

SOME WORKING CONDITIONS OF MALTESE TEACHERS DURING THE NINETEENTH CENTURY AND UP TO WORLD WAR I

George Cassar*

Just like any other worker group, the teacher corps is not by any means removed from the particular conditions that govern it. On many occasions, people carrying out any form of work look closely at the circumstances and situations that condition their daily functions as employees because, very often, these exert a fundamental effect on their positive or negative perception of the job they are carrying out. Such considerations were not much different in past times.

The Maltese Teacher Corps

Along the period under review, members of the teaching sector employed in government schools were categorised within various grades or classes. Within each individual school structure, the highest was the 'Teacher' who, in contemporary terms, would be the Head Teacher of a school. Then, in hierarchical lineage, the rest of the teaching staff would follow. The 'Assistant Teacher' was what today would be termed as the Teacher, and within this grade there were in fact three classes. Thus the First Class Assistant Teacher would be the highest rank under the Teacher successively followed by the Second Class and the Third Class Assistant Teachers. Further down the line, there was the Monitorial Class made up of boys and girls who were apprenticed from within the same school set-up and were slowly groomed towards a teaching career. Such Monitors and Monitresses started their teaching careers from their early teens, being little more than children themselves.

***Dr George Cassar** holds three degrees from the University of Malta: BA(Educ), M.Ed and Ph.D. Presently a senior lecturer at the University of Malta, Dr Cassar also occupies the post of President of The History Teachers Association of Malta and of Harsien Patrimonju Mosti. He is also Education Officer on the Committee of the Friends of the National Archives of Malta and edits its journal, besides being the Executive Chairperson of the Sacra Militia Foundation and the editor of its publications. Dr Cassar has published extensively in a variety of areas, namely, History, Education, Social Studies, Sociology and Heritage and has also edited numerous publications.

E-mail: george.cassar@um.edu.mt

At about 1854, the Director of Elementary Schools, Can. Paolo Pullicino (1850-80), introduced the pupil-teacher scheme by which he hoped that a better crop of apprentice teachers could be formed. These pupil-teachers were to be given training at the Model Normal Schools of Valletta.¹ They were quite young and were selected on the basic criterion that they fared a little better academically than the rest of their peers in their schools. Yet their trainers had only a little more experience and thus such training proved quite mediocre. This reduced the pupil-teacher to the same deficient levels as the monitorial class, or nearly so. In the Maltese education system, the monitorial grade continued to survive alongside the pupil-teacher grade for many years, both groups forming the lower end of the teacher hierarchy.

Practically all the members of the Maltese teacher corps came from humble origins and, to some extent, viewed a teaching career as the means to upward social mobility. This working-class social background could do little towards equipping them with an insight to ambitious personal and social prospects. Such personal circumstances also made them accept much of what the authorities imposed on them without protest or debate. They were, in Marxist terms, 'a docile workforce' that could be used for the purpose of the ruling class without being given any fair reward in return, be this a more respectable remuneration or a higher status in life. They could quite easily be described as an exploited class of workers from whom much was expected yet for whom few really cared.

In the public schools, the teacher corps was made up of both males and females. However, females predominated in numbers and this tallied with what was current at the same time in other countries such as Britain. In Edwardian England, for instance, while in the higher professions (such as clergymen, doctors and lawyers) women made up a mere one per cent, in the lower professional groups (such as teachers) female numbers were very much larger.² At Malta, women did not figure at all in the upper professions while in the lower professions (though this may not be the right nomenclature when referring to teachers along the 1800-1919 period), women made up a much larger proportion. In fact, when around the turn of the century men found teaching less attractive as a career and tended to abandon it, the education authorities at Malta had to resort to female staff to teach in boys' schools in the absence of any other alternative. By 1919, the situation had reached an acute point. Though there were vacancies

1. P. Pullicino, *Terzo Rapporto sulla Educazione Primaria nelle Isole di Malta e Gozo*, Malta 1854, 11.

2. Cf. G. Routh, 'Occupations and pay in Great Britain 1906-60' (1965), in *The Edwardians*, P. Thompson, London 1975, 25.

for fourteen third class male assistant teachers and three monitors, no candidates were found to fill the posts. The only remedy available at hand was that of employing ten third class female assistant teachers in the boys' schools.³ While females saw a teaching career as respectable and a boost to their social status, males saw it differently. For men, the search for better pay and more ambitious aspirations reduced teaching to a 'last resort' solution in their working lives.

As things stood, status could not be enhanced. Teachers in Malta suffered for a long time from the lack of efficient training and a strong academic background so important to prepare them for the arduous and specialised functions they fulfilled. The Royal Commission of 1878, that is, Patrick J. Keenan⁴, sent to Malta to review the education system, put this situation in evidence. Keenan remarked that, 'Of training in the real sense, as understood in Great Britain or Ireland, there is simply none,' continuing that, 'it is too rough, and, even as practice, too incomplete, to be dignified as 'training'.'⁵ Such a situation could have easily been applied to any other period within the 119 years under study here. Teaching staff was not of a high quality. Director of Primary Education Pullicino had also hinted at such shortcomings when, as a reaction to the comments of a Commission appointed in 1865 by the local colonial authorities, he had defended his staff on the claim that, 'Men devoted to their position is what is required' and though they were not of 'a great personal distinction for knowledge' what was required was 'a competent knowledge' at the primary level.⁶ One must not assume that all forms of training were absent. On the contrary, there was the Valletta Model School and others in various localities whose purpose was to impart weekly lessons in teaching and class management to all those who took up this career. Besides, the immediate head teachers were to give in-service training to their assistant teachers in the same schools where they served, and a quarterly report on their progress was also required.⁷ From the last years of the nineteenth century onwards, a few candidates began to be sent to English Teacher Training Colleges

3. National Archives of Malta (NAM), Chief Secretary to Government [CSG] 01/1451/1919, Director of Elementary Schools to Lieut. Governor & Chief Secretary to Government, 25.iii.1919.

4. Patrick J. Keenan was Resident Commissioner of National Education in Ireland. Prior to his visit to Malta, Keenan had already investigated the system of education in Trinidad in 1869-70.

5. J.P. Keenan, *Report upon the Educational System of Malta*, London 1880, 16.

6. NAM, CSG 01/1816/1865, Chief Director to Chief Secretary to Government & Answer to the Storks Commission Report annexed.

7. *Circolari ai Maestri ed alle Maestre delle Scuole di Primaria Educazione di Malta e Gozo*, Malta 1861, 41-2. Circular, 31.iii.1859.

for training but these were as yet a mere trickle when compared to those locally trained.

The shortage of efficient training and academic background impinged on teachers' standing to a large extent. This led to a lack of status and esteem among one and all and was most evident in the salary structure 'enjoyed' by the Maltese teaching staff. When Kay-Shuttleworth described the salaries of English teachers in country schools at about 1830, his observations could easily have applied to Maltese colleagues in later years. He had remarked that such a teacher 'has often an income very little greater than that of an agricultural labourer; and very rarely equal to that of a moderately skilful mechanic'.⁸ While at Malta, Keenan himself had found this situation and queried 'how these poor teachers contrive to clothe themselves as respectable as their official position demands of them, to find themselves with the proper nourishment – bread being said to be dearer in Malta than in London'.⁹ Such were the conditions which Maltese teachers faced. And this was not all.

Distance from Schools

One significant difficulty faced by many teachers was the distance they had to travel to their place of work. At a time when travel was much more difficult and slow, many teachers found that commuting between their homes and schools entailed a considerable amount of hardship. This contributed to job dissatisfaction and was reflected in complaints by members of the teaching staff. At times, it showed how insignificant teachers were in the eyes of superiors and how low in esteem they ranked.

In the early nineteenth century, teachers were sometimes accommodated close to their schools or even in rooms forming part of the same school building. One such case was that of Mrs Bonavia, who in the 1840s served as head teacher of the new school at Cospicua.¹⁰ On the one hand, this measure eased the hardship of teachers who did not have a residence in the proximity of their workplace. Yet, on the other hand, it kept them away from their families for longish periods of time.

During the directorship of Canon Pullicino, the practice of living in the same locality of their school became compulsory for teachers. An 1859 circular notified teachers of the requirement of living in the same town

8. As quoted in E.E. Cowie, *Education*, London 1973, 41.

9. Keenan, 16.

10. NAM, CSG 04/18/1842, Chief Secretary to Government to A/Rector of the University, 3.xi.1842.

or village of their school, a condition motivated by the benefit it procured to the public service.¹¹ Teachers had to move from their home towns or villages and rent houses near their school. Teachers from the island of Malta who were posted in the sister-island of Gozo were even more deprived of their families and friends. *The Malta Times* urged Director of Education Sigismondo Savona (1880-1887) to consider this circumstance, because 'the teachers are condemned to live as solitarians'.¹² The Government authorities in Malta simply directed teachers to acquire a residence near their schools at their own expense. This was in sharp contrast with the procedure upheld in France where, in 1830, the Government stipulated that every teacher was to be given lodging, or its equivalence in money, besides the salary fixed for the post.¹³ This practice was quite a far cry from the treatment of Maltese teaching staff by the colonial Government.

Nineteenth-century Malta did not offer much comfort for people who had to travel long distances, especially in bad weather. According to Director of Education A.A. Caruana (1887-1896), the Valletta Lyceum teachers were getting sick too frequently and their illnesses seemed to coincide with rainy days! Since some of these 'sick' teachers lived at Sliema, and thus on the other side of the harbour, he suspected that it was distance rather than bad health that kept them away from school on such days. These absences interrupted the smooth running of the Lyceum. Colleagues were very reluctant to replace absent staff when asked to do so even though they were enjoying a raise in their salary for teaching loads of up to six hours more every week. Caruana was authorised to issue warnings to teachers who refused to accept the extra load and to order absentees to present a medical certificate for every absence.¹⁴

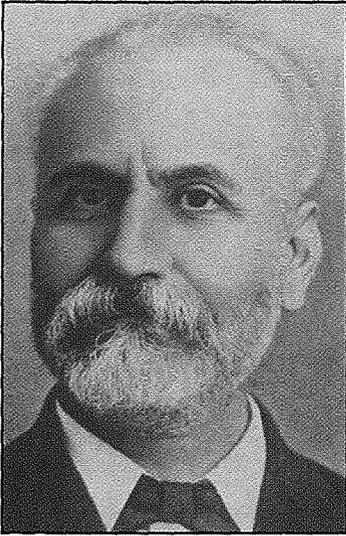
With improvements in the means of transport, and the introduction of the tram and train in Malta, travelling became a little easier. Teachers still had to travel but, at least, they could now do so in a faster, safer and more comfortable manner. At times, the Government paid travelling expenses to these teachers. In 1911, teachers were reminded that, according to a circular of 1905, if they lived 'at a reasonable distance' from tramway and railway stations, they had to make use of such transport. A 1911 circular

11. *Circolari ai Maestri...*, 41. Circular, 2 February 1859.

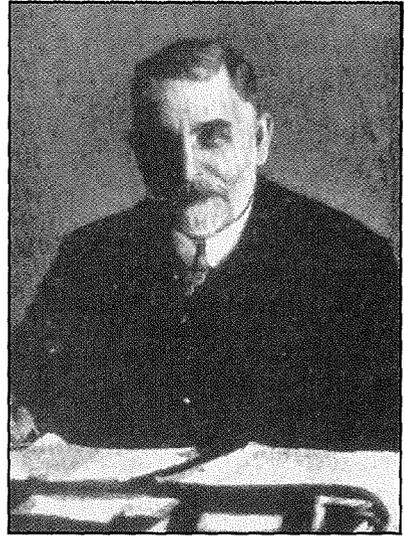
12. *The Malta Times*, 7.viii.1880, 3.

13. Cf. F.M. Binder, *Education in the History of Western Civilization – Selected Readings*, London 1970, 322.

14. NAM, CSG 01/7428/1891, Director of Education to Chief Secretary to Government, 3.xi.1891 & Minute 4.xi.1891.

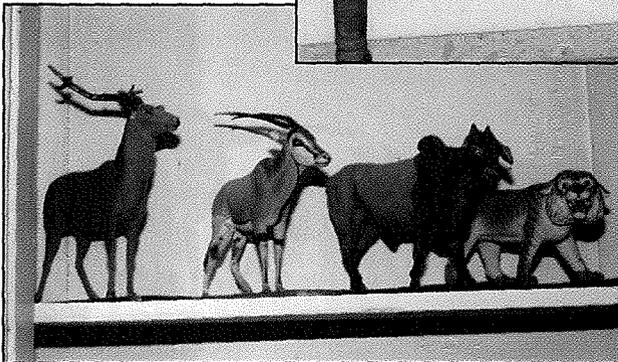
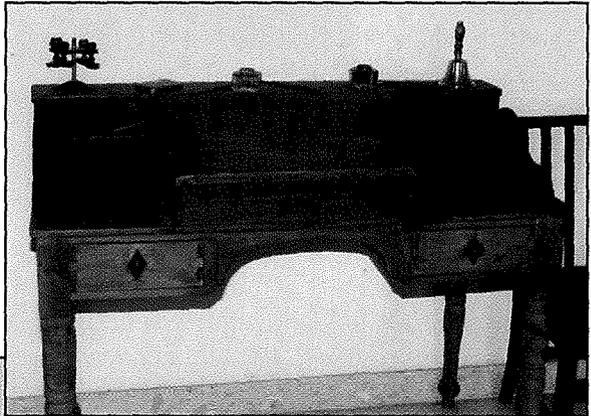


Sigismondo Savona who became Director of Education in 1880.



Prof. Edoardo Magro M.D., Director of Public Instruction from 1904 to 1913.

A typical teacher's desk of the time.



Models of animals issued during the directorship of Paolo Pullicino to help teachers in the teaching of nature study.

added that disobeying such instructions ‘may lead to the transport expenses being disallowed’.¹⁵

This payment was not an automatic concession even though teachers’ salaries were miserably low and incurring extra expenses for renting a room near their school simply meant sheer financial hardship. In fact, there were members of the teaching staff who were not granted any monetary compensation even though they had to travel to schools located at districts away from their residences. Francis Reynolds, Director of Government Elementary Schools (1913-1920), thought it unfair that persons on salaries of six pence a day were constrained to pay three pence daily to go to work, and thus interceded on their behalf by asking for reduced rates at par with those enjoyed by students and military personnel.¹⁶ The burden for teachers was considerable, as one assistant teacher pointed out in a petition for free transport from the city suburb town of Hamrun to St. Elmo School in Valletta and vice versa. The fare being too expensive, this teacher pointed out: ‘I tried to walk but the heat tells much on my health, and, besides, the money which I save from the train, I have to pay in boots’.¹⁷ A partial solution was that a subsidy could be granted on the basis of a concession, or an act of grace based on personal merit.¹⁸ But this allowance was approved in extreme cases only, for teachers were still expected to live in their school districts.¹⁹ Hardships were the order of the day for some teachers for whom even just going to work proved quite strenuous.

That teachers were not regarded with any particular esteem was quite clear to them, seeing the way they were being treated by the authorities. Little was done to improve their social condition. Notwithstanding their meagre salaries, the Government expected teachers to be efficient, irrespective of the considerable hardship incurred. This treatment was considered by the teaching staff to be unjust and unreasonable but it took them more than a century to realise that only in unity could they find strength. It was only in 1919 that steps towards this unity were finally put under way with the formation of a teachers’ union.

15. Teachers’ Documentation and Resource Centre, Floriana, Malta [TDRC], Circular no.29/1911, Elementary Schools’ Office, 16.xii.1911 including Government Circular no.17, 22.ix.1905.

16. NAM, CSG 01/2686/1917, Director of Elementary Schools to Manager Malta Railway, 13.x.1916.

17. *Ibid.*, Petition, Vincent Tanti to Director of Elementary Schools, 5.vi.1917.

18. *Ibid.*, Minutes 9, 10 & 11.viii.1917.

19. NAM, CSG 01/4515/1918, Director of Elementary Schools to Lieut. Governor & Chief Secretary to Government, 10.ix.1918 & Petition, May Cost to Director of Elementary Schools, 7.ix.1918.

School and Classroom Environment

If travelling to one's school was laborious, spending a day fulfilling one's functions in it was no less an ordeal. The school, and especially the classroom environment, are key factors that contribute towards, or hinder, a teacher's level of efficiency. For the students, the immediate environment is of no lesser importance. It may either help significantly the learning situation, or conversely, it may hamper it extensively.

From the 1840s, poor schoolhouse conditions affected a large number of schools run by the Colonial Government including the Lyceum of Valletta, which was regarded to be a 'top' educational establishment by the standards of the time. By 1911, little had changed, and an inspecting officer reporting on the Boys' Primary School in the small village of Ghaxaq confirmed that 'The unsatisfactory conditions of the school premises and the poor surroundings of the children are great factors against satisfactory teaching'.²⁰

Space was just one recurring problem of Maltese school buildings. With a constantly expanding student population, the premises (usually consisting of converted large houses) hired by the Government to serve as schools were hopelessly inadequate. They were neither spacious enough to accommodate the considerable number of applicants nor suitable for effective teaching and learning. As early as 1843, the elementary school of the harbour town of Cospicua exposed such shortages. In fact, though the Government hired part of a building for use as a schoolhouse in 1841, within two years it was found necessary to buy out the tenant and use the rest of the house to create enough space for prospective applicants.²¹ Overcrowding was a real constraint which teachers could not really deal with, thus adversely affecting their actual output.

In 1855, the Valletta Girls' Elementary School was set up within the Valletta Orphanage complex, using one room in which about 300 girls were accommodated. Canon Paolo Pullicino, the Director of Elementary Schools, felt it necessary to request a further comfortable room with two or three partitions. To make matters even worse, the additional toilet requested for this school could not be granted due to financial difficulties!²² The rented girls' schoolhouse at Senglea was not much better. It was crowded to excess, with many students forced to remain standing for lack of space.

20. TDRC, Summary Report, Ghaxaq Boys, 28.xi.1911.

21. NAM, CSG 04/18/1843, Chief Secretary to Government to A/Rector of the University, 12.ix.1843.

22. NAM, CSG 01/6915/1855, Director of Primary Schools to Chief Secretary to Government, 9.ii.1855.

With the number of students increasing daily, Pullicino stressed that 'The locality of this School ... is totally insufficient and I dare say unhealthy, being the privy too near to the classes'. The Government closed it down and rented a new building.²³ Such instances clearly point out how consistently substandard the teachers' workplace was, even by the norms of the time. This naturally reflected negatively on the teachers' social standing and self-esteem. A shabby workplace imparts the image of a lack of status and this is exactly what teachers were experiencing.

In 1880, Sigismondo Savona confirmed similar shortages in school and classroom environment. On becoming Director of Education, Savona visited the primary schools for the first time. He stated that he 'had occasion to notice the disreputable condition of the W.C. in most of these schools, and the want of ventilation and cleanliness in several of them'.²⁴ To repair such faults was not always an easy task, as many directors and most teachers came to learn through experience. For example, in 1883 the toilets of the village school at Mosta 'were in a most disreputable condition' and Savona requested that these should be repaired immediately during a week of school holidays. By the end of the vacation period, nothing had been done and Savona had to affirm that 'it is impossible that the school can go on, with the stench emanating from these offices'. Such repairs had, however, to wait till the Council of Government of the colony voted the necessary funds.²⁵

Such instances would dishearten anyone but they most certainly depressed the teaching staff that was constrained to work under such appalling conditions. The negative response of the colonial Government to solve such difficulties did nothing to enhance the status of teachers. Indeed, it is indicative of the lack of regard the Government had for this corps of workers notwithstanding that, on various occasions, the teachers were praised for their dedication and key contribution towards the welfare of the populace. One easily realises that this was just simple lip service because, when the realities of the teachers' situations came to the fore, few were ready to lift a finger to find a solution.

Official reports by successive Directors of Education emphasised the need for better workplaces. Thus the 1888-9 Report by A.A. Caruana

23. NAM, CSG 01/1030/1865, Chief Director of Primary Schools to Chief Secretary to Government, 13.iv.1865.

24. NAM, CSG 01/7511/1880, Director of Education to Chief Secretary to Government, 16.xii.1880.

25. NAM, CSG 01/13877/1883, Director of Education to Chief Secretary to Government, 15.ii.1883 and Minute 24.ii.1883.

regarding the rented schoolhouses stated that ‘They are very ill adapted for school purposes, badly lighted, and worse ventilated’. The buildings also lacked the space needed to accommodate new applicants, who thus had to be refused admission by teachers, and ‘the sanitary conditions of some of them is really shocking’. For example, the Żebbuġ village school had two classes accommodated in rooms ‘on a level with a yard about 12 or 13 feet below the level of the street’ while, at Hamrun, ‘the Teachers have only three small available rooms one of which is close to the privy’, and this in a village which was rapidly expanding.²⁶

Recurrent shortages in a number of rented schoolhouses included the lack of light and ventilation, the scarcity of furniture, and the terrible sanitary conditions. When such elements were somehow adequate, the lack of space to accommodate all the pupils accounted for quite a few of the other inadequacies.²⁷ The reasons why such rented houses were not fit for schools was outlined in 1912 by Lorenzo Gatt, Superintendent of Public Works. He remarked that ‘an ordinary house cannot have rooms of the required dimensions and so ventilated, and so situated, and with proper latrine accommodation to be safe, from a sanitary point of view’.²⁸ As confirmed by Conrad Thake, and reiterating Gatt’s expert analysis, ‘The internal planning of rooms intended for a residence had a limited flexibility to adequately serve as a school’.²⁹ Due to the weak socio-economic situation present especially during the nineteenth century, Maltese school buildings could not improve fast enough. As Joseph Fenech³⁰ points out, the Government rarely seemed to be willing or able to allocate enough funds for purpose-built edifices to accommodate the children of the poorer classes, besides offering teachers a decent working environment.

Sometimes, a teacher had also to cope with inconveniences abounding in the immediate environs of the school building itself. Noise was one of the major nuisances. In 1899, Napoleone Tagliaferro, the then Director of

26. *Vice-Chancellor’s Annual Report to the Senate of the University on the progress of the various branches in the University, Lyceum, Secondary and Primary Schools during the year 1888-89 and appendices in connection therewith*, Malta 1890, 29.
27. Cf. e.g. *Annual Report by the Director of Education on the State of the University, the Lyceum, and the Secondary and Primary Schools, for the years 1896-97*, Malta 1898, Appendix no.3, xiii-xvi.
28. *Royal Commission on the Finances, Economic Conditions and Judicial Procedure of Malta; Minutes of Evidence*, London 1912, §14203, 448. Evidence of the Hon. Mr. Lorenzo Gatt CMG, Superintendent of Public Works.
29. C. Thake, ‘A historical outline of school architecture in Malta’, *Education* [Journal of the Faculty of Education, University of Malta], 5/3, 1995, 8.
30. J. Fenech, ‘Floriana Primary School: one of the first purpose-built schools in Malta’, *Education*, 5/3, 1995, 14.

Education (1897-1904), pointed out that the workshops in the basement of the Lyceum building, and those facing it, created disruptions for teaching and examinations.³¹ Other classrooms proved unsuitable for teaching due to the noise emanating from carts, cabs and other wheeled vehicles and amplified by the streets surfaced with lava paving blocks.³²

Another inconvenience was smell. For example, the school in the village of Naxxar had to endure the stench from the sewage of its cesspit which was used as manure by the owner of a field in front of the school. At first, the Government had permitted this practice but, following complaints by the school, the owner was stopped and this decision was enforced.³³ But if this situation may have been an isolated case, cesspits were not. Schools were normally connected to cesspits, as the drainage system was still far from adequate at the beginning of the twentieth century. School cesspits were emptied by contract during school hours, causing teachers to complain. Therefore, the contracting company was instructed to carry out such work after school hours.³⁴ All this, added to the defective toilets in certain schools, made the environment hostile to proper teaching and learning and must have had a disheartening effect on teachers and pupils alike.

Some schools were located in areas where prostitution and gambling were rife. The Model Schools of Valletta were situated on the way to a Government Medical Officer's examination clinic that monitored prostitutes thrice monthly as stipulated by law. These 'common women of Valletta and Floriana' took the shortest way to this clinic and passed by the Valletta schools. While waiting their turn, these women gathered in the wine shops facing the schools 'and the disorder they create, together with the abominal [*sic*] language they make use of, is a most serious annoyance'. The Director, A.A. Caruana, argued that this was scandalous to both the pupils and the female assistant teachers who assembled from all parts of Malta for their Saturday morning training lessons.³⁵

Even worse hit was the school at Msida where prostitutes hung around, day and night, along the streets in the vicinity of the school 'engaging

31. NAM, CSG 01/3193/1899, Director of Education to A/Chief Secretary to Government, 12.vi.1899.

32. *Annual Report on the working of the Department of Public Instruction for the Years 1909-10-11*, Malta 1911, 10.

33. NAM, CSG 01/3376/1904, Director of Elementary Schools to A/Lieut. Governor & Chief Secretary to Government, 14.x.1904 & Minute of Superintendent of Public Works, 12.xi.1904.

34. NAM, CSG 01/3461/1904, Director of Elementary Schools to A/Lieut. Governor & Chief Secretary to Government, 25.x.1904.

35. NAM, CSG 01/109/1890, Director of Education to Chief Secretary to Government, 11.iii.1890.

themselves in conversation of an objectionable character as may be expected, and with the greatest freedom'. The boys attending the school saw such acts and were 'only too glad to relate what they see to their companions in school'. The head teacher of this school reported a strong sense of immorality, especially among the older students. Besides, there was also a gambling club. Its 'members' used a garden at the back of the school where, guitar in hand, they sang during school hours. In the toilets, the head teacher found scribbled words relating to prostitution and what the students heard from this neighbourhood.³⁶ It seems that, four years later, the problem of immorality was still widespread in the vicinity of the Msida School, and Prof. Edoardo Magro, the Director of Public Instruction (1904-1913), reported to his superiors that he not only had to deal with 'several cases of gross indecency both as regards language and acts' connected with the students, but the same problems also caused him to deal with one of the monitors who seems to have been influenced by this negative environment.³⁷ With such adverse settings, one could easily realise how difficult it was to cope with situations of indecency and in controlling pupils in class. Though the authorities did what was in their power to contain and, where possible, remedy such shortcomings, yet it always fell on the teaching staff in the schools to face the real and continuous repercussions of the existing problems. Many were not adequately prepared to face such circumstances as they lacked training in all aspects of school life, not least in dealing with 'problems of life'. This was more especially so among the monitorial class who were practically boys and girls not much older than their students.

Occasionally, the Government tried to relieve such problems by finding alternative areas where to build new schools. Some of the first purpose-built schools in the colony included the Rabat school in the sister-island of Gozo and that of Floriana in Malta. By 1856, Pullicino indicated that this school in Gozo had begun to function successfully and that of Floriana promised to offer the best teaching situation.³⁸ With the use of purpose-built schools, teachers could control their pupils a little better and thus uphold more order because, as the Director used to emphasise, instruction was

36. NAM, CSG 01/166/1903, Head Teacher, Msida Boys' School to Inspector of Elementary Schools, 18.xii.1902 & Inspector of Elementary Schools to Lieut. Governor & Chief Secretary to Government, 10.i.1903.

37. NAM, CSG 01/353/1907, Director of Public Instruction - Elementary Schools to Lieut. Governor, 29.i.1907.

38. P. Pullicino, *Quarto Rapporto sulla Educazione Primaria nelle Isole di Malta e Gozo*, Malta 1856, 10-11.

spoiled by the lack of order.³⁹ Other such schools, though few in number, were built during the period under study.⁴⁰

Significantly, the slow rate by which schools in Malta were built robbed teachers of a respectable working environment for a long time. There was no official policy for the building of schools and no readily available blueprint for appropriate school buildings in Malta. This was a far cry from the British situation where there seems to have been more awareness regarding school accommodation. As early as 1840, in Britain the Home Government had published a pamphlet containing a number of school plans. M.V. Daniels points out that 'Every size and type from the tiny country school to the training college was illustrated'. These plans had been designed by different architects and drawn up in great detail.⁴¹ There was no such pool of information to regulate school buildings in Malta. This is a further indication of the procrastination shown by the local Government with regards to the building of new schools. This negative attitude on the part of those in power contributed further to discourage teachers and helped to render them unimportant in the public eye. The teachers' unenthusiastic performance, including the weak authority they exerted, due to the restrictions imposed by this environment, would have been sensed by the public at large and this affected any respect such persons had for the teacher corps. It is no wonder that one young man had claimed that he had been refused by the officers of the Malta Militia 'for the great blot on his character' of having once been an elementary school teacher.⁴²

Daily Classroom Situations

Classroom management is amply dependent upon a favourable student-teacher ratio and, when this is lacking, problems are bound to arise. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the classes in the Lyceum do not seem to have been regulated by any ratio structure. For instance, from 1844 to 1852 there were three classes for English. The professor of English taught the highest while the other two were under the charge of the teacher of English. Whilst the highest varied from six boys (1848) to 41 boys (1852), the third class varied from 29 students (1845) to 73 pupils (1852). In

39. P. Pullicino, *Quinto Rapporto sulla Educazione Primaria nelle Isole di Malta e Gozo*, Malta 1858, 4.

40. Cf. various Education Reports between 1856 and 1919 for a development of school buildings.

41. M.V. Daniels, *Activity in the Primary School*, Oxford 1947, 290-2.

42. NAM, CSG 01/6243/1919, speech of Rogantino Cachia, 22.xi.1919. Rogantino Cachia was speaking in the General Meeting for teachers that set up the Malta Union of Teachers. He was the first Secretary of this Union on its formation in 1919.

certain years, the student population in such classes was far too large for a single educator to handle and this was aggravated by the fact that each lesson was of one hour and thirty minutes duration.⁴³ With such numbers and long lessons, one easily comprehends why many Lyceum students proved difficult to control and why a great number of them ended up being reprimanded.⁴⁴

The problem of teaching loads and student numbers was even worse in the primary schools. Many of the teachers had to handle all the pupils within the different classes single-handedly. Pullicino could not but reckon that 'they cannot teach at one time in different classes'.⁴⁵ A substantial number of teachers had no assistants and, even though there were some pupil-teachers (or monitors)⁴⁶ in the Maltese school system, their number was 'not sufficient to give full assistance to the teachers'. Not enough were available to go around and many of the schools with three divisions of pupils did not even have one single helper to support the teacher-in-charge. Pullicino wanted one pupil-teacher to each class and aimed at having abler pupil-teachers in schools so that teaching could improve.⁴⁷ Moreover, the age range of school-children varied even within specific classes. For instance, in the Ghaxaq Primary School in 1872, there were three classes. In the highest or the Second Class, ages spanned between 8 and 16 years. In the First Class there were boys between 5 and 9 years of age while, in the Introductory Class, boys were aged between 5 and 7 years old.⁴⁸

The problem of pupil numbers was pinpointed in discussions in the Maltese Council of Government. It was revealed, for instance that, in the Lyceum, there was one teacher for more than 80 boys. According to the Crown Advocate, this 'was entirely out of proportion and the rule was of one teacher to a much smaller number of pupils'.⁴⁹ Savona as Director wanted more reasonable ratios as he argued that 50 to 60 boys to one teacher caused 'very little progress [to] be made'. His aim was for each

43. NAM, CSG 01/537/1852, Rector of the University to Chief Secretary to Government, 16.ii.1852. The 1st Class was under Professor Howard. The 2nd and 3rd Classes were under Mr E. Casolani.

44. For examples of gross misbehaviour see *infra*.

45. NAM, CSG 01/5997/1867, Chief Director to Chief Secretary to Government, 14.i.1867.

46. For the difference between the pupil-teacher and the monitor see *supra*.

47. NAM, CSG 01/11914/1877, Chief Director to Chief Secretary to Government, 17.i.1877.

48. TDRC, 'Nota indicante come furono classificati gli allievi in seguito all' esame che ebbe luogo nel 12 Dicembre 1872' ['Note indicating how the students were classified following the examination held on 12 December 1872'] for the Primary School of Ghaxaq.

49. Debates of the Council of Government, sitting no. 40, 21.v.1877, 421.

teacher to have up to 30 boys at any one time⁵⁰ and, for this purpose, he proposed a reorganization scheme in 1881.⁵¹

The primary schools were in an analogous situation. According to Savona, the Model School of Valletta, supposedly the best primary school in Malta, in 1878 had four classes. The headmaster taught the Fourth Class and helped in the teaching of the Third Class 'now and then'. In the First Class, there were 771 boys who could not be taught by the main teacher. They did nothing but Maltese reading. The First and Second Classes, therefore, were under the charge 'of lads, picked from those very schools and receiving from 3d to 9d a day for their trouble'.⁵² Few were as 'lucky' as the teacher of the male primary school of the tiny village of Dingli who, since 1878, had an average attendance of five pupils. However, the school was closed down in 1881.⁵³

In some villages, certain teachers did not fare too badly. Even though they had charge of more than one class in the school, the numbers in each class were quite manageable. According to the 1892 Classification, at the Ghaxaq Primary School, the master had three classes with 21 pupils altogether. His assistant had another three with 31 students in all.⁵⁴ Village schools served areas with a lower population density. Conversely, the town schoolteachers were worse off due to the problem of the larger number of residents in their schools' catchment areas. The schools of the bustling localities of Valletta, Sliema, Hamrun, Birkirkara and Cospicua were thoroughly overcrowded.⁵⁵ Due to massive numbers, it was no wonder that teaching staffs were overworked and this led to stress, exhaustion and poor discipline. Teachers found it difficult to cope, especially in the larger schools, and little could be done to relieve them of large student loads except by employing inexperienced, young monitors/pupil-teachers who, due to the generally defective training programmes and tender ages, were more of a burden than a help in the management of the schools. Besides, good teachers were hard to come by due to the unattractive working conditions and the miserable salaries being offered at the time.

With such large pupil populations, school space became so limited that the Education authorities were constrained to find ways to relieve this

50. *Ibid.*, sitting no.11, 30.iii.1881, 350.

51. NAM, CSG 01/8097/1881, 'Report on Schemes for the re-organisation of the Lyceum and the Arts Faculty in the University', 21.ii.1881.

52. Debates of the Council of Government, sitting no.56, 3.iv.1878, 517.

53. NAM, CSG 01/9798/1881, Director of Education to A/Chief Secretary to Government, 20.ix.1881.

54. TDRC, 'Classification, Government Primary School, Ascjak - Boys', 14.vii.1892.

55. *Report on the Educational Institutions of Malta and Gozo*, Malta 1883, 9.

pressure. One attempt consisted of dividing the school day in two. Thus students would attend half-days, some attending in the morning and others in the afternoon. For example, the Hamrun teaching staff, in 1916, had a large number of full-day students and another considerable number of pupils on a half-day basis with all that this entailed.⁵⁶ The least teachers could hope for was that they would be able to keep down the population to about 30 pupils in each class. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the Education Department had established the 'normal' class size. It became policy that, where the waiting list was too long, a maximum of 36 pupils would be accepted in each class, presuming that, on average, about 30 would be present at any one time.⁵⁷ Russell Rea, one of the members of the Royal Commission of 1912, commented that this number was highly acceptable compared to pupil numbers in London elementary schools where, sometimes, there were up to 80 students in certain classes 'which becomes an impossible size'.⁵⁸

In addition to under-staffing, large class populations and ample variations in pupil ages, the isolated setting in which teachers have consistently operated renders the classroom environment more challenging. Even in today's schools, Bernier and McClelland view this isolation as 'an unfortunate characteristic of the teaching role'⁵⁹ and can affect negatively teachers' authority within the classroom situation. Controlling misbehaviour could, at times, prove difficult especially when teachers are faced not only with the everyday form of 'normal' misconduct but, more so, when faced with extreme cases of deviance.

During the period under review, the worse off were the Lyceum teachers. The older the students and the more adventurous they are, the more trouble they are liable to create. For instance, in 1884, there was one particular class in the Lyceum about which many teachers complained. The unluckiest teacher happened to be Rev. Sciberras who taught them Latin, Italian and Religion. Two of the students, aged 17 and 18 years, decided to disrupt the class. One of them 'imitated with his lips, loud enough to be heard by all the class ... a natural, but very shocking noise', and his companion did the same. Director of Education Savona thought that such nonsense by 17- and

56. NAM, CSG 01/4794/1916, Director of Elementary Schools to A/Lieut. Governor & Chief Secretary to Government, 11.xi.1916.

57. Royal Commission on the Finances ..., §§6798-9, 187. Evidence of The Hon. Prof. E. Magro M.D.

58. *Ibid.*, §6800, p.187. Comment of Mr Russell Rea.

59. N.R. Bernier & A.E. McClelland, 'The Social Context of Professional Development', in *Perspectives on Teacher Professional Development*, eds. M.L. Holly & C.S. Mcloughlin, London 1989, 43.

18-year olds to annoy their teachers was serious enough to merit expulsion and they were punished accordingly.⁶⁰

Another case of gross insubordination in the Lyceum concerned a particular class renowned for 'throwing about, during lesson time, several objects such as potatoes, onions, pieces of wood...' Such misdeeds included the throwing of a bottle of ink, which broke against the wall staining everything, including the hat of the teacher, Mr Cesareo. Acting Director Tagliaferro warned the class against such misbehaviour but the two identified culprits, in defiance, refused to obey him 'to the great scandal of their school-fellows'. One of them was dismissed and all the class was threatened with suspension in the event of future trouble.⁶¹ Such were the pressures placed on the Lyceum staff; for a teacher operating in an isolated setting, facing a whole class of energetic students was, at times, an untenable situation.

Other grievous misbehaviour included an explosion under the teacher's platform during a geography lesson⁶² and the throwing of leaden shot at the students and even at the teachers on different occasions.⁶³ The Lyceum proved to be an incessant source of nuisance for teachers. In 1906, for instance, the number of reports against the adolescent students reached 193. Punishments consisted of suspensions ranging from three days to two weeks, and fines of between 3d and 2s 6d totalling £22 9s 3d in that year.⁶⁴ It was quite difficult to claim that a teacher's job was an easy one. Such cases demonstrated how immature students continuously challenged teachers' standing and respect.

In the primary schools, discipline was somewhat easier to uphold. The majority of the pupils were still relatively young and this helped to control them a little better. It does not mean that discipline was less necessary. A case in point was the monitor who went after a boy who ran away from his place in class. While chasing the deviant student, the monitor slipped on the cemented corridor and badly cut his hand on a pane of glass. He was hospitalised and lost the full use of his hand for a month.⁶⁵

60. NAM, CSG 01/17198/1884, Minutes, 27-29.ii.1884.

61. NAM, CSG 01/11363/1887, Director of Education to Lieut. Governor & Chief Secretary to Government, 20.vi.1887, & Minute by Governor, 23.vi.1887.

62. NAM, CSG 01/853/1890, Director of Education to Chief Secretary to Government, 13.v.1890.

63. NAM, CSG 01/8354/1892, Director of Education to Chief Secretary to Government, 26.i.1892.

64. *Annual Report on the Working of the Department of Public Instruction during the Financial Year 1905-6*, Malta 1906, M15.

65. NAM, CSG 01/4897/1917, Director of Elementary Schools to Lieut. Governor & Chief Secretary to Government, 19.x.1917 & Board of Enquiry to Lieut. Governor & Chief Secretary to Government, 31.x.1917.

On the other hand, at times, students did show a measure of gratitude towards their teachers' efforts. Thus 'to mark their appreciation' the students of Mr Waters presented him with a metal inkstand. However, the Education authorities did not allow the teacher to accept the gift, a decision regulated by Clause 421 of the Colonial Regulations.⁶⁶ Alas, teachers were thus precluded from savouring even such minor compensations, as they could not accept any gifts.

Regarding the hours of work, primary school teachers had at least five daily teaching contact hours, normally from 8.00 to 11.00 in the morning and from 2.00 to 4.00 in the afternoon. In summer they started at 2.30 p.m., finishing two hours later. The girls entered school half an hour after the boys.⁶⁷ The Valletta Model Schools used to open on Saturdays too, and continued to do so till February 1914.⁶⁸ Besides normal hours, teachers also performed night school duties throughout all the weekdays from October till May.⁶⁹ Night schools stayed open till very late in the evening as, for example, between 7.00 p.m. and 9.00 p.m.⁷⁰ This stressful routine must have somewhat affected teachers' performance. The teaching duties added to the requirements of daily classroom management, along with further extra duties which teachers had to perform, meant a really hectic day for many of the teaching staff. This created a decidedly strenuous workload. Many pupils showed little gratitude, and the response from their parents was not much different. Politicians and Government authorities, with their relatively indifferent attitude towards the well-being of the teacher corps, did not help the situation either. Thus, while it was already hard enough to operate within the teaching environment as it was, this classroom routine led to a more intense level of strain and occupational pressure for teachers in the majority of Maltese schools.

Occupational Health Hazards and Sick Leave

All occupations and professions have their particular health risks. Some jobs cause more hardship to workers because of the particular nature of the

66. NAM, CSG 01/2320/1906, Director of Public Instruction to Lieut. Governor, 30.vi.1906 & Minute, same date.

67. *Circolari ai Maestri...*, circulars, 13.i.1851, 2 & 28.viii.1861, 53-4 & TDRC, Attendance Book for the Elementary School of *Strada Zecca* Valletta, 19.iv.1900.

68. Cf. e.g., entries in Log Book of the Government Elementary Girls' School at *Strada Zecca* [Valletta] [September 1912 - October 1914], 17.vi.1913, & 4.iii.1914 (courtesy of the late Mr. M.A. Sant).

69. *Circolari ai Maestri...*, Circular, 29.viii.1861, 58.

70. TDRC, Ascjak Government Boys' Elementary Schools Log Book, correspondence, Headteacher to A/ Inspector of Elementary Schools, 4.v.1899.

work itself. It has been realised that teaching leaves its toll on the teachers' health as they face the pressures and stress caused by the demands of the curriculum, the requirements of classroom management and the control of students. Teachers are prone to illness just as any other person but, apart from the usual maladies, stress is a main contributor towards their indisposition.

When Maltese teachers got sick they usually sent in a medical certificate so that sick leave could be granted. In cases of long-term sicknesses, the Government granted a number of months' leave according to the particular need but this period was not extended indefinitely. At a certain point, a Medical Board was appointed and, if the teacher was found to be too ill, boarding out would be the solution.⁷¹ Teachers were expressly instructed to notify the Director of Education as soon as they fell ill as specified in the *Regolamenti Generali* of 1851.⁷² Being Government employees, teachers fell under the same conditions relative to sick leave that governed the Civil Service.⁷³ Yet only teachers who were on the Permanent Establishment enjoyed six months' sick leave annually,⁷⁴ because assistants and monitors were on the Provisional and Temporary Establishment.

Teachers were 'compelled' to utilise sick leave frequently. The nature of their work had a negative effect on their health as confirmed by various medical certificates. For example, Gioacchino Le Brun asked for a transfer, claiming that his health had been affected by his teaching duties and he had suffered repeated attacks of bronchitis. A medical certificate supported this claim.⁷⁵ Giovanna Maistre, a schoolmistress at Birkirkara, was boarded out due to an illness suspected by the doctors to have been induced 'by the nature of the duties she was called upon to perform'. She was just 46 years old.⁷⁶

A high incidence of sick leave was caused by conditions connected with 'nervous afflictions' – a condition indicative of the stress suffered by teachers.⁷⁷ Some teachers considered the pressures exacted by their duties

71. Cf. e.g. NAR, CSG01/8589/1855, Chief Director to Chief Secretary to Government, 31.viii.1855 & minutes.

72. *Circolari ai Maestri*..., Circular, 13.i.1851.

73. TDRC, circular 'Regulations relative to sick-leave' issued under W. Hely-Hutchinson, Chief Secretary to Government, 30.i.1884, & 'Form of Certificate' to certify illness.

74. Draft no.259, Governor to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 15.xii.1902, in NAM, Despatches from Secretary of State, no. 187/1902, Bundle 16.

75. NAM, CSG 01/5329/1860, Petition, G. Le Brun to Governor of Malta, 8.xi.1860 & medical certificate, 28.x.1860.

76. NAM, CSG 01/16898/1884, 'Colonial Pensions &c' form, 23.i.1884.

77. Cf. e.g. NAM, CSG 01/9021/1862, medical certificate of Marianna Borg, schoolmistress of Qormi Primary Schools, 19.viii.1862; CSG 01/13402/1864, medical certificate of Vincenzo Bonnici, Drawing Master, 3.x.1864.

too onerous and felt compelled to resign,⁷⁸ while others asked for transfers to smaller, less demanding schools. Achille Ferris found it impossible to continue teaching at the large Valletta school because of the strain it exerted on his health. In 1861, he asked to be transferred to the new school at Qrendi. Ferris hoped that his health would improve due to the reduced effort demanded by a village school. His request was granted.⁷⁹ Later on, he returned to the Valletta Model School but, in 1880, the stress level induced by teaching revisited him once more. In this second petition, he argued that ‘the services for a period of 26 years in an Educational Department are too heavy, and scarcely could a man, however willing and vigorous, continue to perform such duties for a longer period of time’. He therefore asked to be appointed clerk but his request was refused on account of his advanced age.⁸⁰

Job stress was a tallying force on many teachers and, as a consequence, the service lost a number of teaching staff who could not take it any more.

Vacation Leave, Holidays and Leave of Absence

As in any other occupation, breaking the work routine is as essential as work itself. Arguably, teachers may require rest more than other occupations. If for no other reason, teachers cannot stop for a breather during the performance of their duties as, in front of them, they have classes of pupils waiting for their uninterrupted attention and guidance. As discussed above, this pressure of work leads to stress and, therefore, acts adversely on teachers’ morale and health. So the granting of vacation leave and holidays were a welcome break in such a demanding routine.

During Pullicino’s directorship, the regulations for the primary schools were formalised. These regulations included the official school holidays.⁸¹ The number of such holidays remained relatively unchanged during the period under study, except for minor adjustments.⁸² Thus teachers enjoyed about 78 days of rest during the year, including one and a half months of

78. NAM, CSG 01/17367/1884, ‘Colonial Pensions &c’ form of Elisabetta Spiteri, schoolmistress of Senglea Primary School, 28.iii.1884. She was compelled to retire due to illness ‘caused principally by over-exertion in the performance of her duties in a very large school’.

79. NAM, CSG 01/7499/1861, Petition, A. Ferris to Chief Director of Primary Education, 3.x.1861 & Chief Director to Chief Secretary to Government, 12.xi.1861.

80. NAM, CSG01/5441/1880, Petition, A. Ferris to Governor of Malta, iv.1880 & Minute 21.iv.1880.

81. *Circolari ai Maestri...*, Circular, 2.vii.1853, 9.

82. TDR, Circular no.15, Elementary Schools’ Office, 8.v.1912.

summer holidays. By contrast, in 1846 the summer vacation period had been of only two full weeks starting from 1 August.⁸³

Malta experiences a very hot climate during the June-September period. Teachers had to work in situations where the stuffiness and heat of the classroom environment, coupled with the lack of concentration of the pupils during these months, made their work very difficult. Due to the high temperatures of the Maltese summer, in 1913 the Government introduced half days for nearly all Departments for July, August and September. This procedure was renewed every year and, following a 1917 circular, the Director of Elementary Schools decided to ask the Government to also grant half days to schools in June. Thus teaching for the months of June, July and September would be of 3½ hours daily. The Lyceum and the secondary schools already had no afternoon sessions in June. Reynolds argued that, though the primary schools opened in the afternoons, 'it is too hot for either teachers or pupils to do any satisfactory work'. At last, the authorities saw reason⁸⁴ after a similar proposal had already been advanced, but to no avail, in 1888.⁸⁵

The number of school holidays enjoyed by educational establishments was not looked upon favourably by everyone. The public rarely seems to have understood teachers' working conditions. The complaint about school holidays in Malta has been a popular subject of discussion since a long time ago. It is no wonder that persons removed from the environment of schools would attack teachers on the only real side benefit inherent in such an arduous occupation.

During the nineteenth century, the Lyceum had a three-month summer vacation and *The Malta Times* complained that this was too long. It called this 'the sudden banishment of the pupils for three whole months', and argued that it was strange that Patrick Keenan,⁸⁶ 'who went minutely into all matters connected with our Educational system,' had failed to consider the length of the summer holidays. According to the newspaper, these holidays caused complaints by parents and the Director should thus take steps to amend the situation.⁸⁷ Luckily for the teaching staff, seven years

83. NAM, CSG 04/19/1846, Chief Secretary to Government to Director of Primary Schools, 3.vii.1846.

84. NAM, CSG 01/2160/1917, Circular no.2/1917, Lieut. Governor's Office, 7.v.1917; Director of Elementary Schools to A/Lieut. Governor & Chief Secretary to Government, 9.v.1917 & Minutes, 11.v.1917.

85. *The Malta Times*, 1st Supplement, 13.vii.1888, 6.

86. Patrick J. Keenan was the Royal Commissioner who had been appointed by the British Government to investigate the situation of education in Malta, an examination he carried out in 1880.

87. *The Malta Times*, 19.vi.1880, 2.

later the situation had not been changed and the same newspaper again criticised the length of the summer holidays. This time it also turned its guns towards the primary school teachers. *The Malta Times* emphasised that if anyone were 'agitating for three months' idleness for the Primary teachers' in emulation of their Lyceum counterparts, this would be 'little less than monstrous'. It held that these comments were not to deny teachers their holidays but, on behalf of parents and guardians, the paper had to consider the interests of the children. With the three months' holidays one had to add two months of Sundays, the half days on Saturdays, the teachers' paydays, leave and sick leave. Besides, there were also 'innumerable festivals' occurring throughout the whole year. This would result in about three months of 'regular instruction for the poor scholars' who sought work by the ages of 14 to 16. In concluding, *The Malta Times* stressed that any proposal for three months' vacation would be 'enforcing upon the teachers an unnecessary and unreasonable period of idleness in the public service', this being detrimental to the future of the students.⁸⁸ This article reflected a general feeling which is still quite active today. Many held that the teacher corps was a privileged group of workers owing to the number of holidays it enjoys. Few people outside the educational sphere mention or take note of the other, less 'attractive' side of teachers' work.

Holidays were part and parcel of school life. Schools were frequently visited by personalities or else benefited from particular national occasions and these relieved the teachers' routine with special holidays. These special breaks were, however, more common in the twentieth century when schools seem to have become centres for occasional visits by dignitaries. Normally, with the visit of the Governor or the Archbishop, a special holiday would be approved for that particular school.⁸⁹ Schools also had holidays following prize days.⁹⁰

88. *The Malta Times*, 1st Supplement, 16.vii.1887, 6.

89. Cf. e.g. Log Book Elementary Boys' School Ascjak June 1911-June 1917. On 15.iii.1917 the Governor accompanied by the Director of Elementary Schools in the morning visited the school. 'On parting he most graciously granted the school a holiday', 83. This was not the first time and, for example, cf. the entry for 18-19 July 1916, in the same Log Book, 77. When the Archbishop of Malta visited schools, holidays were granted too. Cf., for example, Log Book Elementary Boys' School Ascjak September 1906-June 1911, entry for 6.ii.1908, 29, when the afternoon of the visit was granted as a holiday. Cf. also Log Book - Elementary Girls' School Casal Ascjak (February 1907-June 1913), entry for 6.ii.1908 and Log Book of the Government Elementary Girls' School at *Sda Zecca*, [September 1912-October 1914], entry for 9-10.xii.1913, when a holiday was granted on the morrow of the Archbishop's visit to that school.

90. As an example, cf. Log Book Elementary Boys' School Ascjak September 1906-June 1911, entry for 6.iv.1909, 57 & Log Book of the Government Elementary Girls' School at *Sda Zecca*, entry for 19.xii.1912.

On national occasions, schools were always granted holidays to commemorate the event. When the King and Queen visited Malta, schools remained closed to honour their visit.⁹¹ Other holidays were granted on the deaths of the Archbishop of Malta⁹² and the King.⁹³ Such a collection of holidays was bound to create the sensation that teachers had more free days than work days but, as already pointed out, few may have realised how arduous and exhausting these work days were.

At times, teachers could avail themselves of leave of absence. This was a concession which was usually granted on the particular merits of each case. This permission had been granted as early as the 1840s. Even if leave of absence was requested during the scholastic year, this could be granted as long as the school carried on with its usual business. This applied to all teachers, ranging from those in the Lyceum to those posted in the primary schools. For instance, when the teacher of English Language at the Lyceum needed eight weeks' leave of absence, this was conceded if arrangements were made for his students to carry on with their work.⁹⁴ In the primary sector, the mistress of the Żebbuġ Primary School was granted about seven weeks' leave of absence but a substitute was sent to replace her.⁹⁵

Leave of absence could be granted for a variety of reasons. One teacher from Malta was to get married in Gozo so he asked for two weeks' leave of absence.⁹⁶ Another taught in Gozo but wanted to marry in Malta. He was granted eight days' leave of absence even though his school was to remain closed.⁹⁷ Others needed to go abroad for private reasons.⁹⁸ Some teachers went abroad during the holidays but permission was still needed to depart from Malta.⁹⁹ Such a rule had been applied since the first part of the nineteenth century.¹⁰⁰

91. Log Book Elementary Boys' School Ascjak September 1906-June 1911, entry for 15.iv.1907, 17; TDRC, circular no.3, Elementary Schools' Office, 19.i.1912.

92. Log Book of the Government Elementary Girls' School at *Sda Zecca*, entry for 31.vii.1914.

93. TDRC, Circular no.23/1910, Elementary Schools' Office, 7.v.1910. Schools were closed for three days as a sign of national mourning.

94. NAM, CSG 04/17/1842, Chief Secretary to Government to Rector of the University, 1.iv.1842.

95. NAM, CSG 04/24/1851, Chief Secretary to Governor to Chief Director of Primary Instruction, 9.ix.1851.

96. NAM, CSG 01/1533/1865, Chief Director to Chief Secretary to Government, 19.vi.1865.

97. NAM, CSG 01/3471/1885, 'Application for Vacation Leave or for Leave of Absence', 1.vi.1885 & Minutes, 1 & 5.vi.1885.

98. NAM, CSG 01/2705/1875, 'Application for Vacation Leave or for Leave of Absence', 19.vi.1875, & Petition, Giuseppe Calleja to Chief Director, 18.vi.1875.

99. NAM, CSG 01/7763/1875, 'Application for Vacation Leave or for Leave of Absence', 21.vii.1875, & Petition, Teresa Seichel to Chief Director, 19.vii.1875.

100. NAM, CSG 04/17/1840, Chief Secretary to Government to Rector of the University, 4.viii.1840.

Vacation leave for educational officers was granted in the regular vacations of the schools. This was stipulated by Colonial Regulation No.133 and differed from that of other 'ordinary Civil Servants'. The latter had three months' vacation leave in every two years while teachers, especially those of the Lyceum, had more. There was no vacation leave other than that in summer.¹⁰¹ Pullicino found it necessary to remind teachers that they should, as far as possible, utilise the holidays and free days available and not request for special leave if this was not indispensable.¹⁰² Later on, Magro reminded teachers never to leave school without permission from higher authority, except in acute emergencies. Even then, such absences were to be entered in the School Log Book and reported to the Director of Public Instruction. Non-adherence to this order could land the transgressor before the Governor.¹⁰³ Even when special leave was permitted, it was usually considered an exceptional concession and granted without pay, as was the case of an assistant teacher who asked for four days leave due to family bereavement.¹⁰⁴

In the days before unionisation, which in Malta took place in 1919, teachers already enjoyed a considerable number of holidays and a number of concessions. Actually, this was the main positive condition in teachers' work and it was hardly enough to counter-balance the negative elements marring their overall situation. They would have to wait till 1919 and the birth of the Malta Union of Teachers to improve their general state of affairs including their pay packet, as all-important, and even more so, than an extensive list of holidays.

Conclusion

Along the 120 years covered by this review, Maltese teachers had to bear many hardships in the execution of their duties. Perhaps the only minor encouragement was the enjoyment of more holidays than other civil servants. However, considering the burdensome conditions and low salaries that accompanied their occupation, little could ease their difficult working routine.

101. Public Record Office, Kew, Colonial Office 158/306/19850, Minute attached to Smyth to Ripon, 20.xi.1893.

102. TDRC, Circular no.64, Ufficio delle Scuole di Primaria Educazione, 25.v.1869.

103. TDRC, Circular no.26, Elementary Schools' Office, 30.viii.1912.

104. NAM, CSG 01/24031/1898, 'Application for Vacation Leave to be granted to a person employed by the Government of Malta on the Provisional and Temporary Establishment', 25.xi.1898.