (the use of *murtali*, noisy bombs), the use of electricity in church illuminations, a fixed end for the saint's procession etc., it seems that these regulations have never been taken seriously, nor enforced by the police, who are somewhat reluctant to enforce them, may be because

'..... if fireworks are aimed low they can be extremely efficient weapons, and in any event who wants to quarrel with an explosives expert.'⁵⁸

Gullick also hints to the use of illegal fireworks as an 'anti-government declaration'.⁵⁹ But how can we explain this when we know that most of them belong to the working classes, the traditional electorate of the MLP?

The death-toll of explosions in fireworks factories has severely increased recently,⁶⁰ but parliamentary regulations have not been accepted. Parliament had to give in, otherwise most *festi* would not be celebrated at all. Why did the authoritarian government accept this? They could have easily formed a coalition with the Church authorities. The only reason I can think of is that most *fešta* supporters belong to the MLP electorate. Since 1971 all elections have been decided by the narrow margins in Malta and therefore every vote counts. Maybe the restrictions of feasts has been one of the few items the Socialist Government just could not accomplish in Malta.

Clergy loses some grip on the festi

Several secular elements have crept into the village *fešta*, much to the chagrin of the clergy. One of them is the Sunday morning band march which more and more parish priests have been forced to allow. This band march which often starts when the Pontifical Mass is still going on, frequently degenerates into a brawl of drunken fanatics. The faithful are often insulted by the same fanatics, when at the end of the feast the statue of the saint is carried back into the church, by clapping and continuing to shout their extreme adoration for the saint. Only a few parish priests can prevent these scenes by their personal authority.⁶¹

Another example that the clergy are losing their grip on the *festi* is that, in spite of the official day of mourning prescribed by the archbishop, the parishes of Hamrun and Vittoriosa did not cancel the band marches and fireworks on the eve of the celebration of the feasts of St. Cajetan and St. Lawrence respectively, which was the day of the funeral of Pope Paul VI.⁶² It should be noted that these two parishes have many anticlerical parishioners who are also *fešta* fanatics. Hamrun is notorious for its Sunday morning band march, and at Vittoriosa it is impossible to stop the supporters from misbehaviour in church when St. Lawrence is carried back into the church.

This is not to say that the clergy is losing its grip altogether on the *festi*. Generally the parish priest is very much in charge and together with the parish clergy and the invited celebrants he is the focus of everybody's attention during the *fešta*.

GOVERNMENT STAGES ITS OWN COMMUNITY RITES

National Day: Transfers and Troubles

Mintoff's interference with National Day was foremost aimed at his predecessors in government, the Nationalist Party, now on opposition. It is generally assumed that Mintoff just could not stomach the fact that it was not he but the Nationalist Dr. Giorgio Borg Olivier who secured for Malta its independence on 21st September 1964.

Ever since, 21st September had been a public holiday as Independence Day and Malta's National Day. As such it replaced 8 September, Our Lady of Victories, the date which recalled Malta's triumph after the Great Siege by the Turks in 1565 and the Second Siege by the Germans and Italians during World War II. The 8th September was mainly a feast of the Church, which was also the annual *fešta* of three local parishes.

Although the Church was conspicuously present at the Independence Celebrations we may assume that the introduction of Independence Day as Malta's National Day is an indication of the changing power-balances between Church and State after Independence.⁶³

Since he had been returned to power Mintoff did everything to undo what he called 'mock-independence'. Immediately in 1971 21st September was abolished as Malta's National Day (8th September was reintroduced) and as a public holiday, to the chagrin of the Nationalists who continued to celebrate Independence Day ever since.

The proclamation of the republic was claimed by Mintoff as the fruit of his constitutional endeavors, but there were hardly any festivities on the 13th September 1974 whereas people remembered the pomp and splendour of the Independence Celebrations in 1964. Republic Day now became a public holiday and it replaced 8th September as Malta's National Day, until it had to give way to 31st March, 'Freedom Day' the anniversary of the departure of the last British troops from Malta in 1979, which is considered by Mintoff and his MLP as their greatest achievement.⁶⁴

From 1979 till 1987 Freedom Day was celebrated by the Socialist government and its supporters with great pomp, while it was boycotted by the Nationalists. The present Nationalist Government restored Independence Day as a Public Holiday.⁶⁵

My informants do not recall any special enthusiasm on September 21, Independence Day, in the years following 1964. Efforts to stir up this enthusiasm at the local level by holding patriotic addresses in towns and villages had varying, and dubious measures of success. While the MLP supporters tended to boycott these celebrations even quite a few Nationalists had a feeling, perhaps not vociferously expressed, that

September 21 was much too near to September 8, and that it would have been better to graft the new event on to the date of the old National Day, which not only commemorated two great historic events and almost coincided with September 5, which some years before had begun to be commemorated as marking the surrender of the French in 1800 after two years' blockade by the Maltese.

It is interesting to note that the Nationalists started staging great celebrations on September 21st *after* it had been abolished as Malta's National Day and cancelled as a public holiday in 1971. This was resented by the MLP and some times even fights started between overzealous MLP and PN supporters. On the other hand the Nationalists boycotted the several National Days since 1971, which are being celebrated with increasing pomp by the MLP supporters. In 1982 the Nationalists staged a counter demonstration at Luqa Airport, which led to fights between rival supporters.

It seems that the Nationalist supporters did not feel much need before 1971 to celebrate Independence Day. They used to be composed more of the upper and middle classes than the Labour supporters, though the difference cannot be too large as both parties are supported by circa 50% of the population. But we may say that the traditional Nationalists just were not so fond of feasts. The traditional Labour supporters are often keen festagoers, so we should not be surprised that they wholeheartedly participate in the secular feasts organized by the government of their party. The increased enthusiasm for Independence Day among the Nationalists can be seen as a mass manifestation of their abhorrence of the Labour government, but also as a success of the Nationalist policy to find more support among the lower classes, who are keen of feasts.

It seems as if the phenomenon of *festa partiti*, which is still vigorously existing at the local level, has been extended to the national level, where the polarization between the two political parties and their supporters found its manifestation in the ever increasing rivalry between Independence Day and Freedom Day. It is significant to note that, contrary to local *festa partiti*, the role of the Church has been peripheral on the national level. The party leaders have taken the place of the saints. Furthermore the archbishop never took sides, but just celebrated Pontifical Mass on the consecutive National Days. This does not prevent the Nationalists together with a great majority of the (traditionally pro PN) clergy, to be utterly disappointed when the archbishop refused to pontificate on Independence Day, but does so on Freedom Day.

It is too simple to explain the development around National Day as a reflection of the increasing importance of the national level at the expense of the local level. The situation is much more complicated. The

national level has certainly gained importance during the last two decades, but it is not fair to say that consequently the local level has decreased in importance.⁶⁶

May Day or St. Joseph the Worker

May Day certainly gained importance since 1971. It had already been made a public holiday in the fifties upon the proclamation of its dedication to St. Joseph the Worker and becoming a holy day of obligation by the Roman Catholic Church. During Pontifical Mass the Archbishop blesses the tools of several workers. From 1972 onwards large parades were held in Valletta with decorated floats of all local MLP clubs showing the achievements of Mintoff and his government or the failures of the Nationalist opposition. Several bands took place. The whole spectacle was reminiscent of a procession with its slow progress. Instead of the statue and the clergy bringing up the rear there is a lorry carrying the V.I.P.'s of the MLP. The cheers and the confetti were the same as for a patron saint; nor are the fireworks absent from the scene. The spectacle was still going on when Pontifical Mass started. Therefore people had to choose where their first loyalty lay, but some may have been done as I: see the first part of the parade, go to the Cathedral when the Mass starts and when it is over see the last part of the parade.

It remains to be seen whether May Day will continue to be celebrated at the same scale now that the Socialists are relegated to the Opposition.

CONCLUSION

Now that we are able to review the developments in Maltese feasts and rituals it is not difficult to note that hardly anything has changed as far as *rites de passage* are concerned. Church interference, meant to diminish the distance between the clergy and the lay-people, has been well accepted, but it cannot be called very substantial. State interference has hardly been with ritual itself. No alternative funeral ritual has been organized, while the alternative marriage ritual does not enjoy popularity among the Maltese.

As far as community rites are concerned the Church has not been able to implement many changes. Small wonder as we have noticed that the Church itself has been utterly divided. Small groups of 'reformers' within the clergy, legitimizing themselves by referring to the Second Vatican Council's alleged call for more sobriety, have been frustrated in their efforts by these clergymen who felt their prestige and position threatened by the 'reforms'. Especially the parish priests have been able to use the genuine Maltese love for pomp, which is foremost manifest in the working class, to stay in charge and keep up the signs of distinction.

And as the working class is now in power, it is a useful ally in resistance to simplify feasts and rituals in Malta.

Vatican II did not only inspire 'reformers', it also served as a legitimisation for some new religious activities, like Easter Processions, now that Easter has become more important.

During its three terms of office the Socialist government has successfully penetrated in several spheres of social life. It also did not leave the community rites untouched. Carnival has been transferred, religious ritual in government premises restricted, Candlemas abolished, while the *festi* were seriously affected by the abolition of many religious public holidays and the lifting of restrictions on secondary *partiti*. The government created its own community rites, but all these measures have not been able to diminish the increasing popularity with the masses for the *festi*.

It is obvious that the developments in the Bolognese *quartiere* Albora have been much more detrimental to religious feasts and ritual than in Malta.⁶⁷

Most people still prefer Church organized rites of passage to the civil alternative, though some may have a non-religious funeral, which hardly exists in Malta. While some people in Albora prefer a plain civil marriage, the amount of Maltese who do so is negligible.

The differences are even more striking in the sphere of community rites. Mass attendance is low in Albora, but high in Malta. The communist *festi* are much more popular among the population than those of the Church and have taken the place of the religious feasts for the majority in Albora, while the community rites staged by the Mintoffian government are only an alternative for the religious *festi* for a small majority. For most MLP supporters they have just been added to the religious feasts. How can we explain the differences?

First we should keep in mind that Bologna has a much older socialist tradition than Malta, while the communists have dominated local politics since the end of the Second World War. Second, while in Albora 65% votes communist within a multi party system, Malta has a two party system, where both parties can count on almost 50% of the electorate. Consequently, while in Albora the communist *festi* are aimed at the majority of the population, Freedom Day (which is complementary to Independence Day) and May Day are only aimed at barely half the Maltese population. While in Bologna the religious community feasts are only aimed at the churchgoing minority, in Malta they are aimed at the whole population and the clergy sees to it that the masses enjoy themselves, while in the meantime their attention is generally focussed at the religious impact of the feast.

It seems that the working class consciousness in Bologna is less

hampered by other cross cutting loyalties than in Malta, where allegiance to the Church as an institution is still dominantly existent. Although the amount in which the Maltese are still tied to the clergy is gradually diminishing, the remnants of these ties are only slowly disappearing. And this may explain why increasing State interference has hardly affected religious feasts and rituals in Independent Malta.

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Notes

*This article is a partial report of my research into political and religious leadership in Malta, carried out since 1973 with support from the Netherlands organization for the advancement of pure research (Z.W.O.) and the Free University of Amsterdam. It was presented as a working-paper for a session on 'Religion in the New Nations' at the 10th World Congress of Sociology (section Sociology of Religion), held in Mexico City, 16-21 August, 1982. A Dutch translation was published in Koster, Kuiper and Verrips, 1983. It was impossible for me to update this draft.

I am grateful to Dr. Mart Bax, Mario Buhagiar, B.A., Archpriest Joe Carabott, Joseph Cassar-Pullicino, Dr. Charles Gullick, Margreet Koster-Klusman and the participants in a conference on the feasts and rituals in Europe, organized in April 1982 by the Dutch Working Society of Social and Cultural Anthropology in Europe (where I presented the Introduction and the paragraph in Church Intervention in a Dutch draft) for valuable suggestions. I would also like to thank Professor Richard Griffiths, Professor John F. Parr and the Rev. Professor Matthew Schoffeleers, S.M.M. for their corrections. Jetty Koster prepared the text for publication.

¹ Among the Maltese there are very few who have not been baptized according to the rites of the Roman Catholic Church. During British rule (1800-1964) the Church provided the population with a national sense of identity.

² Boissevain, 1965, pp. 55-66.

³ Boissevain, 1984.

⁴ Ever since 1966 Malta virtually has a two party system. Since 1971 the marges of electoral support between Prime Minister Dom Mintoff's ruling Malta Labour Party (MLP) and the Maltese Christian-Democrats, the Nationalist Party (PN), around which all anti-Mintoffians have rallied, has been extremely small. In fact the greatest difference was 3% (51, 5% MLP, 48, 5% PN) in 1976. The MLP is rather anticlerical, the PN is not.

An extensive treatment of the conflict between the Maltese Roman Catholic Church and Mintoff's MLP, which led to the 'mortal sin', is given in Koster, 1984b, pp. 151-215.

⁵ Kertzer, 1980, pp. 131-168.

⁶ *Constitution of the Republic of Malta*, section 2.

⁷ In population areas there is always a church or a chapel just around the corner and priests, monks and nuns go about in the apparel traditionally befitting their religious status. One may presume that Malta still has the highest ratio of religious vocations in the world (Mizzi, 1971, p. 9).

⁸ A rather new custom is the blessing of the rings by a priest at the engagement party (Boissevain, 1969, p. 33).

⁹ Cf. Leopardi, 1958 and Cassar-Pullicino, 1955.

¹⁰ In 1982 Good Friday processions were held in twelve Maltese and three Gozitan parishes; this does not include the few processions already held on Palm Sunday.

¹¹ E.g. St. Paul's Shipwreck (Valletta), St. George (Rabat, Gozo), Our Lady of Victories (Senglea, Naxxar and Mellieha) and Santa Maria (the Assumption, which is the titular feast of eight parishes).

As I am still not yet fed up with *festi* and visited more than sixty I might with some justice be called another *festa* fanatic.

¹²The girls are dressed as miniature brides.

¹³This procession, originally from Mdina to Zejtun, is already mentioned in 1571 by pastoral visitor Mgr. Duzzina 'as something rather long established' (Carabott, 1971, p. 56). Buhagiar (1981, p. 766) gives 1543 as the year when it was first organized on a national scale.

¹⁴Boissevain, 1977, p. 91.

¹⁵In the amended Constitution of December 1974 the term 'corrupt practices' was introduced with respect to elections. According to its definition 'any temporal or spiritual injury' constitutes a corrupt practice (*Electoral Polling Ordinance*, Cap. 163). This means that an election result can be annulled if priests have, for example, refuses absolution to voters of a particular party.

In 1975 the government enacted legislation concerning the Church. First, *Privilegium Fori*, the right that bishops could not be taken to a Government Court, was abolished. Then the Burials Ordinance was amended and a Marriage Bill was passed. Finally the exemption of bishops, parishes, churches and religious communities from income tax was abolished. For an elaborate account of this legislation cf. Koster, 1984b, pp. 229-234.

¹⁶About six Mintoiffians had been interred in the *mizbla*, including one of Mintoiff's former Ministers, and this was a cause of great bitterness for the MLP which added fuel to the fire. As if to demonstrate their defiance, Labour organized annual 'pilgrimage' to these unconsecrated tombs. In 1969 Bishop Gerada had already ordered to demolish the wall which separated the *mizbla* from the rest of the Addolorata Cemetery; cf. Koster, 1984b, pp. 202, 211.

¹⁷So far I have not come across such a case.

¹⁸Cf. Koster, 1984a, pp. 202-204; 1984b, pp. 223-234.

¹⁹In 1976 there were only 51 civil marriages out of 2938 (1.7%), (Demographic Review, 1976).

²⁰Nationalist Party, 1976, p. 20.

²¹Nationalist Party, 1981, p. 68.

²²Although the PN gained 51% of the votes in the general election of December 1981, the MLP managed to obtain a three seat majority in Parliament (because of gerrymandering, according to the PN) and assumed the government in spite of continuous protest of the PN. The third and last term of office of the Socialists was to a great extent dominated by one single question: Should a majority of the electorate be assured of a parliamentary majority? The question was only settled just in time before the 1987 election so that such a situation would no longer be possible. As a matter of fact, as a result of this agreement the PN was returned to the Government with one seat majority, while the actual results hardly differed from those of 1981.

²³Nowadays one does not have to abstain (even from drinking water) from midnight until Communion, but only one hour, while water is always allowed (and rightly so, as it can be very hot in Malta).

²⁴Mintoiff was also Prime Minister during 1955-58 under supervision of the British colonial authorities; cf. Austin, 1971.

²⁵This seems to be in line with the transfer of many village *festi* from the original dates of celebration to summer, but against government policy to attract tourists to Malta during the whole year, and not only in summer.

²⁶Jeremy Boissevain, private conversation with the author.

²⁷Cf. Cassar-Pullicino, 1976, pp. 21-26; Gullick, 1981.

²⁸Now that the present Nationalist Government has once more restored Carnival to its traditional place before Lent, it will be interesting to find out if it will regain some of its original character.

²⁹The Sovereign and Military Order of St. John of Jerusalem ruled the islands between 1530 and 1798.

³⁰So far there has not been any indication of some restoration of the Candlemas Ceremony by the present Nationalist Government.

³¹In Malta, the parishioners consider themselves the collective owners of the treasures of the parish church and rightly so as many generations generously contributed to them (and still do) in work and money.

³²I noticed this myself during Holy Week 1982.

³³Compared to Malta, the island of Gozo – a separate diocese – is more rural, more conservative, clinging to ancient ways and customs, and more deeply religious.

³⁴Cf. Boissevain, 1978, p. 124 for a brief discussion of the difficulties; the same author gives an admirable description of *festa partiti*, generally divisions within a Maltese parish, embracing the

supporters of the titular saint and the supporters of a secondary saint, who has assumed almost equal social importance (1965, pp. 74-96) and 1969, pp. 81-86). In Gozo the situation has been even more complicated as the supporters of St. George claimed to be a parish in their own right in Rabat, a right which was finally granted in 1976. Now the intraparish rivalry has changed these into interparish rivalry.

³⁵Boissevain, 1984.

³⁶In 1982 eight Easter processions were held in Malta and one in Gozo.

³⁷Many Maltese, especially women, still wear the scapular of Our Lady of Mount Carmel and refrain from taking meat on Wednesdays and Fridays. They believe this will reduce their time in purgatory considerably.

³⁸Cf. Koster, 1984a, p. 189.

³⁹For instance Paola was first dedicated to St. Ubaldesca and later to Christ the King.

⁴⁰Of the nine parishes dedicated to Our Lady in one form or another three are dedicated to O.L. of Mount Carmel, two to O.L. of Lourdes, one to O.L. of Fatima, one to Maria Regina, one to the Immaculate Heart of Mary and one to the Immaculate Conception.

⁴¹*Calendarium Romanum*, 147, as quoted by Zarb, 1979, p. 7.

⁴²For a detailed account of Mgr. Gerada's unhappy performance as Coadjutor Archbishop of Malta, see Koster, 1981, pp. 225-228 and 239-245.

⁴³Zarb and Buhagiar, 1979.

⁴⁴The fact that the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship in Rome did not prescribe the feasts of these saints brought great joy to their parishioners. This is not to say that their disappearance from the *Calendarium Romanum* was accepted in any sense. Thus when the secretary of the Congregation, Mgr. Bugnini, was appointed Apostolic Delegate to Khomeini's Iran, the appointment was considered 'merited punishment' according to the 'devotees' of St. Catherine.

⁴⁵*Times of Malta*, 17 March, 1977.

⁴⁶Circular Letter issued jointly by the archbishop of Malta and the bishop of Gozo, quoted by the *Times of Malta*, 18 March, 1977.

⁴⁷Nationalist Party, 1981, p. 85.

⁴⁸Nationalist Party, 1987. The feasts mentioned became public holidays once more since the change in Government.

⁴⁹See note 11.

⁵⁰See note 22.

⁵¹Although according to the Acting Prime Minister the appeal had failed miserably, the government showed its anger by mass suspensions of teachers, civil servants and workers in parastatal firms, who had observed the directives. The businessmen 'will pay bitterly for their action' said the Acting Prime Minister; *The Times (Malta)*, 30 June, 1 July, 1982.

⁵²Boissevain, 1965, pp. 83-84, 107-111; Gullick, 1974, p. 97.

⁵³Boissevain, 1984, p. 176.

⁵⁴Gonzi, 1967.

⁵⁵Cf. Boissevain, 1984. My own personal observations also point into this direction.

⁵⁶Mintoff, 1953.

⁵⁷Gullick, 1980, p. 12.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁶⁰Boissevain, 1984, p. 171.

⁶¹Although quite a few informants told me that this was a rather recent phenomenon, Jeremy Boissevain, in a private conversation, informed me that even as early as 1929 the parish priest of Kirkop carried a gun with him in order to make his parishioners behave in church when St. Leonard was taken back into church after his procession.

⁶²*Times of Malta*, 12th August, 1978.

⁶³The souvenir-folder of the Malta Independence Celebrations (Anonymous, 1964) provides us with splendid illustrations of the dominant role of the Church during the Independence Celebrations.

⁶⁴In 1979 every effort was made to celebrate the termination of the defence agreement with the United Kingdom with a lot of splash, and presumably some pressure was brought to bear on the hierarchy to make them play their part. Therefore the archbishop staged a Pontifical Mass with the *Te Deum* in St. John's Co-Cathedral and issued a pastoral letter which proved to be almost

a verbatim copy of the one his predecessor had written on the occasion of independence. He ordered a mass to be said with special prayers for the nation. All churches had to be illuminated on March 30 and 31 and the bells rung at midnight between Saturday March 30 and Sunday April 1. As all Nationalists ignored the celebration of 'Mr. Mintoff's All Fool's Day' and the majority of the clergy supported them more or less overtly, most parish priests were very reluctant to comply and quite a few of them lit only lamps on the facade of the church for just one hour and ordered the minimum of bell-pealing.

⁶⁵ A new National Day has not been designated so far as the Government's reconciliation policy seeks agreement between both parties on this item.

⁶⁶ Or is increasing attention for the local level, as it has been noticed by Boissevain (1984) and observed by myself another manifestation of growing integration and thus indirectly stressing the importance of the national level (as has been maintained at the Conference on Feasts and Rituals in Europe)?

⁶⁷ Kertzer, 1980, pp. 131-168.

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WAGES POLICY AT MALTA DRYDOCKS: ANALYSIS OF AN AMBIVALENCE

Godfrey Baldacchino

INTRODUCTION

Relatively high and fixed wage rates in a self-managed firm operating with chronic non-profitability may read as economic nonsense.¹ This is however the present reality of Malta Drydocks, and a matter which has been for some time at the forefront of public debate. Unfortunately, the argument has been both simplified and polarized by partisan statements, making it difficult to break through the clichés and to seek an objective analysis of the situation.

This paper attempts to serve as a valid contribution towards a cool, dispassionate discussion of the Drydocks condition. It probes into the apparent ambivalence which surrounds the sensitive issue of what is herein referred to as 'wages policy' – namely, the determination of wage rates and wage structures and their relationship to enterprise productivity and profitability.

Malta Drydocks has been subjected to regular monitoring and research during its period of participatory management.² The emphasis of such analysis has however tended to focus on the *social* consequences of worker participation and on worker perceptions. The element of wage policy *per se* has so far only been considered within the subjective framework of relative deprivation.³ The utter absence of a formal, academic contribution to this specific topic may be taken as a strong indicator of the field's sensitivity.

The paper's first task is to present a preamble into the specific historical processes which moulded a peculiar cultural condition at Malta Drydocks. A series of incentives and disincentives towards increased productivity are next posited but the emerging policy recommendations are confronted with the cultural syndrome to gauge their acceptability and therefore the likelihood of implementation. All in all, the paper hopes to provoke a wider awareness of a veritable 'hot potato', suggesting the poverty of a pure economic analysis. This is handled squarely within the spirit of an overall development strategy.⁴

A CHEQUERED HISTORY OF ACTIVISM

Research has identified that industrial workers in shipbuilding and

shiprepair traditionally exhibit a high degree of union consciousness and militancy. All over the world, dock workers are more prone to be organised in trade unions and are more liable to be aggressive in the pursuit of their demands.⁵

Such a universal condition may be attributed to a cluster of factors: The relative physical concentration of the workforce in a clearly defined territory with a visible demarcation from the world outside generates feelings of self-identity, ethnocentrism and camaraderie; the contact with sailors and passengers from foreign ships also increases the opportunities to interact with new, progressive ideas. The relatively highly skilled composition of the workforce also increases its lobbying power in negotiations.

The same conditions have applied to the workers at Malta Drydocks. When the first proper drydock was constructed at the head of Dockyard Creek in the 1850's, the average annual income of its 360 officers and men was already about £38 – which compared very favourably with the £25 earned at the time by a local University professor.⁶ In 1884, an attempt at forming a Workers' Union by Dockyard fitters was somewhat premature in relation to the social and religious climate of the period and the organisation was happily accommodated into its social environment as a mutual aid society for the sick and needy.⁷ Following the effects of *Rerum Novarum*, a social context less hostile to trade unionism saw the proliferation of various worker organisations. Amongst these was the Imperial Government Workers' Union, organised by a certain Henry Ear in July 1916. Composed of Dockyard workers, it was kept alive and strengthened – numerically and ideologically – by English employees brought over in the period.⁸ A strike was called by the IGWU in May 1917 and was settled in the workers' favour, securing a 50% pay increase instead of the 10% first offered. Another union with considerable membership from dockyard workers, Branch No. 3 of the Workers' Union in England, was established in 1920 and was instrumental in laying the basis of a Maltese Labour Party.⁹

The General Workers' Union (GWU) was founded in 1943, also with a substantial membership and leadership of Dockyard workers. In the same period, and in spite of harsh warnings against industrial action in a state of war, dockyard workers went twice on strike to press for war bonus increases. Other, violent industrial actions took place in 1947 concerning demands for a five day week and again in 1958 concerning the sudden, proposed rundown of the British Services from Malta, following which the Dockyard was transferred to a private, British commercial firm.

Such a chequered history of industrial activism and unrest reached a veritable escalation in the late 1960's: A successful export – oriented

industrialisation policy and a construction cum tourist boom led to a nationwide strong demand for labour, reversing the pessimistic economic projections of the U.N. Stolper Report. The bargaining position of Maltese labour thus improved considerably, resulting in substantial wage increases.¹⁰ A policy of bipartite industrial relations revolving around enterprise – based collective bargaining, however, led to a widening of income differentials. Thus a high degree of industrial unrest was fomented by certain sections of the labour force due to the perception of relatively better financial gains made by traditional reference groups and ‘wage leaders’: Those workers in public sector employment and those with the British defence establishments (See Table 1).

TABLE 1: Industrial Action in Malta (1960 – 1973)

Year	No. of Work Stoppages	No. of Workers Involved	No. of Striker Days
1960	8	6277	37676
1961	3	514	20426
1962	2	140	338
1963	6	7082	8605
1964	0	0	0
1965	3	687	4154
1966	9	615	11599
1967	8	7838	27314
1968	19	21220	58333
1969	17	5892	41445
1970	26	23979	148499
1971	27	2577	24513
1972	42	11999	14677
1973	60	12513	42300

Source: Labour Reports, Dert. of Labour, 1960 – 1973.

The Dockyard workers were not aloof from this general wave of relative deprivation. In their special case, the deprivation felt was more due to a perception of *internal* relativities. Disputes and industrial unrest had been taking place sporadically at the enterprise since its conversion into a commercial concern.¹¹ After nationalisation by the Maltese Government in April 1968, a first collective agreement for the (now Malta Drydocks Corporation) industrial workers was agreed to. In 1969, however, a second different agreement for non-industrials created differentials unacceptable to the Drydocks (Metal) Section of the GWU, representing the industrial workers. The GWU submitted a counter – proposal, which sought wage increases for the industrial workers ranging from 47% to 63% in March 1970. Negotiations reached a deadlock in November, leading the GWU to resort to industrial action: The result was an overtime ban with a strike by fifty workers in key trades which

brought the Drydocks to a seven-month standstill. The workers felt relatively secure in pursuing their industrial dispute because the Prime Minister at that time, Dr. G. Borg Olivier, had given assurance that 'no matter what happened at Malta Drydocks, nobody would lose his employment'.¹² In March 1971, with general elections looming three months ahead, Drydocks Management conceded to give the parity which the GWU was demanding for industrial workers. However, the union refused to accept the offer because this was tied to concessions intended to increase labour flexibility between trades.

The 1970-71 industrial action at the Drydocks has probably been the most economically damaging industrial dispute in Malta's history as an independent nation. It involved the island's largest enterprise, its traditional working class stronghold, its largest workforce (then 6% of the total labour force) and the largest single earner of foreign exchange. Its contribution to the change in government following the outcome of the 1971 general election is believed to be substantial. The Drydocks crisis was one major issue in the election campaign and was conducive to ushering in a form of workplace democracy in the Drydocks' management.¹³

WORKER PARTICIPATION AS THE ULTIMATE PRESCRIPTION

Participatory industrial relations were bestowed onto the Drydocks 'from above' as an *ad hoc* attempt at grafting profitability and a harmonious industrial relations climate to an enterprise which, in its long history, had not known either one or the other. This, of course, was not an exceptional circumstance: As long as the Dockyard was run by the British Admiralty, there was only emphasis on the quality of output, and hardly any interest in cost-benefit analysis on the part of workers, their management or even the colonial power as shipowner. With the transfer to commercial work, management sought to exercise new, different pressures to turn the Dockyard into a financially viable undertaking. The workers could not however be won over to collaborate, especially once management proved ready to accede to wage demands in the face of sufficient pressures. This acted as an incentive for still further industrial action and reinforced the tradition of antagonism.¹⁴

With the prospects of a change in government in 1971, the GWU could not possibly maintain an antagonistic role in relation to its political partner, the Malta Labour Party (MLP), if and when the MLP would be in power and therefore assume the responsibility of managing the nationalized Drydocks. Some form of participatory management appeared to provide the elusive answer to industrial peace and to possible economic viability. And this was the prescription tabled in the joint MLP-GWU 1971 election manifesto to solve the Drydocks crisis.

The prescription was administered immediately after the MLP victory. Co-determination was introduced followed in 1972 by an austerity programme, launched under pressure from the new Prime Minister Dom Mintoff. It included actual wage cuts of between 5% and 20% among different sections of the Drydocks workforce. As a consequence, internal wage relativities were also reduced (See Table 2). With the GWU and the Labour Government equally represented on the new Board of

TABLE 2: Yearly Average Basic Wages and Differentials for Selected Drydocks Worker Categories

	1969		1974		1979		1982	
	Wage(Lm)	Ratio	Wage	Ratio	Wage	Ratio	Wage	Ratio
Senior Staff	1760	4.11	1839	2.28	2853	1.98	4365	2.17
Fitter	577	1.35	1027	1.28	1678	1.17	2472	1.23
Semi-Skilled Tradesman	545	1.27	949	1.18	1623	1.13	2374	1.18
Labourer	428	1	805	1	1438	1	2010	1

Source: Malta Drydocks Wages & Salaries Department (various years)

Directors and with the 'trust relations' existing between the Drydocks workers, 'their' party in government and the GWU, the Drydocks registered a profit in 1974. (See Table 3). This made possible the adoption of the long-proposed wage re-structuring and also enabled the transition to self-management to take place. As a result, labour relations were further harmonised by introducing democratic channels of worker control at the top decision-making level (via a Council elected completely by the workforce) in 1975 and at intermediate level (via 18 Workers' Committees) in 1977. In 1982-83, a number of mixed committees bringing together council members, management, workers' committee members and GWU officials were set up to plan and advise on a number of specific issues: Safety, welfare, finance, purchasing.

The history of the Drydocks thus makes it abundantly clear that the conditions of work, including wages and wage differentials, are issues over which Drydocks workers have been willing to undertake industrial action on so many occasions. Since the introduction of participatory management, however, a healthy strike – free industrial relations climate has also prevailed (See Table 4). One possible explanation for this noteworthy achievement is the very process of worker participation in management, which makes it easier for the worker to assimilate the enterprise's objectives as his very own. However, in spite of operating under such a self-management system, the general conditions of employment – and of wage structure in particular – are very similar to those prevailing in state-managed enterprises: Wage rates are fixed and employees have security of tenure; wage increases are generally in terms of cost of living increases announced in the annual national budget

TABLE 3: Indicators of Economic Performance of Malta Drydocks (1962 - 1987)

Year	Turnover	Profit/Loss Before Tax	Employee Strength	Average Weekly Income Industrial-Senior Staff	
1962/3	4,090,021	- 510,489	5179	8,76,4	35,44,5
1963/4	3,575,108	- 678,530	5193	9,77,7	36,87,3
1964/5	4,343,719	- 663,000	5242	10,64,1	31,36,3
1965/6	4,672,618	- 494,884	5113	11,99,0	31,19,4
1966/7	5,392,596	- 370,839	5455	12,46,4	27,73,1
1967/8	3,886,319	- 1,119,425	5137	11,30,6	33,16,9
1968/9	3,700,463	- 1,737,306	5124	12,62,3	33,83,9
1969/70	4,609,186	- 1,993,360	5378	14,92,7	36,94,4
1970/1	2,464,286	- 3,472,530	5121	13,78,4	30,11,3
1971/2	3,711,596	- 2,894,985	5202	15,76,9	34,93,5
1972/3	5,199,313	- 1,731,110	5336	16,67,6	37,70,2
1973/4	7,036,508	38,119	5066	16,98,5	35,36,1
1974/5	11,130,109	442,805	5118	22,84,9	40,65,2
1975/6	12,122,416	813,978	5273	25,44,8	48,56,9
1976/7	12,509,585	60,178	5256	28,01,0	49,53,5
1977/8	15,753,670	220,494	5163	32,68,2	50,56,4
1978/9	15,989,680	195,234	5087	36,81,6	52,98,0
1979°	12,397,542	256,441	5014	39,55,9	54,86,5
1980	20,378,802	755,936	4941	45,13,2	57,09,2
1981	24,885,881	1,333,312	4862	57,09,2	82,39,4
1982	20,648,716	- 1,964,517	4638	60,23,7	83,95,4
1983	19,666,000*	- 2,753,000*	4819	56,36,0	
1984	18,700,000*	- 4,500,000*	4545		
1985	19,000,000*	- 4,500,000*	4538		
1986	25,000,000*	- 3,900,000*	4300*		
1987	18,900,000*	- 8,000,000*	4200*		

° = Period from April to December 1979.

Source: Malta Drydocks Statistics, various years.

(Turnover, Profit/loss & Incomes are in current Malta Pounds: Lm).

+ = Reply to a Parliamentary Question on 16/11/87, reported in *In-Nazzjon Taghna* the following day.

* = approximate figures.

TABLE 4: Industrial Stoppages at Malta Drydocks (1967 – 1984)

YEAR	No. of Days	Workers Involved	Striker – Days
1967	1	4313	4313
1968	5	4000	20000
1969	9	160	1440
1970	42	4228	57234
1971	118	56	6608
1972	0	0	0
1973	1	n.a.	Overtime Ban
1974	0	0	0
1975	1/2	82	41
1976	0	0	0
1977	0	0	0
1978	0	0	0
1979	0	0	0
1980	1	n.a.	n.a.
1981	1	164	164
1982	0	0	0
1983	0	0	0
1984	1	1	1

Source: *Labour Reports*, Dept. of Labour (various years).

n.a. = not available

and therefore follow a nationwide trend; wage claims over and above these are determined by Management-Union negotiation. Bonuses have occasionally also been distributed as equal lump sums to each worker during years of exceptional performance: such was the case at the Drydocks during the year of record profit in 1981. Some Drydocks workers have also had the opportunity to participate in incentive schemes up till 1981 when extra money could be earned by finishing a contract before the due date. With such a wages policy in operation, Drydocks workers have successfully defended their wages, which are higher in relation to those enjoyed by other workers having similar skills but working in the private sector (See Table 5). They therefore remain, politically and economically, a 'labour aristocracy'.¹⁵

The economic and political leverage of a 'labour aristocracy', as well as other factors specific to Malta Drydocks – its foreign exchange revenue; its large workforce; its multiplier effect on the Maltese economy – has therefore ensured the preservation of good working conditions and stable employment levels even in a situation of chronic loss. Since the Drydocks started registering once again negative balances in 1982, the necessary cash flows have been guaranteed by the Maltese Government via its control over the commercial banking sector. Nevertheless, the pressure is mounting to lessen the Drydocks' financial burden and to improve, in socially and politically acceptable ways, its overall viability.

TABLE 5: Wage Differentials at Malta Drydocks (F,I,L) with Respect to "Reference Group" in Private Industry (X) – in Terms of Current Prices

Job Category	1967		1974		1983	
	Wage Rate Per Hour	Ratio	Wage Rate Per Hour	Ratio Per	Wage Hour	Ratio
F	22c8	1.4	49c4	1.44	121c6	1.41
I	22c1	1.36	45c6	1.33	114c2	1.32
L	18c1	1.11	38c7	1.13	96c7	1.12
X	16c3	1	34c2	1	86c2	1

F = Fitter (Skilled Tradesman) at Malta Drydocks.

I = Intermediate (Semi-Skilled Tradesman) at Malta Drydocks.

L = Labourer (Unskilled Worker) at Malta Drydocks.

X = Worker in Private Manufacturing Industry: 'Metal Products except Machinery and Transport Equipment' Category – Male Workers Only.

Source: Annual Abstract of Statistics (various years)

Drydocks Wages & Salaries Department.

DISINCENTIVES TOWARDS IMPROVED VIABILITY

A number of problematic areas can be identified as disincentives or obstacles to improved viability. Awareness of their influence is important in itself and may be instrumental in bringing about a change for the better, as far as the Drydocks balance of payments is concerned. Three such major areas are examined in turn below:

WAGE DETERMINATION

The first is the actual policy of wage determination: Wages policy and distribution tend to be arranged differently from the Drydocks in other firms practising self-management of some form or other. Firstly, wage levels and wage differentials are determined to some degree by certain criteria which need not remain constant. Most models of labour remuneration in a self-managed firm or economy in fact identify a fixed wage, being the basic wage rate, and a variable wage, determined according to one or more criteria. Such criteria could include experience, skill requirements, education, responsibility, physical effort and mental effort.¹⁶

Secondly, apart from these individual differences, wages tend to be connected, to some degree or other, to the economic performance of the enterprise. In this way, the fortunes of the enterprise are felt much more intimately by the worker to be his very own. This reflectivity of wage to performance should ensure, particularly in large firms like the Drydocks, a 'social participatory motivation to behave in a way which will promote the profitability of the enterprise'.¹⁷

In practice, this means that the maintenance of the wage rate at a high level (or else it being supplemented by a variable component) would depend directly on the existence and magnitude of registered profits.¹⁸

The Yugoslav self-managed economy contains both these individual – linked and profit – linked incentives for the mobilization of the worker at his work. The Mondragon group of cooperatives in Spain have linked enterprise profitability to faster growth of workers' capital accounts.¹⁹ In discussing the 'fundamentals of a theory of distribution in self-governing socialism', Horvat argues that earnings should 'typically reflect individual contributions by workers, while surplus-sharing is a reward for collective performance'; thus, the worker's income should consist of 'paid-out earnings and surplus sharing'.²⁰ The existence of one or both incentive schemes described above is also found in other cases of self-managed enterprises in western economies.²¹ A third different type of incentive is the membership fee, making employment in a self-managed firm conditional to the payment of a sum of money or the purchase of a share.²² The membership fee qualification acts as an effective spur towards greater and better individual performance, apart from guaranteeing a degree of investment in the company. Such spurs are particularly useful and critical when the enterprise is operating in a harshly competitive market, as is the contemporary shiprepair and shipbuilding industry – a condition which shows still no signs of abating.

In contrast to these models of wage determination in a self-managed framework, Malta Drydocks has continued operating with a standard wage rate policy which guarantees relatively high and stable wages in spite of economic downturns.

AUSTERITY MEASURES

A second disincentive towards improved viability has been the series of austerity measures which were introduced at Malta Drydocks after 1982. Such measures were put into effect as a reaction to the global slump in the shiprepair industry which affected the enterprise suddenly and significantly that same year. They have included (1) a freeze on new recruitment; (2) the withdrawal of incentive schemes for jobs which are finished before their due date and (3) the introduction of time-off-in-lieu instead of most overtime work arrangements.

Such measures can, and do indeed, reduce financial costs. However, their long-run consequences may be counterproductive, acting as negative incentives.

Firstly, the freeze on new recruitment has increased the mean Drydocks worker age to above 40 years.²³ This is not a healthy sign in an enterprise where muscle and agility are important requisites for effective work, especially on board vessels. It is too much to expect over

fifty-year-olds to work at dizzy heights, in narrow double bottoms, in obnoxious and dangerous working conditions. Indeed, many Drydocks workers opt for less demanding work roles, switching over to lighter duties in the various offices and 'shops', once they reach a certain age or suffer an accident at their place of work. With a progressively ageing workforce, the proportion of productive workers in the total complement decreases and suggests an overall reduction of productive output per capita. At the same time, new techniques and skills in the art of shiprepair are more difficult to come by without a regular influx of skilled workers, trained in contemporary methods and equipment.

Secondly, the withdrawal of popular incentive schemes reduces the attraction of extra effort, particularly for those who used to earn most from such schemes – that is, the industrial, productive, so-called 'direct' workers. While the Drydocks may have been forced to lower its prices considerably to attract work in the last years, the losses accruing in this manner may have been offset, wholly or partly, by a larger turnover of vessels, using the existing berths, docks and other services nearer to 100% utilisation and full capacity. Such a more rapid turnover of vessels may still be achieved, were some form of direct incentive made available. Of course, faster completion dates mean still greater competitiveness and also reduce the penalties occasionally paid by the Drydocks, when a ship's repair list is not finalised by a targeted completion date, agreed upon in advance.

Thirdly, the introduction of time-in-lieu (TIL) instead of overtime payments again hits adversely – financially and psychologically – the productive, 'direct' industrials, these being, again, that segment of the workforce which would accrue most overtime work. In fact, within a few months from the introduction of TIL, this measure had already become difficult to operate because workers in many key trades were accumulating hundreds of hours of TIL, without any realistic prospects of taking leave, since they were practically in continuous demand at the Drydocks.

Thus, all three austerity measures introduced in 1982 are argued to have acted as negative incentives, particularly on that segment of the Drydocks labour force which counts most, at the point of production, to get the job done well and on time. In fact, the Drydocks Council decided to abrogate two of these three austerity measures: Overtime work was resumed in October 1985 while a new apprenticeship entry was duly affected early in 1987. The incentive scheme has not been re-introduced to date.

THE ELEMENT OF SIZE

Malta Drydocks is a large enterprise in two senses: It has a large,

sprawling, physical site and it has a large, permanent workforce. Both these factors act as further disincentives.

The effect of group size on performance has been reported in studies concerning social psychology as a 'diffusion of responsibility' or, more popularly, as a 'free rider effect'. Such studies have revealed a rather uncanny, inverse relationship between feelings of responsibility and size of group.

Self-management and participatory industrial relations seek generally to establish a stronger relationship between effort and productivity than what normally exists under traditional labour relations. It is clear that a worker hired at a fixed hourly wage in a traditional enterprise will have no immediate, personal, financial motive to behave in such a manner which will promote the profits of the enterprise, irrespective of whether the latter is state or privately owned. Various initiatives, including profit-sharing, the 'share economy' proposals in the United States and Soviet *perestroika*²⁵ may be understood as managerial techniques which seek to tie more closely the workers' commitment to the goals of the enterprise where they work. Put differently, participatory management seeks to reproduce as closely as possible the kind of responsibility and effort which motivate self-employed workers who are completely dependent on their self-discipline and work methods to generate output and, eventually, profits. However, the causal relationship between *personal* effort and *personal* reward is seen to degenerate progressively as the size of the workgroup increases, even where participatory management is practised. This tendency has also been referred to as a 'logic of collective action'.²⁶ The uncanny thesis postulates that large groups are less able to act in their common interest than small ones because the incentive for group action diminishes as group size increases, unless selective incentives are introduced.²⁷

Consider an example to show this relationship in action: A self-employed craftsman can be said to function with a 100% relationship between effort and output and, ultimately, profits. What would happen however in a self-managed enterprise, or a family business, or a worker cooperative, with n self-employed craftsmen working together? In this case, 'the individual worker who shares the profit with his fellows will still get some benefit from any additional profit due to his own effort; but it will be only an n th of the result of his own efforts. Thus, the larger the enterprise, the less the sense of profit participation and the weaker the social motivation to do the best for the whole partnership of fellow workers.'²⁸

Therefore, apart from disincentives already considered – a fixed wage structure and no incentive schemes to finish ship repairs ahead of due date – a further diffusion of responsibility results from the sheer

magnitude of the Drydocks workforce, whereby only 1/4200th of personal effort may find its way as personal reward, if profit is registered and shared. A similar argument applies towards feelings of responsibility for losses. The size of workforce thus reduces to insignificant levels the relationship between personal effort and personal sanction, be this positive (in cases of profit) or negative (in cases of loss).

The sprawling nature of the worksite aggravates the matter further: It takes half an hour brisk walking to travel on foot – as is the normal means of internal transport – from the far end of No. 6 Red China Dock to the Boiler Shop beneath the Senglea Bastions or to No. 1 Dock in Dockyard Creek.²⁹ This physical condition leads to evident problems of communications: Difficulty of effective supervision; difficulty of coordination between trades; waste of precious time spent on travelling to and from one's box rack to one's work station and/or to the foreman's office. The composite effect of large size and large workforce is an increasing sense of alienation from enterprise objectives. It is quite impossible to identify one's personal contribution to the overall performance of the Drydocks, since the only evidence of such performance is submerged beneath the enterprise's global, end-of-year statements. These are infrequent and too occasional, and without a bearing on internal divisions of, say, territorial or departmental productivity achievements. There is no direct feedback relating what one has done to what one has achieved. Ideally, there could be a personal, but also a departmental or territorial based measure of feedback, and at shorter time intervals, to strengthen the relationship between effort and output; this is likely to contribute to productivity increases.

It is interesting to note that, in the oasis of self-management found near the town of Mondragon, in Basque Spain, a strike was actually organised in 1974 in the largest production unit, called Ulgor, then with 3250 worker-members. Following a diagnosis of this singular event, blame was partly put on inadequate communications caused by large size of plant and workforce leading to worker alienation. In consequence, the general policy at Mondragon has been to prevent 'giantism' by keeping unit sizes as small as possible.³⁰

To take stock of the argument then, it appears that a number of variables dampen the incentive and motivation of workers at the Drydocks towards even greater productivity and efficiency. These, along with other imported factors beyond local control, affect negatively the enterprise's profitability. Such internal variables include the rigidity of wage determination, the austerity measures introduced since 1982 and the consequence of large size. Reforms could be – and, indeed, have been – introduced to counter the effects of some of these variables. Yet, no reforms in wage determination have occurred. While the economic

pressures to do so certainly exist, it is impossible to isolate socio-political and cultural considerations from the analysis, if this is to prove relevant to the local situation. Indeed, an exploration of the cultural formation of the Drydocks workforce suggests that the environment is not likely to push for a change in this direction.

A CERTAIN PATTERN OF EXPECTATIONS ...

Being the elite of Malta's skilled labour force, the cradle of mass unionism and a stronghold of the MLP, the Drydocks has historically always played a key socio-political, apart from an economic role, as the first sections of this paper took pains to point out. From this has emerged the condition of a labour aristocracy: 'As a result of their effective organisation, Drydocks workers, in spite of all their grievances, have managed to raise their wages and to better their conditions of work well' above those of other workers in private industry.³¹ This advantageous position has bred over the years a certain pattern of expectations. Thus, for example, Drydocks workers have 'reacted very strongly whenever they felt that their advantageous position over comparative reference groups of other workers was being eroded'.³² Also, since the Drydocks started registering losses in 1982, the subsidy of necessary cash flows by the State, mainly via the two largest commercial banks, has been generally considered as a matter of course by workers. It is accepted as an implicit obligation from the State, in recompense for the Drydocks maintaining its labour force at the pre-recession levels. The arrangement also reflects a safe and secure compliance with paternalism on the part of the Drydocks worker which again undermines further the incentive towards effort: The State tends to act, in a neo-colonialist fashion, as a well-disposed patron on whom the security and income of the Drydocks worker depend. Thus the worker keeps getting his normal, standard wage, just as if he is operating in a viable, sheltered market, even when the economic pressure is strong for a downward swing.³³ The problematic nature of this situation was perhaps being suggested by the then acting Prime Minister, the Hon. Dr. K. Mifsud Bonnici, during a seminar on Workers' Participation organised for the GWU National Council:

'Participating in management does not simply mean participating in profits but also means carrying your share of responsibility. In times of crisis, one should not shirk the responsibility of management and participate simply when things are progressing well.'³⁴

In this context, it may be argued that the persistence of fixed and relatively high wage rates impervious to performance or profitability

criteria is an expectation by Drydocks' workers from the political system. This condition militates against the development of a self-reliant, self-responsible, participatory consciousness.

Admittedly, back in 1972, the Drydocks workers did accept substantial wage cuts in the face of non-profitability. This was only agreed to, however, following a confrontation between the Prime Minister and the GWU and a fierce reaction on the workers' part. Then, however, there were a number of factors which contributed to the acceptance of wage revision: The powerful and charismatic leadership of Dom Mintoff; the willingness on the part of the Drydocks' labour force to undertake short-term sacrifices for the sake of desirable long-term goals (profit-sharing and profitability); the enthusiasm following the election of a Labour Government some months before. Apart from these considerations, the workers were faced with no realistic alternatives. The Prime Minister made this clear:

'You have three choices to consider: Whether you want me to continue to be your leader, whether you want the Drydocks to be closed down or whether you want as from next Monday that everyone agrees to carry his share of the burden.'³⁵

... AND A STRONG UNION PRESENCE

The wages policy pursued at Malta Drydocks is however not simply the result of some abstract and tenuous cultural syndrome. One significant, visible element of the cultural condition is the strong spirit of unionism present at the Drydocks. The Dockyards (Metal) Section of the GWU maintains practically a monopoly situation at the Drydocks with over 90% membership registered. Apart from its numerical strength, the benefits and concessions achieved over the years of antagonism and militant bargaining are still protected and guarded with pride. Among these is the instance on a clear demarcation of trade responsibilities; a myriad of allowances for various degrees of danger at work or for working in obnoxious conditions; a basic 40-hour, 5-day week and, of course, a fixed wage policy. The defence and preservation of these conditions of work has now been carried over into the participatory era; the strength of the union position and tradition is such that, apart from the GWU, even the participatory decision making bodies themselves – the Council and the Workers' Committees – feel very strongly that such conditions should not be waived. If they would, Drydocks workers are likely to finish off worse individually, even though the enterprise's financial position may improve.

This interplay between the traditional and the participatory is no news as far as the Drydocks is concerned. Yet it is indeed peculiar to

find such an unusual blend of stable self-management and a strong union movement fashioned in the British spirit of antagonism. The latter condition was a major stumbling block to participatory experiments in the United Kingdom;³⁶ while successful participatory initiatives in the United States and Basque Spain have not had to contend with an active union presence.³⁷ Elsewhere, as in Yugoslavia, the trade union is not in a confrontative situation and, indeed, operates similarly to a managerial institution.³⁸ At Malta Drydocks, the *modus vivendi* appears possible in spite of the apparent ambivalence because, in contrast to Yugoslavia, the participatory decision makers have effectively taken over and preserved the traditional trade unionistic perspective. The large proportion of Council and Worker Committee members have, after all, long experience as union activists, apart from being GWU members. Professional management has been, since 1975, the main target of the composite trade unionistic front (that is, GWU – Council – Worker Committees). One evidence of this is the relentless criticism voiced by managers against members of workers' committees on the (valid?) grounds that they are in practice acting as union stewards.³⁹

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Restructuring wage levels and wage differentials under participatory management with trade union support has considerably improved labour relations at the Drydocks and led to a period of remarkable industrial peace. Nevertheless, the persistence of a fixed wage policy carried over from the pre-participatory epoch, unrelated to individual, group, departmental or territorial performance criteria, means that the worker's wage does not act as an incentive towards effort and higher productivity. This situation is in sharp contrast to many examples of self-managed firms elsewhere but understandable once the specific cultural condition is unfolded.

Therefore, while a number of policy recommendations may be suggested, yet it is also likely that their acceptability depends on their conformity to cardinal trade union principles. For instance, the argument above has suggested the usefulness of considering the administration of a stronger, incentive-based wage policy, making more powerful the bond between labour remuneration and individual or group performance. One possibility here is to peg a small proportion of the basic wage rate to profitability levels, such levels being determined via joint management – union consultation. Contrary to contemporary proposals for similar wage flexibility in traditional firms,⁴⁰ the participatory structure ensures that the worked out profit figures are just and genuine, since the trade union has direct access to the company's accounts. Such a measure would be fully within the spirit of self-reliance and self-

management. The painful trade off involved in adopting such a measure is to forfeit fixed and equal wages for all in each grade, other than the usual service-based increments. From the workers' point of view, this is generally not attractive and would probably lead to effective pay reductions, at the going market conditions. Thus, the suggestion is not likely to be taken up by the Drydocks Council.

A second major recommendation concerns the matter of decentralisation: Unless the source of surplus (or of deficit) is directly under the workers' control (for instance, in their own department), feedback from it can easily turn out to be counterproductive, causing still more frustration and acting therefore as a disincentive.⁴¹ Individual workers may be lazy and apathetic, but may still be rewarded by reaping profit bonuses if the enterprise as a whole turns out to be profitable. Conversely, individual workers' efforts and productivity may end up being not simply unrewarded but penalised by wage reductions if the enterprise as a whole registers losses. These possibilities help to explain why profit sharing does not necessarily boost productivity. Over and above this, the 'size' factor warrants independently a decentralised arrangement for the variable wage component: One which makes as direct and visible as possible the connection between individual effort and individual reward.⁴² Once again, from a union perspective, the arrangement is unpalatable because it fomenters internal rivalry and hostility among different sections of the Drydocks labour force.

CONCLUSION

In spite of a series of registered losses at the Drydocks, wage rates have remained relatively high compared to those of allied workers in private industry.⁴³ This is partly understood in terms of the bargaining success of Drydocks worker representatives (notably the GWU) in contrast to the generally less organised, less militant and less class/trade union conscious counterparts in the private sector. This is however also due to the distinct status with a strong historical, socio-political and economic foundation with which the Drydocks worker attributes himself quite automatically and which guides and moulds his political expectations.

The general discussion above suggests that the problematic nature of wages policy at Malta Drydocks forms part of a complex set of ambivalences of attitudes and perceptions. At the root of these lies the blend of a fledgling participatory culture with the traditional one. As emerges from available scientific evidence,⁴⁴ Drydocks workers express agreement with participatory management and appreciate its contribution to a series of socio-economic spin-offs; but these feelings remain encapsulated within a persistent 'us-them' vision of industrial

relations and neo-colonial expectations from a benevolent state.⁴⁵ Fixed wage rates, impervious to market conditions and individual or group differences in effort, along with profit sharing when there is profit to be shared, reflect the colonial work ethic, with the accompanying implications of job security and low responsibility for the enterprise's business. It is due to these deep-rooted, cultural contradictions that a cardinal ambivalence – relatively high and fixed wage rates on the one hand and annual heavy losses on the other – is totally absent from the Drydocks worker's mind.

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Notes

¹ I would like to thank Ales Vahcic for prompting the ideas which led to the writing of this paper and Joe Portelli, Saviour Rizzo, Freek Schiphorst, Henk Thomas and Edward Zammit for going through the various drafts and presenting their constructive criticism. I also acknowledge the assistance of the Malta Drydocks Council for making this study possible. Responsibility for the contents is, of course, only mine.

² Notable studies and research reports focusing on Malta Drydocks include Baldacchino (1984); Baldacchino et. al. (1986); Borg Bonello (1983). Gauci (1982); Kester (1974, 1980, 1986); Portelli (1983); Zammit (1981, 1984); Zammit & Baldacchino (1984); Zammit and Portelli (1983) and Zammit et. al. (1980, 1982). All the above items are listed in a select bibliography included within the references to this paper. For a brief report on Malta Drydocks see Bradley & Gelb (1983, pp. 59–61).

³ Relative deprivation may be defined as "actors' perception of discrepancy between their value expectations and their value capabilities. Value expectations are the goods and conditions of life to which people believe they are rightfully entitled. Value capabilities are the goods and conditions they think they are capable of getting and keeping . . . The emphasis of the hypothesis is on the perception of deprivation; people may be subjectively deprived with reference to their expectations even though an objective observer might not judge them to be in want . . ." – Gurr (1970, p. 24).

⁴ Various recent official statements abide by the principle of relating more closely remuneration to effort. For example, the Nationalist Party 1987 Election Manifesto Section III – 7.7, p. 65: "Schemes will be introduced to motivate self-employment . . . and special individual initiative". Malta Development Plan 1981–85: "Stronger efforts will need to be made at the Drydocks to re-establish easier flow of communications between labour and management and to involve workers more deeply in efforts to raise efficiency and productivity." Also Malta Labour Party/General Workers' Union 1981 Election Manifesto, pp. 7–8: "Income differentials today have narrowed down . . . therefore, the time is ripe for the introduction of incentive schemes for those workers who are involved in work which entails risk and/or responsibility and who show initiative to improve efficiency and production". Translations and emphasis mine.

⁵ Based on comparative studies of industrialised and industrialising countries which both suggest that workers in maritime "occupational communities" are amongst the most strike-prone, along with miners and transport workers. See Kerr & Siegel (1954) and Sandbrook (1981) respectively.

⁶ As pointed out by Busuttil (1973, p. 12).

- ⁷ As described in Bonnici (1931) and reported among others by Fino (1983, p. 18) and Dobie (1967, p. 80).
- ⁸ Dobie (1967, pp. 81–2) and Zammit (1984, pp. 43–4).
- ⁹ Dobie (1967, pp. 82–3).
- ¹⁰ Koziara (1975, pp. 67 ff).
- ¹¹ Information on industrial relations at the Drydocks in the 1960's is based on Aquilina (1974); Ellul (1972); Ellul Galea (1973); Kester (1980, Chapter 4) and Koziara (1975).
- ¹² Ellul (1972, p. 30).
- ¹³ The MLP–GWU electoral manifesto of 1971 stated that the Drydocks would be reorganised as follows by a Labour Government:
- It would be run by a Board of Directors having equal representation from the GWU and from Government, with a Chairman acceptable to both sides.
 - Its management would eventually be handed over to the workers as soon as the Drydocks was put on an economically sound footing.
- ¹⁴ Zammit (1984, p. 49).
- ¹⁵ The meaning of a “labour aristocracy” in this context refers to a group of workers who have achieved a high status among the working class by virtue of class consciousness and radical unionism. The term begs qualification because widely contrasting versions, already present in Lenin's works where the concept was introduced, have been subsequently used. For an examination of these versions see Waterman (1975).
- ¹⁶ See, for example, Wachtel (1973, Chapter 5) for a discussion of the wage in the Yugoslav self-managed economy.
- ¹⁷ Meade (1972) quoted in Vanek (1975, p. 395).
- ¹⁸ See, for example, Ward (1958, 1967) for such a model of a labour-managed enterprise.
- ¹⁹ Thomas & Logan (1982).
- ²⁰ Horvat (1967) also quoted in Jones & Svejnar (1982, pp. 147–8).
- ²¹ For example, in the John Lewis Partnership (UK), remuneration has been “determined partly on job performance and partly on what must be paid to secure the worker's services. The rate of pay in turn determines the share of distributed profits” – Flanders et. al. (1968, pp. 181–2). In the U.S. Plywood Cooperatives of the Pacific NorthWest, every worker earns equal pay and every worker receives an equal share of the annual profits. The amount of hourly advance and annual refund are determined by each cooperative's Board of Directors. “When the market goes bad and the company loses money, the workers vote to cut their hourly pay” – Zwerdling (1973, p. 101).
- ²² This is the arrangement in Mondragon and in many other producer cooperatives. However, this form of incentive is usually adopted by worker-owned enterprises.
- ²³ Indirect evidence collected from the responses of the 1982 Drydocks Opinion Survey. Baldacchino (1984, p. 36).
- ²⁴ For experimental evidence of “diffusion of responsibility” see Latane' & Darley (1968).
- ²⁵ On the share economy see Weitzman (1984) and on Soviet *perestroika* (that is, economic restructuring) see, for example, Odom (1987).
- ²⁶ Olson (1965) and Olson (1982, pp. 17–35).
- ²⁷ Olson (1982, p. 31).
- ²⁸ Meade (1972, p. 403).
- ²⁹ The Drydocks disposes of 2079 metres of effective wet berth along with seven dry docks with a total length of 1405.3 metres. Source: Official Drydocks publicity material.

- ³⁰ The account of the singular strike at Mondragon is described, although sketchily, in Thomas & Logan (1982, p. 35) and Zwerdling (1973, pp. 154–8).
- ³¹ Zammit (1984, p. 43).
- ³² Zammit (1984, p. 44). This once again explains the occurrence of the industrial disputes of the late 1960's. Even during the Labour Administration, significant protest and discontent was voiced when the two-thirds pension scheme was introduced. In this particular instance, the drydocks worker conceded a status reduction.
- ³³ McCormick (1969, p. 128).
- ³⁴ Organised by the Workers' Participation Development Centre at the University of Malta on January 14, 1984. The speech was reported verbatim in the newspaper IT-TORCA as follows: "Tiehu sehem fit-tmexxija ma jfissirx biss tiehu sehem fit-tgawdija iżda li terfa' wkoll parti mill-piż. Fil-maltemp wiehed m'għandux jahrab mir-responsabilità tat-tmexxija u jippartecipa biss meta l-affarijiet mexjin tajjeb biss."
- ³⁵ For a vivid account of the 1972 events concerning the Drydocks, see Kester (1980, pp. 48–52).
- ³⁶ Batstone et. al. (1983).
- ³⁷ See Thomas & Logan (1982) on the Mondragon coops; Jackall & Levin (1984) on producer coops in the USA.
- ³⁸ See, for example, 'Unions in Eastern Europe', in *International Labour Reports*, 1986, No. 18.
- ³⁹ As identified by Baldacchino (1984) and Kester (1986).
- ⁴⁰ See, for example Weitzman (1984) and McGregor (1960, Chapter 8).
- ⁴¹ The cause and effect connection should also be established in the temporal sense: Hence the liaison of profits/losses with wages and salaries, which are paid monthly, carries a psychologically meaningful behaviour and reward relation.
- ⁴² Bernstein (1976, pp. 65–6).
- ⁴³ This is evident from a comparison of the basic wage rates of occupational grades at the Drydocks with the basic wage rates of allied work in private industry. (See Table 5) Drydocks wage data has been collected with the kind permission of the Drydocks Council from the Wages and Salaries Department at the Drydocks. I also acknowledge the assistance of JoJo Mallia, former Council Secretary.
- ⁴⁴ Reports of the survey conducted by the Workers' Participation Development Centre at the Drydocks in December 1982 are available in both Maltese and English: See Baldacchino (1984); Zammit & Baldacchino (1984) and Baldacchino et. al. (1986).
- ⁴⁵ Baldacchino (1984, p. 33) and Baldacchino et. al. (1986, pp. 220–1).

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DISEQUILIBRIUM LABOUR MARKET MODELS: A DIAGRAMMATIC APPROACH

Lino Briguglio

INTRODUCTION

In this paper, a simple disequilibrium aggregate labour market model will be proposed. As in the case of most market models, more than one relationship is involved, since in a market, at least three variables, namely demand, supply and own price, may be assumed to be simultaneously determined.

The presentation is intended for readers with little or no knowledge of econometrics, and for this reason, a diagrammatic approach is used. Mathematical formulations are kept to the barest minimum in the main text.

In a diagrammatic representation of a model, a given relationship is usually restricted to include two variables, generally with the dependent variable on the vertical axis and one explanatory variable on the horizontal axis. Such an exposition implicitly assumes that other explanatory variables involved in the relationship remain constant. Thus, for example, the traditional price/demand diagram, assumes amongst other things, that the income of the buyers, the price of substitutes and consumer tastes remain constant. This *ceteris paribus* assumption may be relaxed by allowing for outward or inward shifts of the schedule.

In econometric estimation, on the other hand, the researcher proposes a model, generally in mathematical form, with all the variables involved in the relationship, and utilises data on the dependent and the explanatory variables to test certain hypotheses. Very often the Least Squares Method of Regression is used, and this permits the researcher to produce estimates of the extent to which every explanatory variable included in the model effects the dependent variable.

Very often diagrammatic expositions are used to propose theoretical relationships, which are then empirically investigated by some econometric method. As stated, the method used in the present paper is diagrammatic, and is theoretical in nature. A formal mathematical derivation of the model however appears in the appendix, and it is intended to explain how the relationships shown in the diagrams can be estimated by the Least Squares method of regression.

A LABOUR MARKET MODEL

The labour market to be discussed in this paper consists of five relationships explaining (1) labour demand, (2) labour supply, (3) wage rate changes (4) observed unemployment and (5) observed employment.

Labour demand (by firms), measured by employment, is assumed to be influenced by wage rates, on the grounds that employers may decide to employ fewer labour services as the cost of employment increases.¹ Labour supply (by households), is also assumed to be influenced by wage rates, which may be considered as the opportunity cost of performing non-market work (such as housework).²

Wage rates are assumed to increase with excess labour demand and to decrease with excess labour supply. The most important difference between an equilibrium and a disequilibrium labour market model is that in the case of the former model, wage adjustment is assumed to be fast enough to ensure that disequilibrium does not persist, whereas in the latter model wage adjustment is assumed to be sluggish.

As is well known, unemployment may be caused by various factors. For the moment it is assumed that unemployment is due to shortage of labour demand in relation to labour supply. At a later stage, frictional unemployment, due for example to skill mismatches, will also be allowed for.

To start with, we shall assume equilibrium conditions, implying that actual employment³ is equal to labour supply and labour demand, and that unemployment is equal to zero. This assumption, which will be abandoned at a later stage, is useful only in so far as it permits us to explain the main difference between the equilibrium and disequilibrium versions of the model.

In very simple terms, an equilibrium labour market model may be expressed as follows:

Labour Demand:	L^d is influenced by W and X^d	(1)
Labour Supply:	L^s is influenced by W and X^s	(2)
Wage Rate Adjustment:	ΔW is influenced by $[L^d - L^s]$	(3)
Unemployment:	$U = L^s - L^d = 0$ (assuming equilibrium)	(4)
Employment:	$L = L^s = L^d$ (assuming equilibrium)	(5)

where L^d and L^s represent labour demand and labour supply respectively. X^d represents non-wage variables influencing labour demand, such as output and technology, whereas X^s represents non-wage variables influencing labour supply, such as population size and short-run economic conditions. W is the wage rate, and ΔW refers to changes in the wage rate.

In diagrammatic form, these relationships may be expressed as shown in figure 1. Figure 1a shows the demand and supply relationships,

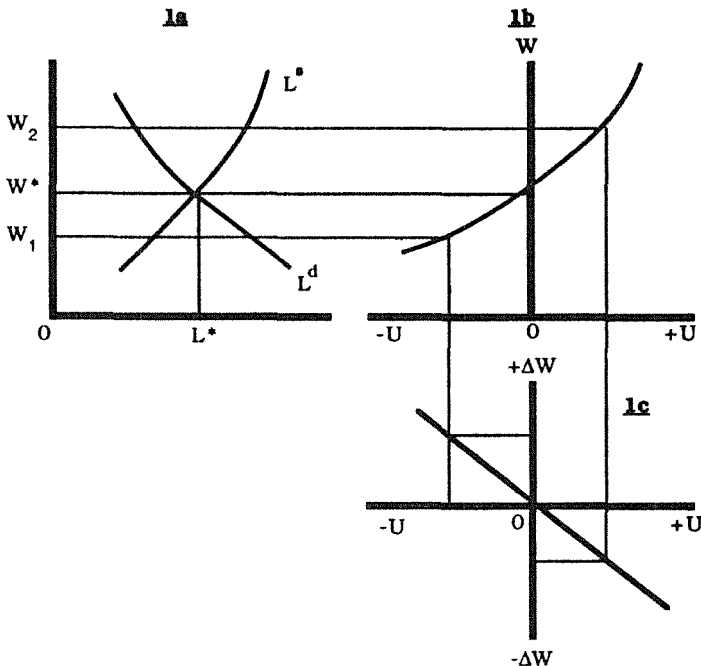
where equilibrium occurs at wage rate W^* and employment L^* . This equilibrium position may be disturbed at any time with shifts in the supply and/or demand schedules, caused by changes in X^s and/or X^d .

Figure 1b shows the rate of unemployment at different wage rates. It is zero at W^* , assuming equilibrium. At wage rate W_2 , unemployment is positive, since at this relatively high wage rate, labour demand is lower than labour supply. It is notionally negative at wage rate W_1 , since at this wage rate, labour demand is higher than labour supply.

Figure 1c shows the wage adjustment function. The south-east quadrant of figure 1c shows that when unemployment is positive, wage rates decrease. Higher rates of unemployment would bring about faster wage rate decreases. The north-west quadrant of figure 1c shows that when labour demand is excessive in relation to labour supply, wage rates will rise. Wage rates are stable when unemployment is zero.

In this equilibrium scheme, wage inflation and unemployment can exist but cannot persist, since wage rates are assumed to change quickly in response to market disequilibrium, so as to eliminate excess supply or demand.

Figure 1. A Labour Market Model.



Although *involuntary* unemployment is to many of us an observed reality, some authors prefer to work with the assumption that the wage rate clears the market in all periods, and propose labour market models based on the equilibrium assumption. Such models impose the constraint that supply and demand for labour services are equal, so that the observed quantities are those shown by the intersection of the demand and supply schedules, as in equation (5) above.

This assumption may be justified on the grounds that the observed unemployment is the result of voluntary choice by the persons concerned to stay out of work. This choice can be rationalised in terms of labour supply theory, regarding the allocation of time to alternative uses. For example, among the unemployed persons, there may be those who refuse immediate offers of employment to improve the chances of finding a better job at some later date. In a way, this is similar to a person's voluntary decision to invest in his human capital through full time study, rather than by taking a job.⁴

This type of non-employment may occur even if job vacancies exist, and if the wage rate is at its equilibrium level. It may be considered as forming part of what Friedman (1968) called *The Natural Rate of Unemployment*, and is associated with searching for jobs. Therefore, irrespective of whether or not the persons concerned are registered as unemployed, such non-participation in market work is voluntary, and does not violate the assumption of equilibrium.

Such an interpretation of observed unemployment has been used to support the formulation of equilibrium labour market models. For example, Lucas and Rapping (1970), whose model postulates that the wage rate clears the market in all periods, suggest that even during the 1930's depression, there was no involuntary unemployment.⁵

Although it cannot be denied that measured unemployment contains a voluntary component, the implication that it contains nothing else is, to say the least, questionable.⁶ In the real world, there may be persons who would be willing to take employment at the current or even lower wage rates, but who remain involuntarily unemployed because the current wage rate fails to adjust to its equilibrium level.

It is reasonable to assume, or at least to test the assumption, that the labour market may not clear, in which case it would not be correct to impose the condition shown as relation (5) above, which states that the transacted quantity of labour is equal to both labour supply and labour demand.

MODELS OF MARKETS IN DISEQUILIBRIUM

To allow for the possibility of market disequilibrium, the unemployment relation could be specified so as to include a term for

observed employment as follows:

$$L = \text{minimum of } L^d \text{ or } L^s \quad (5')$$

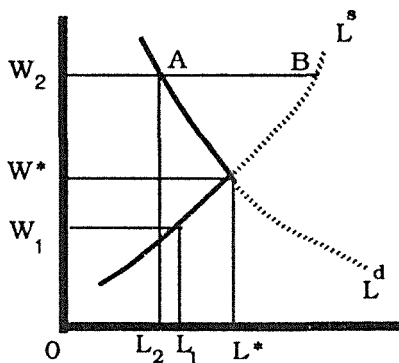
which states that the observed quantity of labour employed is equal to the quantity demanded or the quantity supplied, depending on which of the two is the lower.

This can be explained with respect to figure 2, which shows a hypothetical labour demand (L^d) and labour supply (L^s) schedules. In figure 2, W^* and L^* represent the equilibrium wage rate and the equilibrium amount of labour services respectively. At a wage rate higher than W^* , say at W_2 , the transacted quantity of labour, L_2 , is determined by the amount that firms are willing to take at this relatively high wage rate. In this case, excess labour supply (involuntary unemployment) would be equal to AB .

At a wage rate lower than W^* , say at W_1 , the transacted quantity of labour (L_1) is determined by the amount that households are willing to offer at this relatively low wage rate.

Thus the quantity of labour transacted cannot be on the dotted line sections of the labour demand and labour supply schedules, but on the solid line sections, which is known as 'the short side of the market'.

Figure 2. The Short Side of the Labour Market



Relation (5') therefore expresses all possible points on the short side of the market.

It should be noted with respect to figure 2 that observed employment would be on the demand schedule, when $W > W^*$ and excess supply is implied, and on the supply schedule, when $W < W^*$ and excess demand is implied. It is on both schedules when $W = W^*$ and equilibrium is implied.⁷

In a disequilibrium market model, it is not assumed that the wage rate adjusts completely to clear the market, and it cannot therefore be taken for granted that $L = L^d = L^s$ at all times, so that, before assigning employment observations to labour demand or labour supply, one has to partition the sample into excess supply or excess demand regimes.

ESTIMATING DISEQUILIBRIUM MARKETS MODEL

The question of whether or not wage rates adjust to the equilibrium rates is an empirical one, and cannot be settled on *a priori* grounds.⁸ To some, the presence of institutional factors such as minimum wage legislation is sufficient evidence that the wage rate does not necessarily adjust to clear the market.

The speed of wage adjustment can be investigated empirically through econometric methods developed for this purpose. Econometric methods of estimating the coefficients of markets in disequilibrium is of fairly recent origin. In their seminal paper on the subject, Fair and Jaffee (1972) suggested several procedures of specifying and estimating demand and supply schedules in uncleared markets. This problem was subsequently considered by others⁹ who introduced variants of the models suggested by Fair and Jaffee. Basically, these methods can be grouped into three categories, namely:

1. methods which are not based on wage-changes information, and the sample of observations is separated into excess supply and excess demand regimes on the basis of some other criteria. As a general rule, econometric criteria are not sufficient for this purpose, and the researcher has to rely on partition rules chosen by himself, such as for example, the assumption that periods characterised by large layoff rates or low capacity utilisation belong to the excess supply regime.¹⁰

The Least Squares method of regression is then applied to estimate the labour demand coefficients, (such as the demand/wage elasticity) utilising data for the periods assigned to the excess supply regime, since as noted with respect to figure 2, during periods of excess supply, only labour demand is observed. The coefficients of the labour supply equation are estimated utilising data for periods assigned to the excess demand regime.

2. methods where information about the direction, but not the magnitude, of wage changes is available and used as an indicator of the presence of excess supply or excess demand. This procedure is sometimes referred to as the *Directional Method*.

It is assumed that when the wage rate is higher than its equilibrium level, excess supply exists, in which case market forces will exert downward pressures on the wage rate. If on the other hand, the wage

rate is lower than its equilibrium level, excess demand is implied, in which case the wage rate would tend to increase.

Following this assumption, it is postulated that if the current period wage rate is observed to increase relative to that of the previous period, the current period is characterised by excess demand. In this case the transacted quantity of labour in the current period is assumed to belong to the supply schedule, as shown in figure 2.

On the other hand, when the current period wage rate is observed to decrease, current period observations are assigned to the excess supply regime, in which case the transacted quantity would represent labour demand, as shown in figure 2.

The labour demand (or labour supply) relation can then be estimated separately, utilising data for periods when the transacted quantity of labour is assumed to belong to the demand (or supply) schedule.

One problem with this and the previous procedure method is that the number of observations, which may already be limited, would have to be divided into two regimes, and therefore degrees of freedom are lost in the estimation procedure. Another problem is that it may be difficult to allow for the presence of non-market forces in wage adjustment. In particular, there is the possibility that in the presence of excess supply, wage rates increase due to union activity, in which case, the transacted quantity would be mistakenly assigned to the excess demand regime.

3. methods utilising information about the magnitude of price changes to estimate the amount of excess supply, or excess demand. This procedure is sometimes referred to as the *Quantitative Method*. Unlike the other methods just described, the Quantitative Method is not based on the *a priori* assumption that disequilibrium exists and persists, but it can be used to derive an expression to estimate the speed with which the wage rate adjust to clear the market. The basic assumption made for estimation purposes is that the difference between current period and previous period wage rate is related, in terms of magnitude, to the extent of excess labour demand. This third method therefore involves estimating the magnitude of the slope in figure (1c).

A finding of slow or sluggish adjustment is interpreted as evidence that disequilibrium exists and persists. The procedure is somewhat too lengthy and technical to present here. It is explained in Briguglio (1984), and presented in summary form in the appendix to the present study.

The Quantitative Method has several advantages over the other two described earlier. Apart from the fact that it does not take disequilibrium for granted, it permits the researcher to use all the observations in the

sample to estimate the coefficients of the model, and allows for the effects of non-market forces on wage rate changes.

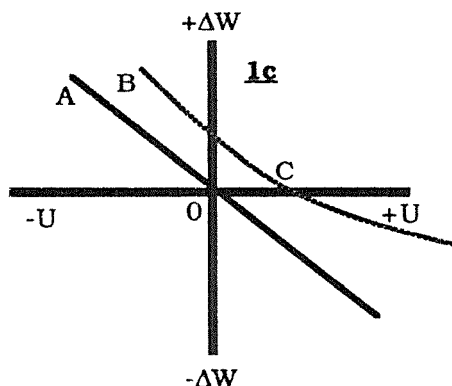
NON-MARKET FORCES

The method just described can be used to test for the effects of non-competitive elements on wage rate changes. An important consideration in this respect is union activity.¹¹ If the non-competitive elements are denoted by N , the wage adjustment equation can be modified as follows:

$$\Delta W \text{ is influenced by } [L^d - L^s] \text{ and } N \quad (3')$$

the difference between relations (3') and (3) can be shown in diagrammatic form as in figure 3.

Figure 3. Non-Market Forces



Line A of figure 3 shows the wage adjustment in the absence of non-competitive forces. In this case, wage changes occur as a result of excess labour demand or excess labour supply. Thus, when excess demand is zero, wage rate changes are also zero. Curve B, on the other hand, indicates that as a result of upward pushes on wage rates by non-competitive forces, wage rates changes are positive even when there is no excess labour demand. In this hypothetical case, non-competitive forces work against market forces, and it takes an excess supply larger than OC to bring about a decrease in wage rates.

Notice also that wage adjustment is assumed to be slower in the downward direction. This is shown by the non-linear section of curve B, and reflects amongst other things, institutional factors which tend to work against flexible downward wage adjustment.

This inclusion of variables representing non-competitive forces in the wage adjustment relation means that the partitioning of the sample into excess supply and excess demand regimes no longer depends on

whether wage rate changes are positive or negative, since positive wage rate changes may no longer signify excess demand. The mathematically minded reader would find in the Appendix a more rigorous explanation of how non-competitive elements enter the model.

MARKET FRICTIONS

The relationships described so far are based on the assumption that unemployment is equal to excess labour supply in relation to labour demand. In reality, unemployment may be caused by what are known as market frictions, which result in unfilled job vacancies. In other words, there may be an amount of jobs demanded by firms which cannot be filled due to such factors as skill mismatches, lack of information about market conditions, and lack of labour mobility.

Under these circumstances, observed unemployment would have to be redefined as follows:

$$U = (L^s - L^d) + V \quad (4')$$

Relation (4') states that observed unemployment is excess labour supply plus unfilled vacancies. In other words, the number of labour force members without a job includes those who do not have one due to the fact that the going wage rate is higher than its equilibrium level, and those who would have had a job in the absence of market frictions.

Also, with the presence of market frictions, labour demand and employment cannot be assumed to be equal, since a fraction of demand remains unsatisfied.

As a result, relation (5) would also have to be modified to allow for a respectification of the short side of the market, as follows:

$$L = \text{minimum of } (L^d - V) \text{ or } L^s \quad (5'')$$

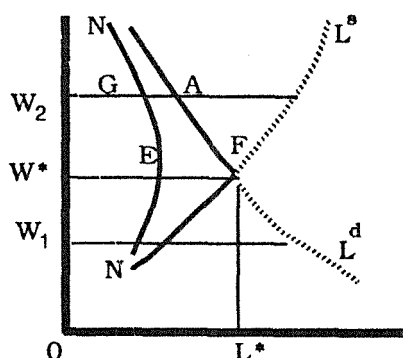
Relation (5'') states that the observed employment is labour demand less job vacancies, or labour supply, whichever is the smaller.

Relation (4') and (5'') can be explained in terms of figure 4.

In figure 4, L^d and L^s are drawn as before. This time however, employment and labour demand are not assumed to be synonymous. For example at wage rate W_2 labour demand is denoted by W_2A . This measures the number of jobs available. The number of unfilled vacancies is AG . Employment is therefore W_2G . At wage rate W^* , labour demand is W^*F , unfilled vacancies is FE , so that employment is W^*E . In other words, in an equilibrium situation, unemployment exists due to market frictions.

It should be noted that in figure 4, the number of unfilled vacancies increases as labour demand increases. This implies that frictional

Figure 4. The Short side of the Market with Job-Vacancies



unemployment increases as excess supply increases. One reason for this is that as unemployment increases, job search for the existing vacancies becomes more efficient.¹²

In figure 4, the curve NN shows observed employment at each level of W . It is drawn to the left of both the L^s and L^d curves, suggesting that actual employment is always lower than labour demand or labour supply.

An important implication of figure 4 is that W^* , which is the equilibrium wage rate, is compatible with a certain amount of frictional unemployment, equal to EF .

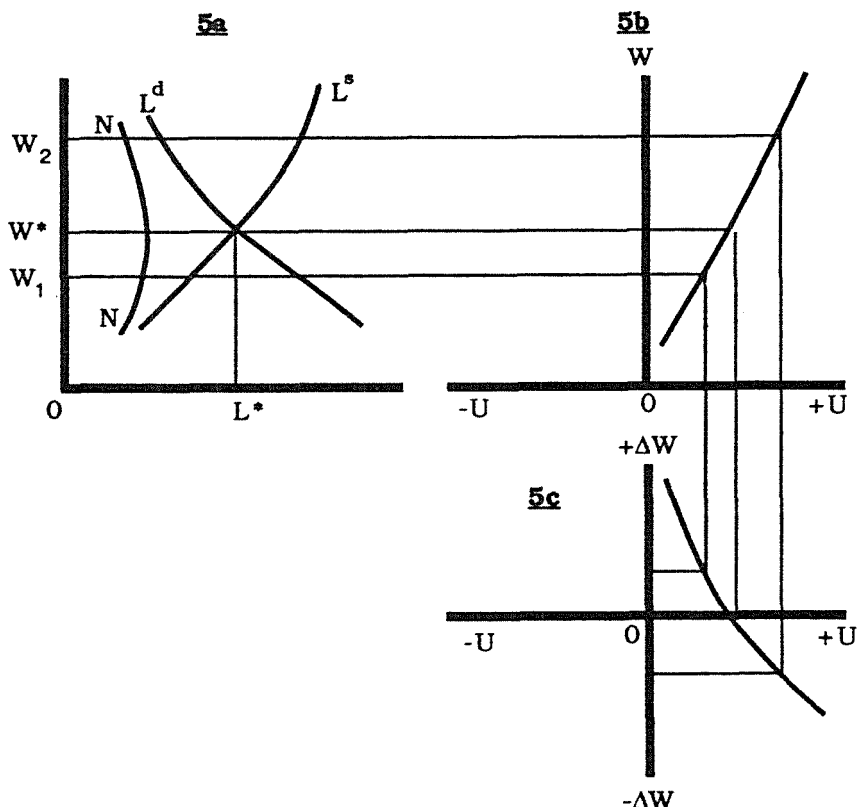
INCORPORATING MARKET IMPERFECTIONS

Diagrams (3) and (4) can be combined into a single diagram depicting a disequilibrium labour market model as shown in figure 5.

Figure 5a shows the labour demand, labour supply and observed employment schedules. As explained with reference to figure 4, the observed quantity of employment is shown by the curve NN. Figure 5b shows the extent to which unemployment rates change with the wage rate. Unlike figure 1b, at the equilibrium wage rate, unemployment exists. It should be noted that unemployment in figure 5 covers excess supply and frictional unemployment.

Figure 5c shows the wage adjustment equation. The wage adjustment equation does not pass through the origin due to the imperfections described above. Firstly, due to the possibility of non-competitive forces, pushing up wage rates even in the presence of unemployment, we may have positive wage changes compatible with excess labour supply. Secondly, due to the presence of market frictions, we may have positive wage changes compatible with a degree of frictional unemployment.

Figure 5. A Disequilibrium Model



It should be noted that union pushfulness and frictional unemployment do not in themselves explain wage inflexibility. It is possible, for example, that following a wage increase demanded by a union during periods of excess supply, market forces operate to bring back the real wage rate to an equilibrium level again. Similarly, the presence of market frictions implies that unemployment may exist at an equilibrium wage rates, but not necessarily that wage rates are inflexible.

DISEQUILIBRIUM AND THE PHILLIPS CURVE

Figure (5c) may be compared to the Phillips curve relation which also starts from the premise that wage rate changes and excess demand for labour are related. Literature on the Phillips curve abounds¹³, and has been reviewed elsewhere. Most of the empirical attempts to estimate the Phillips relation followed Lipsey's (1960) lead in that they were based

on the explicit or implicit assumption that there exists a transformation between excess labour demand and the rate of (observed) unemployment. The validity of this assumption has been questioned.¹⁴

Figure (5c) is not based on this assumption, and since it directly uses the determinants of labour demand and labour supply. The problem of whether or not the observed unemployment is a good proxy for excess labour demand or supply is therefore avoided.¹⁵

In some studies on wage adjustment, additional explanatory variables, besides the rate of unemployment have been included. Among these one finds price changes¹⁶, profit rate or its rate of change¹⁷, and productivity.¹⁸ These variables may influence wage rate changes directly, and indirectly through their effects on labour demand and supply. The indirect effects would therefore be already represented by the unemployment rate, if the latter is considered to be an index of excess labour demand (or supply). The meaning attached to the coefficients in the wage setting equation have therefore to be interpreted in this light, and care must be taken not to include variables which are already represented by the rate of unemployment, and which may therefore be redundant.¹⁹

CONCLUSION

Models that impose the *a priori* condition that the labour market is always characterised by equilibrium may not represent reality in the presence of slow wage adjustment. It was shown in this study that it is possible to specify a labour market model which, while not excluding the possibility of equilibrium, allows for the existence of excess supply or demand.

It was shown that the incorporation of a wage adjustment relation in the model permits the researcher to explain and possibly estimate the degree of sluggishness in market clearing, and even to assess the impact of non-market forces on wage rate changes.

The explanation of disequilibrium models is somewhat more complicated than the more convenient explanation of equilibrium models. The improvement in relevance, however, particularly with respect to the labour market, where non-market clearing is a distinct possibility, would seem to warrant the extra effort involved.

A MATHEMATICAL FORMULATION OF A DISEQUILIBRIUM LABOUR MARKET MODEL

A. The Equations

$$\text{Labour Demand: } LD = aW + bX \quad (1)$$

$$\text{Labour Supply: } LD = cW + dY \quad (2)$$

$$\text{Wage Adjustment: } W - W_{-1} = e(LD - LS) + fN \quad (3)$$

$$\text{Unemployment: } U = LS - LD \quad (3)$$

$$\text{Observed Employment: } L = \text{minimum } LS, LD \quad (5)$$

where: LD = labour demand

LS = labour supply

W = current period wage rate

W_{-1} = previous period wage rate

U = unemployment

L = observed employment

X = non-wage variable affecting LD (other variables may be added)

Y = non-wage variable affecting LS (other variables may be added)

N = non-excess demand variables affecting wage adjustment.

All variables are current period observations, unless otherwise stated. The lower case coefficients would represent elasticities if the variables are measured in logs.

B. Deriving an Expression with the Demand Relation Coefficients.

Since market equilibrium is not imposed, observed labour cannot be assumed to belong to the demand schedule during all periods.

According to equation (5) labour demand (and not labour supply) would be observed, i.e. $L = LD$, in periods when excess supply exists, i.e. when the current wage rate (W) exceeds the equilibrium wage rate (W^*). Thus we can write:

$$L = aW + bX \quad \text{if } W > W^* \quad (6)$$

During periods of excess demand, labour supply is observed i.e. $L = LS$. An expression for labour supply may be obtained by rearranging equation (3) as follows:

$$LS = LD - 1/e (W - W_{-1} - fN)$$

Substituting for LD and given that in periods of excess demand, $L = LS$, the above can be written as:

$$L = aW + bX - 1/e (W - W_{-1} - fN) \quad \text{if } W < W^* \quad (7)$$

Combining equations (6) and (7):

$$L = aW + bX - 1/eG \quad (8)$$

where:

$$G = (W - W_{-1} - fN) \text{ if } W < W^* \\ \text{and } G = 0 \text{ otherwise.}$$

The term $[1/eG]$ is therefore introduced as an implicit adjustment for excess demand. There still remains the problem, however, of establishing when $W < W^*$ in order to compute the value of G .

C. Deriving an Expression with the Supply Relation Coefficients

According to equation (5) labour supply (and not labour demand) would be observed, i.e. $L = LS$, when excess demand exists, i.e. when the current wage rate (W) is lower than the equilibrium wage rate (W^*). thus we can write:

$$L = cW + dY \quad \text{if } W < W^* \quad (6')$$

During periods of excess supply, labour demand is observed i.e. $L = LD$. An expression for labour demand may be obtained by rearranging equation (3) as follows:

$$LD = LS + 1/e (W - W_{-1} - fN)$$

substituting for LS and given that in periods of excess supply $L = LD$, the above can be written as follows:

$$L = cW + dX + 1/e (W - W_{-1} - fN) \quad \text{if } W > W^* \quad (7')$$

Combining equations (6') and (7'):

$$L = cW + dX + 1/eH \quad (8')$$

where:

$$H = (W - W_{-1} - fN) \quad \text{if } W > W^* \\ \text{and } H = 0 \text{ otherwise.}$$

The term $[1/eH]$ is introduced as an implicit adjustment for excess supply. As before, there still remains the problem of establishing when $W < W^*$ in order to compute the value of H .

D. Establishing when $W < W^$ from Observed Data*

Substitute (1) and (2) into (3):

$$W - W_{-1} = e(aW + bX) - (cW + dY) + fN$$

which when rearranged yields:

$$\{1 - [e(c-a)]\} W = W_{-1} + e(bX - dY) - fN \quad (9)$$

In a situation of equilibrium $LS=LD$ and $W=W^*$ so that

$$aW^* + bX = cW^* + eY$$

which when rearranged gives

$$(c-a)W^* = bX - dY \quad (10)$$

Now substitute equation (10) into (9) to obtain the following:

$$\{1 - [e(c-a)]\} W = W_{-1} + e(c-a)W^* - fN \quad (11)$$

so that:

$$W = iW_{-1}(1-i)W^* - (if)N \quad (12)$$

where:

$$i = 1 / \{1 + [e(c-a)]\} \quad (13)$$

which when rearranged gives:

$$W^* - W = [i/(1-i)] [W - W_{-1} - fN] \quad (14)$$

the coefficient i takes a value of between zero and unity given that e and $(c-a)$ are both positive, (as is reasonable to assume). Therefore equation (14) states that:

- i. if $W - W_{-1} - fN > 0$ then $W^* < W$ and excess supply is implied.
- ii. if $W - W_{-1} - fN < 0$ then $W^* > W$ and excess demand is implied.
- iii. if $W - W_{-1} - fN = 0$ then $W^* = W$ and equilibrium is implied.

The sign of the expression $(W - W_{-1} - fN)$ therefore is an indicator of excess supply or excess demand. All the terms in the expression, with the exception of the coefficient f are observable variables. The next step is to produce an expression for the coefficient f utilising observable variables.

This can be done by rearranging equation (9) and substituting equation (14) into it as follows:

$$W = iW_{-1} + \{ [1-h]/(c-a) \} bX - \{ [1-h]/(c-a) \} aY + (if)N \quad (15)$$

Equation (15) can be estimated by the method of least squares, from which the estimate of i is obtained, and by substitution, an estimate of f .

Once i and f are estimated the researcher would be in a position to compute the right hand side of equation (14) and to assign observations to the excess supply and excess demand regime. This would then enable the researcher to compute G of equation (B), and H of equation (B'). In

turn this would permit the estimation of equation (B) and (B') and therefore of the coefficients of the demand and supply relations.

The parameter i is of interest with respect to the state of the market. It can be seen from equation (13), that if e takes a value of zero [implying infinitely slow wage adjustment in equation (3)], then i would take a value of unity. If on the other hand e takes a value of infinity, implying instantaneous wage adjustment, then i takes a value of zero.

The estimated value of i from equation (15) would therefore indicate whether the equilibrium assumption is valid. If i is found to differ significantly from zero, then it would not be correct to assume equilibrium, since such a value of i implies sluggish wage adjustment.

E. Some Comments

The model just described can be estimated by the method of Least Squares, given data on the variables listed in section A of this appendix. The two-stage Least Squares may be appropriate to allow for the endogeneity of wage rates, labour demand and labour supply. The procedure would involve estimating equation (15) first, and then using the predicted values of W and the estimated values of i and f , to estimate equations (8) and (8').

It should be noted that the above model does not allow for unfilled job vacancies in equations (4) and (5). The introduction of unfilled vacancies would complicate the exposition, since the criteria for partitioning the sample into excess supply and excess demand regimes would have to allow for the assumption that a component of labour demand is not actually observed as employment.

Another point to notice is that equation (3) assumes the same speed of upward and downward wage adjustment. The model can be formulated in such a way as to assume slower downward adjustment, and this assumption can then be tested econometrically.

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Notes

¹ The relationship between Labour demand and wage rates can be explained in terms of the law of diminishing marginal productivity, which in turn could be formally derived from an assumed underlying production function. See Briguglio (1985).

² For a discussion on the variables, including wage rates, which are thought to affect labour supply on macro-economic level see Bowen and Finegan (1969).

³ In this discussion, the transacted quantity of labour is assumed to be that observed, which in the text of this paper is sometimes referred to as *employment*. For a discussion on the various concepts associated with market quantities see Grossman (1974).

⁴ The 'New Microeconomics' approach [see for example Phelps et al (1970)] allows for search unemployment, which is frictional and voluntary in nature. One implication of this approach is that unemployment may be an investment in better utilisation of employed persons at some future date (op. cit. p. 17).

⁵ In their study, which covered the period 1929–1965, Lucas and Rapping consider observed unemployment as 'consisting of persons who regard the wage rate at which they could be currently employed as temporary low and who therefore choose to wait, or search, for improved conditions . . .' (p. 285).

⁶ The work of Lucas and Rapping (1970) was heavily criticised for this underlying assumption by Rees (1970) who has this to say about the equilibrium assumption contained in the Lucas and Rapping model: 'It is of great convenience in fitting simultaneous equation models to be able to assume that quantity supplied is equal to quantity demanded, but where the world is not obliging enough to satisfy this condition, econometricians may be forced, to go through the trouble of making more realistic assumptions'. (p. 309).

⁷ This suggests that single equation models of labour demand would be misspecified, if in the presence of excess demand, observations of the quantity of labour are assigned to the demand schedule.

⁸ Wage rigidity may be due to institutional factors, such as minimum wage legislation, union resistance to wage cuts, and wage contracts which bind the employers to retain a certain wage rate, irrespective of market conditions.

It should be noted that the wage adjustment relation is specified in discrete units, compatible with observable wage and labour quantities, the data for which is usually published in discrete time intervals (monthly, quarterly or annually). The numerical value of the coefficient c_1 , therefore depends on the length of the time interval between one period and another. For a discussion on the relation between discrete and continuous-time versions of the wage adjustment mechanism see Bowden (1978b), pp. 84–88.

⁹ See for example Bowden (1978), Fair and Kelejian (1974), Godfield and Quandt (1975), Laffont and Garcia (1977), Maddala and Nelson (1974) Rosan and Quandt (1978), Quandt (1983), and Briguglio (1984).

¹⁰ One method that may be used for this purpose is a maximum likelihood procedure, suggested by Quandt (1958). Reece (1976) utilised a version of this model together with *a priori* information to assign observations to the demand or supply schedules.

¹¹ Union activity is sometimes measured by the rate of change of union density [see Hines (1969)] or by an index of strike action [see for example Johnston and Timbrell (1974)].

¹² On the relation between job vacancies and unemployment see Hansen (1970). A number of empirical studies on this relation conclude that there is a negative relation between job vacancies and unemployment. See for example Dow and Dicks-Mireau (1958).

¹³ See for example, Santomero and Seater (1978) and Laidler and Parkin (1977).

¹⁴ See for example, Corry and Laidler (1967).

¹⁵ A similar approach was utilised by McCallum (1974).

¹⁶ See for example Eckstein and Wilson (1962).

¹⁷ See for example Perry (1966).

¹⁸ See for example Kuh (1967).

¹⁹ See Archibald (1969) for a discussion on what he calls 'intruders' in the Phillips relation.

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BOOMERANGS ON A SMALL ISLAND: MALTESE WHO RETURNED FROM AUSTRALIA

Constance Lever-Tracy

INTRODUCTION

In 1947 there were 3,238 Maltese born persons in Australia. Maltese emigration records show a further 87,868 departing for Australia from mid-1947 to mid-1986, giving a total of over 91,000. The Australian census of 1986 however shows only 56,232 Maltese born persons still living in Australia. The postwar departures, comprising over a quarter of the entire population of Malta (at the start of the period) are a major component of that mass exodus which is one of the most salient and well known facts of Maltese postwar history. Altogether by the end of 1986 a total of some 149,000 were recorded as having departed permanently, almost entirely to Australia, Canada and Britain, leaving a population of 345,000 at the end of the period.¹

What concerns us in this paper is the gap between the records of departures to Australia and the Australian census figures at the end of the period – the 35,000 missing persons. If these are emigrants who have returned home, they would indicate the departure of almost two-fifths of those who arrived in Australia and the presence in Malta of a large population of ex-Australians, constituting 10% of the population. As we shall see many additions and subtractions do however need to be made to the figure for missing persons before we can estimate return migration.

Large scale return migration would raise many important questions for both countries. Has Australia failed many immigrants? Are they often really 'guestworkers' in their orientation anyway? Why do they return? What becomes of the returnees? How do they experience the change? What impact do they have on the social, economic and political life of Malta? If emigration is not a single action but one part of a complex chain unwinding over a lifetime (and across generations) what kind of continuing articulations does it set up between the source and the receiving country?

It is only rarely and recently that such questions have even been posed in the two countries. Australian records on immigrant settler arrivals have been good since 1959, but on returns they have been (perhaps inevitably) worthless. Maltese data on departing emigrants and

their attributes have been detailed throughout, but it was only in 1975 that returns were first seriously recorded. Until the 1970s the policies of both countries were clear and complementary. Australia sought to attract permanent settlers and regarded any returns as evidence of failure, while Malta encouraged and assisted permanent departures from what was seen as an overcrowded island with an insecure economic future. Complacently, it was assumed in both countries that the plans and desires of the migrants would follow public policy.

Selective figures seemed to confirm this. Malta counted only those few returns who, arriving within two years, had to repay their passage. When in 1975 they started asking all arrivals at the ports if they intended to stay, the numbers recorded as '*returned emigrants*' rose from 63 to 558, with 1,313 the following year. In 1977 the government, in response to these figures (and fearful of the economic consequences of the impending final closure of the British base in 1979) introduced restrictions on returnees, including immediate access to unemployment benefits and to public sector jobs.² Since then little attention has been given to them. For long in Australia settler departure records were accepted in good faith, without any questions about whether people might have a motive not to announce such intentions reliably to the authorities. Yet, for example, the Australian figure of 1,395 declared departures 1975–1982 contrasts sharply with the new Maltese records of 7,428 returnees from Australia in the same period declaring their intention to resettle permanently in Malta.³ In 1973 an Australian Government report questioned the idea that returnees were a handful of failures and Charles Price's appendix, using arrival data and census '*residues*' estimated settler losses of 20–40% for various ethnic groups, after ten years residence, with a figure of 30% for the Maltese.⁴

Very little research on returns has followed from this new awareness in either country, however. One notable exception in Australia is S.L. Thompson's excellent study of returnees to a small and isolated village in Italy.⁵ In Malta there are three pieces of work. E.P. Delia carried out a careful extension of Price's method, using wider data, which concluded that in the non-recorded period up to 1974 permanent returns were between a quarter and a third of recorded emigrants – a total of some 19,000 ex-Australians living in Malta by that date.⁶ (From then until mid-1986 Maltese records show a further 8,477 returning from Australia, giving a total of nearly 28,000).

Second, there is R.L. King and A.J. Strachan's very interesting study of returnees (mainly and atypically from the United States) to the village of Qala in Gozo. They found 20% of the village to consist of returnees. Most of those who were back for good were households headed by men who had been away 15–20 years and had returned in their late thirties

and early forties to retire early and live on their savings (invested abroad). Their economic and social role was limited. Finally, Russel King also carried out a survey of 185 returnees across the Maltese Islands, 89 from Australia. This concentrated primarily on their experiences abroad.⁷

So far there has been no other study which has looked at returnees from Australia to Malta and the King and Strachan study (like Thompson's in Italy) focussed on the untypical situation of returnees to a small village, isolated from urban labour markets.

Students of migrant labour in Western Europe for long suffered from an opposite myopia to the Australians and Maltese, but for a similar reason. In the 1960s receiving countries such as Germany and Switzerland and source countries such as Yugoslavia, formulated policies for temporary 'guest worker' flows. It was only in the changed climate of the 1970s that it became generally noticed that many of these temporary workers had *de facto* become permanent, having won longer term permits and family reunion through prolonged and repeated stints, when the countries of Western Europe closed their doors to new workers in 1973. Those already there were unable to continue the to and fro pattern of before and were forced to choose whether to settle or to return. Many chose the former.⁸

The result of the prior assumption of temporariness has been that return flows and repeated remigration and their motives and impact were always a major focus of Western European studies. The two sets of one-sided expectations, of purely temporary residence in Western Europe and permanent family settlement in Australia have now been discarded and awareness has been converging. It has become clear that there is no absolute divide between guestworker flows and family settlement. The two are alternative strategies available to workers, who may (often with pain and difficulty) switch in response to changing circumstances in the new country or the old. The Australian and West European experiences are not poles apart but points on a continuum with mutual relevance.

The West European literature on return migration has produced over the years a vigorous debate on the impact of such returns on the home country. We can disentangle three evolving arguments here. The first, set in the modernisation perspective of the 1960s, saw returning migrants bringing in updated skills, investment capital, and modern values.⁹ This came to be increasingly contested from an 'internal colonialism' paradigm which saw migration as a drain of resources from poor to rich countries with no *quid pro quo*. The emigrants from Turkey or Yugoslavia, it was shown, were made up disproportionately of the skilled workers of those countries. In Western Europe they were used as factory fodder in deskilled jobs where their skills were more likely

to atrophy than to develop. On their return they invested neither their savings nor their labour in the modern sectors of the economy but, it was argued, frittered them away in the consumption of houses and cars and in setting up petty self-employment ventures which frequently failed. Manual work for wages was seen as incompatible with the status of a returnee, and when the petty enterprise failed and the savings were all spent, remigration was the only way out.¹⁰ A third approach did not contest many of the findings of the second, but evaluated them quite differently. The infusion of resources into the construction of a stock of new houses and into an infrastructure network of trucks and taxis and repair shops has been seen as very valuable. From the point of view of the migrants themselves (often ignored in the first two approaches), years of sacrifice and hard work have paid off with a degree of family independence and comfort.¹¹

While this debate is of relevance to Maltese return migration, it is clear that in many ways the situation in the main Maltese island is very different.¹² There is the overwhelmingly working class rather than peasant nature of the population and of the emigrants, from the beginning of the migration period and before.¹³ There is the absence of a clear urban-rural division on the main island which is only 27 km by 15 km and linked by an excellent and cheap bus network, so that every part is accessible to every other for work or schooling or social contact. Perhaps most important of all is the growth in prosperity over a period when the contrary was expected, sustained over the last dozen or so years when most countries have experienced reversals. Wages in Malta are low by European and certainly by Australian standards,¹⁴ but abject poverty is very rare, minimum wages are enforced, and pensions and health services are universal. Housing is spacious and solid, home ownership promoted by government subsidies has risen from 32% in 1967 to 54% in 1985 and no more than 2,000 out of 104,000 households are estimated now to be living in substandard conditions.¹⁵ Unemployment has not risen over 10% and is currently under 5% after massive public sector job creation schemes by the previous government.¹⁶

This paper will first look again at the '*missing persons*' data cited at the beginning and an independent attempt will be made to assess the proportion of returned migrants, in one section of the population – the parents of high school children. The rest of the paper is based on a questionnaire completed by 110 such parent returnees from five of the schools, with the deeper understanding provided by 30 personal accounts derived from long interviews with individuals obtained through personal contact and a snowball approach (with one contact leading to another), as well as letters in response to a request in a local newspaper. The survey

and interviews explored the motives for and experience of return – paying particular attention to the hypotheses of emigration as a means to accumulate savings for self-employment and that of a return to early retirement. The likely impact of the returnees on Maltese society and the nature of continuing links between Malta and Australia will then be evaluated and the study concludes with policy recommendations to both the Maltese and the Australian governments.

THE MISSING PERSONS

It had appeared easy enough to find returnees, but initial enquiries drew nearly a blank and my suggestion that there could be over 20,000 of them in Malta was met with incredulity. Enquiries among neighbours, shopkeepers and priests in the three cities area where I was staying produced at first only three people, who themselves knew only of their own families. The 'Australian Taylor' in Cospicua had changed hands since it was opened and the Boomerang Bar in Vittoriosa did not open during my stay. 'Oh Yes', people said, *'A lot did come. The wives missed their mothers and pushed their husbands to return. But they found it didn't work and they went back again after a while'*.

The Maltese-Australian Association did not appear to involve many returnees. The Chairman, Nick Bonello, claimed a membership of 200 but did not supply the list. Their publication had died after a few issues due to failure of advertisers to pay and they had been unable to maintain paid staff or their own premises. Both Bonello and Father Attard of the rival Friends of Australia Association thought definitive returnees would not number more than a few thousand, being mainly retired people who found that their Australian pension stretched further in Malta. This often happened where the retired man had missed the mateship of his working life and hoped to find it again in the active bar and club life of Malta.

This did not resolve the mystery. The Australian High Commission stated that only 760 people in Malta were drawing Australian pensions. Second time emigrants would reappear in the next Australian census and would thus not form part of the missing 35,000. It was necessary to re-examine the data.

Maltese records on emigrant departures to Australia have been considered very reliable, however doubts arise when they are counterposed to Australian arrivals data. Since 1959 these have recorded both settler arrivals and a wider category of permanent and long term arrivals which also includes Australian residents returning after a stay of more than one year overseas.

MIGRANT MOVEMENTS – AUSTRALIAN AND MALTESE DATA

	1959 – 1974	1975 – mid '86	Total 1959 – mid '86
<i>Maltese data:</i>			
Settler departures for Australia	41,022	8,484	49,506
<i>Australian Data:</i>			
Settler arrivals from Malta	36,817	6,513	43,330
Non-settler long-term arrivals	4,915	4,166	9,081
Total permanent and long-term arrivals	41,732	10,679	52,411

Sources: Malta-COS *Demographic review*

Australia: Department of Immigration *Consolidated Statistics* and data supplied by the Department

Note: Data by calendar year and data running from mid-year points have been adjusted by halving in some cases

It is clear that for the period 1959 – 1974 the Maltese departure data correspond quite closely to the Australian P & LT figure and thus seem to include those who had returned to Malta for a long visit (whatever their intentions). Such people having been counted twice (or more) have inflated the figure of Maltese recorded as departing for Australia.

LONG TERM (NON-SETTLER) ARRIVALS FROM MALTA

Year	Annual Average
1967 – 68	161
1968 – 69	193
1969 – 70	246
1970 – 71	479
1971 – 72	529
1972 – 73	735
1973 – 74	783
1974 – 75	535
1975 – 76	282
1976 – 77	478
1977 – 78	628
1978 – 79	754
1979 – 80	475
1980 – 81	435
1981 – 82	330

Our problem with Australian entry data is the absence of information on settler arrivals before 1959 when some two-fifths of all Maltese had arrived. However it is clear that the numbers of '*long-term*' returning resident arrivals has risen sharply over the years. The excess of the P & LT figures over the (unavailable) settler only figures for the period up to 1959 cannot be very great. These were 39,605 P & LT arrivals from Malta from July 1945 – December 1958. It is improbable that more than 1,500 of these were thus counted twice. We can obtain the following improved estimate of total settler arrivals.

1947 – December 1958 P< Arrivals from Malta	39,600
Minus estimate for Australian residents returning after long absence in Malta	<u>1,500</u>
	38,100
January 1959 – June 1986 Settler Arrivals from Malta	<u>43,330</u>
Total Settler Arrivals from Malta 1947 – 1986	81,430
Maltese born persons already resident in Australia in 1947 Census	<u>3,200</u>
Total Maltese Settler Arrivals recorded in Australia up to mid-1986	84,630
Minus those recorded in 1986 Census	56,230
'Missing Persons' (improved estimate)	28,400

The figure for total arrivals however must include some double counting. Intending returnees to Malta who changed their minds and went back to Australia within a year would be counted as short term returns and those who went back after 1 – 3 years (or longer if they obtained visa extensions) would be counted as long term returnees. However any who allowed their visas to lapse and then reapplied and remigrated would be counted twice. Price and Delia are both aware of this but neither seems to expect it to be of great magnitude. However a count made in November 1987 of files at the Australian High Commission found that of the 147 most recent immigrant visas granted, 20% were to people who had already resided in Australia. Of the first 105 visas granted in 1980 31% were to second time emigrants. If this kind of proportion were projected back to the period of mass immigration (whose files have been destroyed), there would be few '*missing persons*' left, but this would of course be nonsensical. Remigration grows as does the pool of returnees.

The scale of second time migrants with new visas is however sufficient to call into question the whole '*missing persons*' approach –

especially when it is added to the other unknowns: it is possible that departing Maltese have not returned to Malta but gone to a third country. This is however probably balanced by the arrival of Maltese born persons from other places too. The other major unknown hiding place of the missing persons is among the dead. The age structure of the Maltese in Australia would not suggest a high death rate but it must run into thousands over the 40 year period. No records are available.

While all the above considerations would reduce the expectation of finding 28,400 returned emigrants now living in Malta, we must expand it by the number of their Australian born children who came with them. Russel King's study of Qala suggested many adult returnees were thus accompanied. Many of the returnees I interviewed had brought back such children and several were themselves Australian born. Such children must choose their nationality at 18 and if they do not renounce their Australian citizenship they cannot work in Malta. The Australian High Commission has been recording over 100 such renunciations annually.

The figures make it clear that many immigrants have left Australia and that emigration is not a simple once and for all act, but one stage in a chain of movements for the many who retain links with both countries. However it is not possible to use them with any confidence to estimate the number of returnees currently in Malta. For that a field count was decided upon.

Twenty-four secondary schools were approached, with the cooperation of the Director of Education and they agreed to count the number of pupils who said one or both parents had ever lived in Australia. Five of the schools distributed questionnaires to be filled in by parents of those who had replied in the affirmative. This method ensured a good coverage of the 35 – 49 age groups (85% of questionnaire respondents were in this age range) – a group of which most were likely to be past the age for further moves. The results show a high degree of variability corresponding to some extent to the areas of original heavy emigration to Australia. Clearly returnees are drawn back to their districts of origin, a finding which accords with that of King. (Lockhart also noted strong local residential loyalties in internal movements of Maltese).¹⁷ The higher figure for girls' schools may reflect a greater knowledge by girls of family history or else a greater attentiveness and willingness to cooperate with the school. They suggest the boys' schools' figures are underestimates.

School	% of Children with Parent(s) who had been in Australia
Girls Trade School, Gozo	31.7
Girls Secondary School, Gozo	27.3
Boys Secondary School, Gozo	18.8
Girls Secondary School, Ta' Paris, B'Kara	11.4
Girls Trade School, St Andrews	8.4
Boys Secondary School, Dingli	7.7
Girls Secondary School, Rabat	7.1
Girls Secondary School, Siggiewi	6.7
Girls Secondary School, Sliema	6.2
Girls Secondary School, Mrieħel	6.0
Boys Secondary School, Mtarfa*	6.0
Girls Secondary School, Zejtun	5.5
Girls Secondary School, Sta Venera	4.7
Girls Trade School, Vittoriosa	3.6
Girls Secondary School, Cospicua	3.3
Boys Secondary School, Zebbug	3.2
Boys Secondary School, Tal Ħandaq	3.2
Boys Trade School, Corradino	2.8
Girls Secondary School, St Andrews	2.4
Boys Secondary School, Ħamrun	1.9
Boys Secondary School, Corradino	0

	Returnees	Total School Population Surveyed	%
Gozo Schools	375	1,567	23.9
Malta Schools	370	8,464	4.4

* This figure was an under-estimate as it only included children who where themselves in Australia. It has therefore been doubled to take some account of this.

These figures need to be discounted by a fifth to allow for the 40% of children who had had only one parent in Australia giving 19.1% for Gozo and 3.5% for Malta.

The numbers in private schools appear to be very low, about 0.5% in St Aloysius and De La Salle. Maltese migration has been largely a

working class experience both in their background and in their work in Australia. It seems that the return has not given them access to the private schools.¹⁸

The private schools account for 24% of pupils on the main island and 11% in Gozo. The overall proportion of returnee parents would then be around 3.1% of parents in Malta and 17% in Gozo giving a combined minimum figure of around 4.2% of the age group which is about 3,000 persons. In the Australian census of 1986 there were 23,545 Maltese born persons aged 35–49, over two out of five of all Maltese born persons in Australia.¹⁹ The returnees would then constitute about 11% of the total cohort. This figure may reflect undercounting in some schools and we might suggest a range of 11–15% as a credible permanent return rate. If we multiply this by the total Maltese community in Australia we get a probable range of 7,000–10,000 returnees living in Malta. (To this must be added a couple of thousand of their Australian born children). Some of the differences between this figure and that of the best '*missing persons*' estimate of over 28,000 is accounted for by deaths and perhaps by other '*leakages*' (net departures to third countries, and people absent from Australia on census night who were not subsequently traced). Much of the difference however would be due to the double counting of second time remigrants, who have received a visa more than once indicating that for many, return is no more a complete and definitive act than was the original migration. The remainder of the study looks more closely at those who have by and large resettled permanently and on the whole contentedly in Malta. The others, who left again, may be a different story.

THE MIGRATION CYCLE

By far the highest rates of postwar emigration in general as well as the highest proportions going to Australia were from the smaller island of Gozo. Gozo is much more agricultural than the main island and its inhabitants, lacking the possibility of daily commuting to industrial or harbour areas have a tradition of overseas migration and return going back to the 19th century. King and Strachan's study of Qala in Eastern Gozo produced a three stage model of the migration cycle. Very young men depart for around five years. After returning to marry, the couple then redepart together for around another 10–15 years. They then return definitively with their pre-teenage children to live on the income from invested savings, supplemented by some part time fishing and farming or else to set up as independent producers or traders (the former pattern tends to characterise US returnees, the latter the Australians). The whole cycle is a planned venture into industrial labour in high wage destinations, aimed at accumulating savings and at an eventual withdrawal and return

to independence or leisure in the place of origin.²⁰ The data collected in King's survey of the islands as a whole does not entirely fit this picture, but his interpretation is basically shaped by the Qala generated model.²¹

King's picture fits well with many other analyses of migration, especially to Western Europe or America, both in the postwar period in earlier times. These see much of such migration in intent and (insofar as it achieves its objectives) in its conclusion as an articulation between a pre-capitalist peasant or artisan mode of production and modern wage labour. The project is, by means of heroic hard labour and sacrifices for a number of years, to accumulate the savings to establish or re-establish family independence and status on a secure and comfortable basis in the place of origin.²²

King's stress on early retirement (sometimes even before the age of 40) and on leisure rather than a family business is an interesting variant, and one which makes the project one of wider current relevance. The danger with studies of returnees to isolated rural areas is that they predetermine a dualist model and findings which counterpose the modern, urban wage labour of the receiving country with the traditional, rural petty commodity production of the place of origin and return. In fact many source countries have themselves been undergoing rapid industrialisation and urbanisation over the last 40 years and mass internal migration has paralleled the flows abroad. A survey of Greek and Italian immigrants in Australia found that although most had a village origin, a sizeable minority had worked in major cities of their homeland before emigrating and all but three had relatives living in such cities. Most visits home were not restricted to the village of origin.²³ There are indications that the destination of many returnees is also urban.²⁴ As much or more than an articulation of modes of production there are internationally mobile wage workers whose kinship and information networks and own movements to and fro link the working class in different industrialised parts of the world.

Gozo contains only 8% of the population of the Maltese islands. The largest number of returnees are in Malta, where the '*villages*' have many of the attributes of conurbation suburbs, and where the population has not been peasant for many generations. Even in the 1948 census only 14% of the population were engaged in agriculture or fishing and the proportion of wage and salary earners in the population has risen steadily from 66% in 1948 to 68% in 1957, 77% in 1967 and 85% in 1985 (a figure no different to that in Australia).²⁵ Immigrants can return home without losing access to bright lights or modern jobs, though their wages will almost certainly be significantly lower (see Footnote 14). The original emigration was for many of them not a venture into the proletarian

condition but a search for higher wages or a response to unemployment or the fear of retrenchment in the docks and shipyards that served the withdrawing British naval presence.²⁶ Since then the port has become busy servicing the needs of other kinds of ships – oil tankers and containers and cruise liners, a considerable amount of light industry has been established and tourism has developed. It was decided to restrict the study to the main island of Malta in order to produce a complementary study to the village study of Qala.

The study is based on the combination of two elements. The first is a group of 22 long open-ended interviews. The initial contacts were mainly made through the assistance of the Workers' Participation Development Centre (WPDC) at the University of Malta and their spouses. These then led on to their brothers and sisters, grown up children, parents and workmates. The trail started in the University but rapidly led back into the working class at many points. Most were resident in the harbour conurbation or in the outer harbour area. Had time allowed, the contacts could have been followed further, perhaps indefinitely. There were in addition 11 responses to a letter in the newspaper asking for information. Seven of these were followed up with interviews. Less revealing, though more representative were 114 questionnaires completed by returned parents of five secondary schools, chosen to cover a range of catchment areas and social groups. There were nine responses from the two private schools of St Aloysius and De La Salle, eight from the Corradino trade school, ten from the Hamrun junior lyceum and 87 from Mriehel girls junior lyceum. The response rate was 75% of the households. They covered 65 men and 49 women in 80 households. There were replies from both partners in 34 couples, with a further 7 cases (three men and four women) where only one partner replied though both had been in Australia. In addition there were 28 men and 11 women who seemed to have married non-returnees in Malta.

SURVEY PARAMETERS

Age Now:	Men	Women
	%	%
Under 35	–	9.
35 – 39	13.	(36.
40 – 44	(50.	76%(40.
45 – 49	73%(23.	11.
50 +	14.	4.
	100.	100.
	n.65	n.49

Age went to Australia:		
Under 10 (or born there)	(5.	(9.
10 - 16	10%(5.	13%(4.
17 - 24	78.	64.
25 +	13.	22.
Age of Final return to Malta:		
Under 17	3.	—
17 - 24	22.	20.
25 - 29	30.	38.
30 - 39	38.	40.
40 +	6.	4.
Date of First going to Australia:		
Before 1963	27.	22.
1963 - 1967	(53.	24.
1968 - 1973	68%(15.	41.
1974 - 1986	3.	13.
Date of last return:		
Before 1965	6.	—
1965 - 1969	34.	20.
1970 - 1974	20.	20.
1975 - 1979	25.	38.
1980 -	14.	22.
Length of Stay:		
Under 2 years	2.	2.
2 + 4 years	28.	31.
5 - 9 years	33.	40.
10 - 14 years	16.	13.
15 + years	20.	13.
	100.	100.
	n.65	n.49

The current age of the sample derives from their status as parents of high school children. It is this which has largely determined the emigrant cohorts to which they belong, with 65% going between

1963 – 1973, a period which accounts for only one-third of all emigrants to Australia. given that these are largely now probably permanent returnees, their length of stay is generally less than the Qala experience would suggest, although the age structure would not have precluded a greater proportion of longer term emigrants. Although there are few who returned before 1965, they are scattered through the whole period since.

Neither the interviews nor the survey fit the Qala model of two stage migration. Only one interviewee and only seven of the 34 survey couple husbands married a woman who emigrated later than themselves. In two-thirds of the survey couples the pair first emigrated together and in the remaining cases the woman had preceded her husband to be, accompanying her parents.

More significantly both interviews and survey indicated a far lower proportion for whom emigration had been initially planned as a finite project than either the Qala model or King's general survey indicated.

	Men %	Women %
Finite (Specified or Unspecified) Period of Emigration Originally planned	33.	49.
Went to stay/for good	52.	30.
Other (don't know, went to see, born there, went with parents)	15.	21.
	100. n.65	100. n.49

Amongst the interviewees only one couple had gone with what may be called a 'guest worker' orientation. The Arrigos* had cut short their planned six year stint to 4½ years when Mary became pregnant because the required level of savings needed two incomes and spartan accommodation. *'We rented one room, from relatives and there were rats'*. Their savings were however enough to buy a flat and a car on their return and with that they were well content. Of an orientation to long years of sacrifice aimed at early retirement or the setting up of an independent enterprise there is scarcely a trace. The only retired interviewees had returned in their seventies, to be near nephews, because

it seemed unwise to remain out of reach of any relatives in their declining state of health.²⁷ In the sample were only two men who fitted the Qala idyll – retiring early to a little part time work on their return. One of these had won a lottery. There were a further four men who did nothing when they returned but two of these were clearly unemployed, seeking work and unhappy about it. The case of the other two is unclear, but they were quite young and perhaps engaged in a black economy they did not wish to declare. At first sight the self-employment goal appears a little more likely.

What did on returning	Men %
Obtained a job	64.0
Nothing (retired, unemployed, ect)	8.0
Self-employed, own business	25.0
At school	3.0
	100.0
	n.65

* All names of returnees are fictional.

It is true that of the 14 who started in self-employment five abandoned it later. (Three of these five now regret their return and none is contented). What is more counter-indicative is that only four of the 14 say they returned in order to set up a business or that saving for a business was an advantage of their stay, or indeed mention planning their return at all. Half of them had gone to Australia intending to settle and most had returned because of family or homesickness. Among the interviewees moves to self-employment were quite common, but revealed clearly the irrelevance of the model. Edward Balzan and Jack Agius both had the strong commitment to community service which is frequent among Maltese.²⁸ Edward had worked for many years in Australia as a hospital orderly and found enormous satisfaction in companionship with the sick and in interpreting for immigrant patients. He was very involved with the Maltese Club and also had worked as a volunteer scripture teacher in schools. Jack had been a founding member of community organisations in Australia and Malta and a person of some public standing, who worked for a travel agent in both countries, organising visits between them. Both had considered setting up their own business as a means of making a living, and both had rejected it as likely to interfere with their freedom to devote themselves to that which most interested them.

The Cassars and the Portellis had both decided to come back quite suddenly after nine and twenty years in Australia, in the first case because Lilly missed her parents, in the second because of an attack of homesickness by John while visiting Malta. The Cassars found that the difference in house costs between the countries left a surplus with which they bought a minibus, which he operated successfully for a number of years. When he lost some lucrative contracts he abandoned it and took a better paying job instead. *'It was all very sudden. If we had known we were coming back we might had saved for it, but it worked out anyway'*.

John Portelli's brother in Malta proposed to them a partnership in which he would provide the premises and they would provide the labour to set up a guesthouse. John had always preferred the security of a regular wage, but it offered a means of coming home. Antoinette loved Australia but her work as a catering manageress had opened her eyes to the potential in such a business. The enterprise foundered after a couple of years on a family quarrel about money. By now it was too late to remigrate for the teenaged daughters, tempted back with them initially by sun and sea, were settled and married. John found again a job as a fitter.

Perhaps the most revealing case is that of Carmelo the butcher. He had worked in Australia for eleven years in a bacon factory, working his way up from labourer to leading hand. He had all his family and many friends in Australia, but his wife was alone and prevailed on him to return. He told her he was unwilling to accept the wages and conditions of a Maltese factory – if he could make a go of his own shop, alright, otherwise they would remigrate. The shop worked out well in a traditional style. There are no big supermarkets in Malta and small shops do not need to open for long hours to compete. In 35 hours a week or so he could achieve the same standard of living as had required overtime and weekend work at the bacon factory. He had more time for his family. But he missed his relatives and the social life and the mateship of Australia and the factory. As a butcher he saw only women all day long. Finally after twelve years back, at the age of 40 he took the plunge, obtained a new visa, sold up and packed, intending to return and seek again a job in a meatworks (his resources would not run to a business in Australia). At the eleventh hour sanity prevailed, in the form of the refusal of the children (one engaged, the other completing a trade training) to go with them.

In Australia too the tendency to set up independent enterprises is lower among the Maltese than many other immigrant groups. In the 1986 census 28% of employed Greek born immigrants, 26% of the Italian born but only 12% of the Maltese born were employers or self-employed. The

Maltese are an admirable and hardworking people. The country has made more of its recent independence than most and achieved much in an unfavourable economic climate. Petty entrepreneurship is not however one of their driving forces. They are too many generations away from a peasant heritage and too accustomed to setting high value on a reliable employer and on job security. Malta is a tiny island with a magnificent harbour, set at what was for long the crossroads of the world, between Europe, Asia and Africa. In Neolithic times it was it seems the founder of the megalithic culture that spread to Stonehenge and elsewhere, but since then it has mainly served as a base and haven for navies and traders from elsewhere and its population have acted as the workforce, skilled and unskilled to service the ships and their masters.

The Maltese migration chain consists of moves within the working class condition from start to finish. Of the migrants to Australia from 1959 – 1985 who had been in the Maltese workforce, 72% had done non-agricultural manual work before migrating.

SURVEY OCCUPATIONS IN AUSTRALIA

Last Job – Men	%
Skilled Tradesmen (including drivers)	28.
Semi and Unskilled Manual Jobs	44.
Non-Manual Jobs (clerical, real estate sales, driving instructor, foreman)	9.
Own Business (including 2 farming)	6.
Unclassifiable	8.
Did not Work	5.
	100.
	n.65

The 1981 Australian census shows 61% of Maltese born in the workforce were craftsmen, operatives or labourers or transport and communication workers. (Only 30% of the Australian born were in these occupations). Only 6% of the Maltese born were in professional or administrative jobs.

Of the 42 in the survey who became employees when they returned to Malta, nine worked in building jobs provided by the housing boom and eight in the developing tourist industry as waiters, barmen, hotel receptionists, etc. Five became drivers and three went into shipbuilding and port work, (joined by two more whose business failed). Skilled workers tended to remain in their trade, (sometimes moving in and out of self-employment, over time). A few have on arrival or later moved

into higher level jobs, as an accountant, a personnel manager etc, but the large majority remain in what are clearly working class jobs.

It is when we come to look at women's work that the notion of an articulation of relations of production takes on some meaning. Men's work is not fundamentally different in the two countries. Women's work however is much less commodified in Malta where domestic labour enters far more into the constitution of the socially constructed standard of living and where it is integrated into a much more complex set of social relationships than in Australia (we shall return to this in Part Two). In general immigrants in Australia tend to have particularly high levels of female paid workforce participation, even when they have small children. In our sample 74% of the women had done paid work in Australia, 46% of these in factories, 17% in services, 11% clerical, 10% as beauticians, 7% in a family business and 10% 'other' (a supervisor, a training officer in a laboratory, a dress designer and a teacher). Since their return 78% had never done a paid job and half of the remainder had worked discontinuously. The women in the survey were more unambiguously glad to be home than were the men (55% compared with 41%) and the interviews indicated that the fact that they did not have a paid job was seen by many of them as one important reason for preferring Malta. It was *'better for the children'*, and they would not like to leave them with anyone else. The contrast was not seen as a personal choice but as a social construct. *'If I was in Australia now I would have to have a job. My sister there is working with a one year old'*. On the other hand *'I couldn't go out to work here, I have far too much to do'*. A local newspaper has been reporting the inability of factories to fill 500 machinists jobs for women.

It is not immediately clear why in Australia, where men's wages are much higher, two incomes are seen as necessary yet, we should note that despite the lower pay rates and the single incomes over half of both men and women considered their standard of living in Malta to be *'the same'* as it had been in Australia. It seems that when people move from one society to another, where social expectations and the mix of commodified and non-commodified values differ, they can suffer a substantial fall in monetary income without experiencing it as a decline in their standard of living – so long as certain basic needs are met.

Many of the components of the standard of living which are paid for in Australia are provided by domestic work here. There seems to be for example more material shops than clothes or home furnishing shops. Home cooking is more varied than that available in the few non-tourist oriented restaurants and there are not many *'take aways'*. Houses are ornately decorated with marble floors, wrought iron arches, lace curtains and glass chandeliers all kept spotlessly clean so they can be

publicly displayed through glass doors that open onto the pavements. Children are much loved and much cared for, and until recently numerous. Family celebrations – births, first communions, confirmations and marriages – are lavishly celebrated with many guests and elaborate food and clothing made by the mother with help from a circle of relatives. There is a lot of visiting. Even Antionette Portelli who had had a long very satisfying and much regretted work career in Australia (while her mother had cared for the children) and who regretted the return, remarked that *'when I came to Malta on holiday I used to admire the young girls pushing prams, taking their kids for a stroll – we didn't have time for such things in Australia – I thought of what I'd missed'*.

Here let us note the articulation. It was migration and the paid work of women in Australia which often made possible the outright purchase of the house and its furnishings and thereafter the maintenance of the 'same' standard of living with a single, lower income. If the Maltese show little inclination to purchase premises and tools for men's work they certainly do so for women's non-waged work.

One might say that people left Malta for economic reasons but that once the pressure of these was reduced (because of the money made in Australia and because of the improving situation in Malta) then non-economic factors were able to have more play and prompted a return. This would however impose the over-simplification of these categories. It would ignore the desire for wider choices and open horizons that was almost always bound up with the 'economic' departure. It would discount the real economic value of Malta's 'non-economic' attractions. In other countries people will pay a lot for sun and sea, boating and fishing on the doorstep and for conviviality, general accessibility and security. It would also forget the 'non-economic' losses involved in return – the relatives and friends and the ethnic community left behind in Australia and the memories of youthful adventure.

For the returnees Australia is a large, new continent, a place of open spaces and opportunities but one where outside the family network and community they have taken with them, in the end for many there may be loneliness and no full acceptance. Malta is a *'very small island'*, where everyone knows everyone and where there is an intense sometimes embittered, kinship, neighbourly, communal and political life. These contrasts prompt both the departure and the return. Some Maltese emigrated because they were unemployed, more because they sought higher wages or saw limited and shrinking work opportunities around them. There is also however a long tradition of emigration going back to the 19th century and increasingly by the 1960s and 1970s they went to join other relatives (sometimes most of their family) already there, in the Maltese suburbs of Sydney and Melbourne. *'For the natives of*

Malta the rocky islands have become perches, affording a beginning in life and some sustenance it is true, but mere footholds on a life which many Maltese feel can only be brought to fruition in the wider world beyond the Grand Harbour . . . happy to leave it and happy to return'.

The reasons for return essentially involved a complex of personal feelings – missing parents and relatives, feeling lonely, unsettled, fed up, missing the country and the way of life, all of which was often grouped under the name of 'homesickness'. This had motivated 42% of the men and 58% of the women. Family obligations, especially to sick or aged parents added a further 10% to each of these percentages. Men in addition had returned for work related reasons in 13% of cases (to set up a business or take up a job) to marry in 7% of cases and to avoid conscription in 5% of cases. Thirteen percent of men and 15% of women came back only because their spouse wished to come. The stereotype that men only return before retirement '*because the wife misses her mother*' was thus not borne out. If women mentioned their relatives more often than did the men it was perhaps because they were less likely to be in Australia, 75% of the men still have relatives there but only 66% of the women. Women were more likely than men to have followed their spouse into the complete unknown. However men were no more often than women an unwilling returnee and were frequently affected by the same feelings. Homesickness often strikes suddenly, like love, falling upon people perhaps long and happily established in a country where they have chosen to settle. In some cases it affected men and women all of whose close relatives were in Australia. It may be triggered by a setback there, a flood, an illness, a difficulty in conceiving children. In one case a man received a postcard of Msida, his home town, and seeing the new buildings felt a need to be part of the changes. Often it is triggered off by a holiday back in Malta. Once it takes hold it can become a consuming passion like '*an attack of madness*' and though the feeling is most often shared it can sometimes drag an unwilling partner or children in its wake. Barbara Micallef had lived in Australia happily for 21 years. Three of her four children were married there and there were grandchildren. In Malta was only a sister, not seen for years. When her husband died she felt a sudden and overpowering need to return. After three years back now she has already revisited Australia once and is planning another visit, but she does not regret the move. Here she feels an independence that the loss of her husband had deprived her of there. While in Australia she must wait for the children to visit to take her out, here she can get to the shops and the church and the sea on her own two feet and feels she can rely on the neighbours all around. The family would not let her return alone however, and an unmarried son aged 33, for whom Malta was a foreign country and who gave up

a promising supervisory job, was prevailed upon to accompany her. The ultimate irony occurs when as in the case of Sam Mamo the *'sillyness wears off'* and regret sets in, but the originally unwilling family have now become immovable; the wife's parents are now too sick to be shifted back once again and the Australia bred daughter is married with a child and thinks of herself as Maltese.

If departures are by chain migration so, to a lesser extent, are returns. Half of the men and a third of the women had other relatives (apart from spouse and children) who had returned from Australia. Lilly Cassar's parents had a big house in Sydney where the many brothers and sisters met for frequent barbeques. When they returned to Malta this ended, there was *'only work and thinking about work'*. Eighteen months later they too returned and were soon followed by other brothers and sisters.

On the whole however few people in the survey were discontented. Only 14% of men and 15% of women regretted the return. Of the eight men who regretted it, three had not worked since returning, two had opened a business that failed and one had been unable to replace an active social life in ethnic organisations in Australia. In the remaining two cases the problem was unclear, but both had followed their wife back unwillingly. Of the regretful six women, two had been brought up in Australia and had abandoned interesting jobs to become housewives in Malta and two felt their social life had deteriorated.

Many men felt their working lives – conditions and earnings – were better in Australia, but 63% of them and 68% of the women felt their social life in Malta was better. Only 20% of men and 9% of women thought it was worse. *'You can go swimming in the summer after work and always meet someone you know'*, *'There is always something going on'*. The difference between men and women is greater than so far indicated. While 41% of men were glad they had returned and had no desire to depart again, an equal number were ambiguous, glad to have returned but feeling they would also like to return again to Australia. Women had fewer doubts. Fifty-five percent were glad to be back with no second thoughts and only 21% were ambiguous. Such ambiguity is expressed in the view that *'our heart belongs to both countries'*, a sense of dual identity.³⁰ It is sad that such duality can be trapped in bureaucratic tangles that seek to pigeon hole people neatly – as when Malta requires a choice of citizenship and when Australia refuses new visas. (I heard one case where a returnee with an Australian disability pension was refused a new visa on grounds of ill health).

Though interviewed women spoke with some regret and nostalgia of their lives in Australia, and missed the shops and sometimes the work opportunities, several interviewees insisted life in Malta was better for

women and for children. They spoke of the companionship of a densely inhabited world where few women are absent at work. *'You open your front door and see twenty people you know'*. And certainly Maltese streets and shops in the mornings are full of knots of women talking. In the summer evenings people put chairs out on the pavements by their open front doors and others walk up and down in family groups. The local streets are also the scene of public events. There are religious fiestas when everyone turns out in their best clothes. The anti-clerical half of the population turn their backs on the priestly procession but cheer the statue while everyone is deafened by petards and dazzled by fireworks. There are political demonstrations too, often also family events with Labour Party women in red skirts and their daughters wearing red hair ribbons. The women spoke also of the freedom that comes from easy mobility and from a sense of safety. Antoinette Portelli had brought back with her two teenage daughters of 16 and 19 and despite her regrets felt the move was good for them. *'Our worries were just starting when we left. I've worked in the university there and seen the girls' lives. Drugs, the pill, finding couples asleep on the dining room floor in the mornings. Here we could trust them to go out, to go to discos, to come home at midnight. We never worried, we know they were safe. There we could never have allowed it'*.³¹

Rita Spiteri had lived and worked in Australia from the age of 15 to 24. She had not at first wanted to return, but now was glad. *'Social life is better here. I can go out by myself with the baby anywhere, I don't depend on other people. I'm not afraid to go out at night alone, I can go anywhere with the children on buses, I can take them into bars. There are buses every five minutes, and people I know all around. In Australia you need a car to go anywhere. If you are home with the kids, there is no one around'*. Maltese buses are indeed full of women and children and family groups can be seen having a drink in the clubs.

Doris Mamo who had lived in Australia from the age of 2 to 14, had been handicapped for jobs in Malta, despite good school results, by a lack of Maltese literacy and, she felt, a lack of patronage. She was now home with a two year old and thought Malta a much better place to bring up children, not only because of the mothers being at home but because *'you can trust the kids to be outside. They have a better life. In Australia they are always inside, here they are always out, playing with other children'*. The rarity of public drunkenness, the low rates for violent crime and serious road accidents,³² the ubiquity of busybodies and of communal constraints, between them can be felt as liberating. In a world where everybody knows everybody's business, and is inclined to speak their mind on it, one also suspects that family violence, especially against children, would be rare.

Had the job opportunities for working class immigrant women in Australia been more attractive they might have embraced less willingly the trade off of career in return for an enlarged female role with safety, mobility and companionship and perhaps not felt that freedom lay in the latter direction.

TO THE SMALL ISLAND FROM THE LARGE CONTINENT

What has been the impact of the migration experience? We can start by looking at the returnees themselves. Although only about one in seven of the survey regretted their return to Malta, nearly all were glad they had gone to Australia in the first place – 95% of the men and 85% of the women. This reply is quite often emphasised with underlining, exclamation marks or further comments, *'we thank God we went to Australia when we were young'*, *'Australia is one of the best countries in the world'*, *'I like both countries because Australia is a beautiful country'*, *'Maltese people feel very close to Australia'*, *'I feel very much indebted to your country'*, *'I will never forget Australia because it was my future'*, *'Australia is a wonderful place to live in'* are but a selection. I asked Jack Sammut whether he thought such replies might be partly motivated by politeness towards me. He was emphatic: *'We love Australia as much as Malta. Because we are so small and limited, when we go to a continent like Australia it seems like a paradise'*. The Falzons spoke enthusiastically of their long holiday coach trips to all parts of Australia and Alfred Bonnici nursed a deep regret that he had never fulfilled his ambition of buying a motorbike and going right around the continent on it.

The questionnaire asked whether the stay in Australia had been useful for people's work or life in Malta and in what way. Sixteen percent of men and 5% of women said it was of no use. Sixty-three percent of men and 40% of women spoke of saving money and 22% of men and 12% of women spoke of gaining work related experience or training. Eight men and three women had learned a trade in Australia. The other major category related to a general broadening of experience. Forty-seven percent of men and 40% of women gave this kind of reply. The question had provided as an example of an answer *'met people from many countries and learned about them'* and though many simply underlined or repeated this phrase, twenty-five people elaborated on it, saying how much such meetings had taught them, how much they enjoyed such friendships, how they had learned to communicate, to be tolerant and how inhabiting a large continent with a diverse population had broadened their outlook. One woman, a teacher now, brought back by her parents at the age of 7 wrote to me that *'I think my parents' stay overseas broadened their personal outlook...it gave them*

individuality . . . ever afterward I felt they were more open minded than others and I was proud of that . . . I never forgot my childhood in Australia . . . it made me aware of a bigger world and gave me the confidence in later years to go and study in the US'.

There were however some reservations that emerged. When asked what Australia could learn from Malta 40% said 'nothing' or did not answer, often it seemed either because they were seen as incommensurable or because the idea of such a small island having lessons for a large and rich continent was absurd. Jack Sammut was a leading figure in the Labour Party and proud of its achievements against inflation and unemployment and considered that in the '*social domain Malta has taken gigantic steps ahead of other countries*' – but he denied that any of this could be relevant for a large country. However some did attempt a reply. Five percent spoke of history, tradition and religion, eight percent of hard work and savings and an equal number of family values and family unity. The largest single reply, 21%, focussed on friendliness, a willingness to help other people and especially hospitality as lessons Australians could learn. In some cases it was clear there was a lingering pain at occasions when they had felt excluded or rejected and been called '*wogs and other names*'. The Falzons, whose enthusiasm for Australia was great after 19 years residence, praised Australians' nice manners but then noted that '*when there was trouble these could break down and then they would call you wogs and bastard new Australians, no matter how long you have been there*'.

We can conclude then that for these migrants themselves the experience of emigration has overwhelmingly and of return largely been positive, though both have involved loss and nostalgia. The question of the impact of return migration on the Maltese economy and society is harder to answer in a more than speculative manner.

The first thing to note is that substantial savings were brought in. These were not so much deliberately accumulated for this purpose as realised when a home was sold in the booming housing market of Australia. Though some amount was often left invested overseas most was brought in enabling a few to set up businesses, others to take their time over their initial job search and most to purchase a comfortable house or flat. As a result only two of the 64 men referred to unemployment as a problem, with a possible two others as well, a proportion no higher than in the resident population.

Neither entrepreneurship nor a relevant enhancement of skills appear to be important contributions. Of those few who had acquired training and qualifications in Australia quite a few did not make use of them. It was clear from the interviews that there was a small but real problem of accreditation and recognition at the Maltese end. While an

accountant had found Australian training to be highly regarded in Malta, a Telecom technician's qualification had been rejected. In particular young people faced a consensus that school standards were higher in Malta and were penalised by the recent importance given to literacy in the Maltese language, a lack of which barred them from state secondary schools, the university and many jobs. Nick Borg had come fifth in Victoria in the public service entry examination. On returning to Malta soon after, he got no credit for this and suffered a prolonged period of unemployment and of special projects work with the Emergency Labour Corps.

The influx of funds will have been useful for the balance of payments and the job creation impact of returnees effective demand, especially in the labour intensive house-building sector, will almost certainly have outweighed the jobs they themselves took up. While 30% of the survey came back between 1975 and 1979, only 17% came back in the subsequent five years which accords with entry data suggesting a recent slowing down. Eighty-three percent of the survey stayed under 15 years, two-thirds under 10 years. Recent levels of emigration since 1974, would not generate substantial non-retiree returns yet to come. There is no evidence of a potential influx putting great pressure on the labour market nor of a need for the continuation of the 1977 restrictions on their access to welfare and the employment register. This may cause great hardship to a few without serving any general purpose.

What of the more nebulous but important area of values, attitudes and behaviour? King's Qala study concluded that the returnees were no more than '*a passive, conservative influence and act within the system not to change it*'. Despite a brief aside suggesting that this might not always apply in the more urban parts of Malta, this conclusion is reiterated in his more general study.³³ Here I would disagree. To that general broadening of awareness and perspectives which as we have seen many returnees consider they have gained, we can add first a broadly critical and comparative approach towards Maltese society. '*Malta has much to learn*'. While 25% failed to reply or said '*nothing*' and there was a wide range of other replies. Nineteen percent mentioned economic attributes of modernity, skills, technology, trade and the creation of well paying jobs. Eleven percent spoke of public cleanliness and the quality of public services. Eleven percent also mentioned the desirability of treating politics less seriously, not allowing it to be a source of discord and six percent spoke of discipline and abiding by the law.

There are two areas in particular that require further elaboration – that of politics and that of treatment at work. A criticism of the place of politics in Maltese life came up spontaneously in the first few interviews and thereafter even those who did not mention it themselves

all responded in the same vein when asked. To the question 'has your work been better here or in Australia (conditions, interest – not including pay)?', 65% of male respondents and 72% of female respondents said it was better in Australia and only 12% and 6% said Malta. If we exclude the self employed, the figure for men rises to 74% preferring Australian work and only 9% preferring it in Malta. It is in the extra comments, written on and especially in the interviews and letters, that the meaning of this widely agreed and not unrelated critique of Maltese politics and work is to be found.

Malta is a dual society, its population divided more or less equally between the Demo-Christian Nationalist Party and the Social-democratic Labour Party. It also has two independence days, two societies promoting Maltese-Australian friendship and two trade union structures. The parties have clashed on the question of clerical power (though almost the entire population are practising Catholics), in foreign and domestic policies and to a certain extent but less clearly in their class base. Sometimes families have been split. Each party has held power for long periods since the war in a country where government or para-statal organisations (including the docks) employ nearly 50% of the workforce, and where political patronage is rife in employment, promotion and the regional distribution of public works, '*politics is our bread and butter*' (Jack Sammut). It is also a passion '*Everyone talks politics all the time, even the children and the old women*' (Carmelo). Everyone's affiliation is generally known. Several interviewees and a number of survey respondents, supporters of both parties, said that the results of an election played a part in their decision to migrate or to return or in their evaluation of their decisions.

In 1981, by a small gerrymander, the Labour Party was returned to office with 49% of the votes.³⁴ The Nationalists responded by refusing to sit in Parliament and by mobilising all the forces at their command to sustain a continuing crisis, until a constitutional accord corrected the injustice, guaranteeing a parliamentary majority to the party with most votes. At the next election in 1987 the Nationalists came to power. Concerned perhaps lest the country be '*administered from the opposition*' they have since carried out transfers of personnel, especially Labour Party activists and people in key positions. They also proposed measures which seemed to forebode large scale sackings, especially of thousands of people in positions created by recent job creation schemes to counter unemployment (some of which had been allocated by other than formal procedures). The Labour Party and the General Workers' Union responded in turn with mass demonstrations and threats of a general strike (occurring over the period of the study) and obtained in the end an assurance that there had been no intention of sacking anyone and a guarantee that this would not take place.

Maltese society has a lower level of personal and criminal violence than most, but quite a high level of political violence. In the aftermath of an election many supporters of the defeated party remain at home behind locked doors.

To the returnees, Australia seemed to offer an alternative to this politicized setting, a 'healthier' model, where when the citizens had done their duty of voting they could 'leave it to the politicians' and remain 'a united people', where jobs and promotions, contracts and prizes and commendations for sporting achievements were obtained by merit not dependent on political affiliation; where what mattered was 'what you know not who you know'. All the interviewees were clearly committed to one party or the other, some were members and a few were activists, yet both sides were agreed in this critique.³⁵

The attitude to working conditions ran partly parallel to this. To some extent people were referring simply to a higher level of provision of, for example, boots and overalls, washrooms and canteens and guaranteed penalty payments. In general however the main emphasis was on the existence of formalised rights: clearly defined normal working hours, non-arbitrary bonus systems, formal procedures for dismissal and promotion so that people need not fear to answer the foreman back or to complain if they felt unjustly treated. The stress was on reward for effort and merit, rather than favouritism and arbitrary power. Craig Littler has argued that *'There is an important distinction between rules prescribing the way in which the task must be performed and rules prescribing the way people should be chosen, trained and promoted. Subordinates fight rationalisation in the first area and want it in the second'*.³⁶ The career open to the talents, what Littler calls the bureaucratisation of the employment relation, was seen as an Australian model for Malta to follow. On the other hand one small employer told me of ex-Australians who had left him after a short while (and returned to Australia) because he said they disliked the absence of clear job demarcations.

To what extent are returning migrants looking back with rose-tinted glasses, using an idealised memory as a yardstick to legitimise their sense of Maltese shortcomings? I am certainly unconvinced that Australian beaches are cleaner or Australian drivers more law abiding than Maltese ones. I remain a little sceptical of Alfred Bonnici's and Jack Sammut's claims that if they had stayed in Australia they 'could have gone much further'. Alfred left school in Australia at 16 and worked as a shop assistant for a year before returning to Malta. At 33 he is head barman in a large hotel. Jack worked for four years in Australia in his early twenties rising from bank teller to cashier. In Malta he became a leading diplomat with a major overseas posting.

More generally the view of Australia as the country that rewards everyone according to merit is contradicted by the experience of many immigrants from non-English speaking countries who found their education and credentials unrecognised and their prior experience discounted. Here however Maltese experience since the last war is clearly distinctive. Maltese tradesmen were apprenticed within a British recognised system and none of the certified tradesmen in the interviews or questionnaires, welders and boilermakers, jewellers and cabinet makers, fitters and mechanics, spoke of any difficulty in following their trade in Australia. Maltese education at the time of high emigration was conducted in the English language and those who had full literacy and high school qualifications found no barrier to clerical and banking jobs. Supervisory or at least leading hand positions were not hard to obtain by Maltese who had an advantage in English fluency over other South Europeans.³⁸ Insofar as Australia is not a land of equal opportunity for immigrants, the segmentation is structured through barriers set by fluency and literacy in the English language and by the non-recognition of credentials obtained outside the British system, not by prejudice and discrimination.³⁹ The Maltese indeed largely escaped this in the postwar period and their major handicap of often inadequate formal and grammatically correct literacy, which kept most in the manual working class, was generally accepted as fair. There was however, one of the interviewees who had suffered from Australian exclusionary barriers. Joseph Spiteri had sold a thriving business with the intention of taking his five children to a land of greater opportunity. He sought to reopen the business in Australia but was blocked from joining the Chamber of Auctioneers who refused to credit his experience. After four unfortunate years during which he was tricked out of a part of his money, and was reduced to working as a cleaner in a factory, he returned to Malta and successfully rebuilt his old business. Four of the five children followed Henry with his new wife Rita, in order to join the family business. *'Australia has a lot to offer to workers but not to people like us'*.

What matters for the argument however is not the accuracy of this somewhat idealised Australia but the fact that there exists in Maltese society and especially in the working class, a substantial number of people who feel that their experience in Australia adds weight to their criticism of arbitrariness at work and of patronage in politics. The Maltese working class is numerically large and well organised.⁴⁰ The strengthening of such ideas in their ranks cannot be discounted as irrelevant.

There are however some individuals whose impact may be more direct. One of these clearly emerged in the questionnaires and one in the interviews. The first had worked as a clerk in Australia for five years and when he returned found a job in middle management and is now

a personnel manager in industry. Australia helped him *'to broaden my outlook on life and the world around me and see it in the right perspective'*. What Malta could learn was *'especially in industrial relations, based on respect and appreciation for the employee's efforts and achievements'*. The second is George Camilleri. At 21, after working in a family business, he went to Australia on the spur of the moment, *'for a bet'*, but intended to settle because *'that was the only spirit in which success was possible'*. With a good matriculation he found at once a job in a bank and worked his way up over 14 years to a managerial level in the training section. He also acquired a small property. They returned because Jane was lonely, George was becoming bored with his work, *'I had achieved what there was to achieve'*, because the sale of the property brought in unexpected resources and because with the children approaching high school age *'it was now or never'*. The money freed him to seek work that interested him and he is now secretary of an agricultural marketing co-operative (at half his Australian pay). While the Australian experience had no direct relevance it had taught him how to handle people and given him great confidence. More important it had given him the determination to carry out the job without fear or favour. *'In Australia if you want to get somewhere you look at the requirements of the immediate problem. In Malta you have always to look at the political aspect – what type of people are you going to pinch, what the backlash will be. Everybody here knows ministers but I only look at what needs to be done . . . so many people try to influence you, but if you act on principle they all complain but no one challenges you. If someone wants special treatment and I refuse because it is not for the good of the co-operative, they are angry, but when they find that people of the other party have also been refused they hold you in more esteem'*. He has far reaching and imaginative long term plans for the co-operative whose achievement stands no chance unless a bipartisan unity of the members can be constructed and unless there is general confidence in the organisation. Though George has no thought of remigrating he feels himself *'a part of Australia and a part of Malta'*.

CONCLUSION

Returns from Australia to Malta have been on a large scale and though much of this has been negated by re-migration, there remain probably over 10,000 returnees and their Australian born children permanently settled in Malta. Most have returned to the areas from which they departed, a choice perhaps facilitated by general accessibility. The survey respondents were equally divided between those who had departed with a guestworker orientation and those who had intended to settle in Australia for good. While the latter had failed to make the

clean break they intended and been drawn back by homesickness or family ties, the former seem also often to have returned on impulse or in response to an unexpected event. There was almost no evidence of planned savings being geared either to the establishment of self employment or of early retirement. The difference in these findings from those in Qala seem to derive either from the specificity of Gozo, where more limited job opportunities leave these two options as the only viable mode of return or else because of the more narrow specificity of Qala's returnees, coming mainly from the exceptionally high wages of the United States. By and large for these returnees the original departure and the homecoming have been worthwhile, though seemingly more so for women than for men. Women's productive activities in Malta contrast far more sharply with those in Australia than do men's. In Australia the only escape from the double workload lay in the marginality and loneliness of the suburban housewife. In Malta women's domestic work was more central and less easily replaceable by commodities and it formed part of an extended and supportive network.

By and large neither emigration nor return have involved clean breaks and both left residues of nostalgia and loss – for relatives, country and lifestyle and for memories of childhood and youth – with some perhaps rose-tinted regrets for what might have been. A few have been trapped in Malta against their will (as have others in Australia) by their commitments to relatives and family or by the obstacles to obtaining a new entry permit. There remains with me the image of Alfred, brought back unwillingly at the age of 17, tied here now by marriage, who longs for wide open spaces and withdraws often to the room where he keeps his model train set, in a country where there is not a single kilometre of railway line.

The returning men have found mainly working class jobs, in both traditional areas such as the docks and also in the newer factories and in the expanding tourism and housebuilding sectors. They have not suffered greatly from unemployment and their contribution to effective demand is likely to have more than counterbalanced the jobs they have taken. Only a few have contributed to the establishment of new enterprises or have brought back usable enhanced skills, but it seems likely that they have contributed to currents in the working class which see Malta in a wider perspective which are hostile to political patronage and which would seek an improvement of working conditions and an extension and formalisation of workers' rights. There are also throughout Malta perhaps a hundred people in positions of greater influence, for whom their Australian experience provides a model for innovative behaviour.

Certain proposals for policy reform flow from this study, for both governments. Mass migration was fostered by both countries in what was seen as their national interest. What has followed has not been a neat transfer of population, leading to assimilation, integration or even a multi-cultural society. What has come into being is people with international, or at least transnational roots, networks and loyalties, which are often passed on to their children. While this may be uncomfortable it is often enriching both for the people and the countries thus linked. It is not appropriate or just for bureaucratic regulations to treat such continuing links and movements to and fro as deviant.

The greatest responsibility falls on Malta, where both parties have in the past refused emigrants or the overseas born children of returnees the right of dual nationality. The expectation that young people should make binding decisions at the age of 18 is particularly onerous. There is no justification for continuing the restrictions on returnees' rights to welfare and jobs. Malta has also it seems paid too little attention to the need to give adequate credit to education obtained overseas. In particular the government should, like migrant receiving countries, provide courses in Maltese literacy, to enable youthful returnees to pursue studies and find jobs commensurate with their talents.

It is wrong too that Australia has washed her hands of those who depart. The lapsing of the immigrant visa after more than three years absence has caused much unhappiness and is a major disadvantage to non-citizens. Yet naturalisation is an unreasonable expectation when it involves burning one's bridges back. It is only just to suggest that the same period of residence that gives an entitlement to citizenship should alternatively give a right to a permanent visa for re-entry, and that this should apply retrospectively to those who have currently forfeited their visas. This study was unable to focus on the situation of pensioners and retirees. There are 760 of the former currently in Malta and many others with claims now or in the future. The few I spoke to all had problems of some kind, with claims or payments and difficulty in knowing where to turn. It would be desirable for someone at the high Commission to have a role as ombudsman, to investigate complaints of both Australian citizens and ex-permanent residents.

Such measures would be no more than a recognition of the facts that the immigrants in multi-cultural Australia remain also Maltese and that there is a part of Malta which is forever Australia.

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Notes

¹ Malta Central Office of Statistics (COS), *Demographic Review*, (1986 figure-estimate supplied by COS).

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), *Census of Population 1947, 1986*.

² Russel King, 'Post War Migration Policies in Malta, with Special Reference to Return Migration', *European Demographic Information Bulletin*, Vol. 10, No. 3, 1979.

³ Australia, Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, *Australian Immigration Consolidated Statistics*. Malta COS, *Demographic Review*.

⁴ Immigration Advisory Council, *Inquiry into the Departure of Settlers from Australia*, Canberra, AGPS, 1973, p. 34.

⁵ Stephanie L. Thompson, *Australia Through Italian Eyes*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1980.

⁶ E.P. Delia, 'Return Migration to the Maltese Islands', *Hyph'n: A Journal of Melitensia and the Arts*, Malta, Vol. 3, No. 1, 1981, pp. 1-8.

⁷ Russel King and A.J. Strachan, 'The Effects of Return Migration on a Gozitan Village', *Human Organisation*, Vol. 39, No. 2, 1980.

Russel King, 'The Maltese Migration Cycle', *Oxford Polytechnic Discussions in Geography*, 13, 1980.

⁸ Stephen Castles, *Here for Good*, London, Pluto Press, 1984.

Ray Rist, *Guestworkers in Germany*, New York, Praeger, 1978.

⁹ Charles Kindleberger, *Europe's Postwar Growth*, Cambridge CUP, 1969. See a discussion of this approach in W.R. Bohning and D. Maillat, *The Effects of the Employment of Foreign Workers*, Paris, OECD, 1979.

¹⁰ For example J. Poincard and M. Roux, 'Emigration contie developpement: Portugal et Yugoslavie', *Revue Tiers Monde*, Vol 18, 1977. N. Abadan, 'La Chaine Migratoire Turque', *Sociologie du Travail*, No 3, 1972. Bernard Kayser, *Manpower Movements and Labour Markets*, Paris, OECD, 1971. Suzanne Payne, *Exporting Workers: The Turkish Case*, London, CUP, 1974.

¹¹ Michael Piore, *Birds of Passage: Migrant Labor and Industrial Societies*, Cambridge, CUP, 1979.

¹² The inhabited Maltese islands consist of Malta, with over 90% of the population and the smaller more isolated and rural island of Gozo.

¹³ Malta COS, *Demographic Review*.

¹⁴ In January 1987 an experienced and skilled welder/burner in the relatively high wage Dry Docks, earned the equivalent of about \$4 an hour (at the current exchange rate, which is a fairly accurate reflection of prices other than construction and public transport). In Australia at this time a tradesman's basic hourly rate was over \$10 an hour.

¹⁵ Douglas Lockhart, 'Public Housing Initiatives in Malta Since 1955', *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, Vol. 103, No. 1, 1987, p. 42.

¹⁶ Malta C.O.S. *Quarterly Digest of Statistics*.

¹⁷ Russell King, 1979, *op.cit.*

D. Lockhart, 1987, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

¹⁸ See the ensuing discussion further on in the text.

¹⁹ Australia ABS *Census of Population 1986*.

²⁰ R.L. King and A.J. Strachan, 1980, *op. cit.*

²¹ R.L. King, 1980, *op. cit.*

²² Michael Piore, *op. cit.*

A. Portes, 'Migration and Underdevelopment', *Politics and Society*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 1978.

- ²³ C. Lever-Tracy and M. Quinlan, *A Divided Working Class*, RKP, London, 1988, pp. 36–37.
- ²⁴ Paine, *op. cit.*
- ²⁵ Malta, COS, *Census 1985*, p. 87.
- ²⁶ R.L. King, 1980, *op. cit.*
- ²⁷ One respondent to the newspaper letter had returned to retire, with substantial severance pay, after being made redundant at the age of 50.
- ²⁸ The Maltese are great joiners and committee members. In Australia 39% of men and 29% of women had been active in ethnic, sporting, church or trade union bodies and in Malta 26% of the men and 24% of the women were active in church and political organisations, football, regatta and band clubs etc. Many hours of voluntary labour are devoted in Malta to the elaborate presentation of public events. Time and money is lavished on church activities. The dome of the church in Mosta was the third largest in Europe until it was pushed to fourth place by a new village church in Gozo.
- ²⁹ R.L. King, 1980, *op. cit.*, p. 67.
- ³⁰ For most this was no more than a vague wish and only a minority of them had tried to remigrate – prevented by family members or refusal of visa. While remigration at this age is difficult, it does occur, attested by Australian Immigration records. One of the interviewees was planning to remigrate, following Australian born children who, having renounced their Australian citizenship once in Malta, had now gone back again to their country of birth with immigrant visas. For some the dual loyalties never cease to motivate action.
- ³¹ In 1985 out of 5,587 births only 66 were recorded as 'illegitimate', Malta COS, *Demographic Review 1985*.
- ³² Claimed by the *Times of Malta* to be the lowest in the world, eight times lower than in Australia (in relation to number of cars).
- ³³ R.L. King, 1980, *op. cit.*, pp. 67–68.
- ³⁴ Few countries have a system that ensures total equity. In Britain in 1951 and 1974 the winning party had fewer votes than the opposition parties.
- ³⁵ I do not share their view. I think a high price is worth paying for the vitality of democracy. In Queensland where I live, a corrupt government remained in power for 20 years through a gerrymander in which 34% of the votes were enough to guarantee it a clear parliamentary majority. The same government in a politically motivated move sacked 1,000 power workers. Protests were unsustained and limited. Queensland was not reft by intense political divisions; instead its democracy was sapped by apathy and outraged helplessness.
- ³⁶ Craig Littler, *The Development of the Labour Process in Capitalist Societies*, Heinemann, London, 1982, p. 43.
- ³⁷ In earlier periods the Maltese certainly met not only prejudice but sometimes systematic discrimination. See Barry Yorke, *The Maltese in Australia*, Melbourne, AE Press, 1986.
- ³⁸ With the additional advantage of being often able to communicate with Italian and Arabic speakers.
- ³⁹ C. Lever-Tracy and M. Quinlan, 1988, *op. cit.*, Chapter 2.
- ⁴⁰ Trade union membership, (in two federations of course) in 1985 was 57% of employees and has been rising since. Malta COS *Annual Abstract of Statistics and Census of Population*.

