

## **Michael Briguglio: *Ideological and Strategic Shifts from Old Labour to New Labour In Malta***

### PREFACE

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In many European countries Third Way parties are seeking to emerge from old style socialist workers parties while struggling against the rising neo-conservative tide from the West. Michael Briguglio's study on the ideological and strategic shifts in Malta Labour party is thus highly topical.

Now a promising young civil servant, Michael Briguglio comes from a politically engaged family. Both his parents and sister at one time were active in political and social movements that challenged established powers and values. He was active, while a student, with the leftist Movement Graffitti and later with Malta's minuscule third party, Alternattiva Demokratika-the Green Party. He is currently on Sliema Local Council on behalf of Alternattiva Demokratika. His family background, grassroots political activism and graduate training in sociology have well equipped him to conduct a critical analysis of Malta's factional political scene.

He describes in detail the transformation of Malta's old socialist workers' party into one that also caters for middle class interests. His study is historical and comparative and employs a Gramscian and Althusserian framework to analyze the ideological and strategic shifts in the party. He writes clearly and succinctly and his analysis is probing and convincing.

Briguglio links the strategies of the two dominant political parties to the evolving social and economic fabric of the country. He explores how the restrictive economic and social policies of Old Labour's autocratic and charismatic leader, Dom Mintoff (prime minister from 1956 to 1958, and again from 1971 to 1984), became increasingly discordant with the country's developing economy and rising standard of living. Finally, in the 1987 elections, increasing numbers of voters, eager to engage in pan-European middle class consumerism, voted to exchange Old Labour's harsh regime for the more open, free market policies of the Nationalist Party. The Nationalist government that followed ushered in a decade of escalating prosperity and consumerism.

During the ten years the Labour Party was in opposition, its new young leader, Alfred Sant, managed to cleanse his party of its violent elements and to modernize it in ways that attracted middle class voters. As a result New Labour won the 1996 general election and embarked on a course of serious social and economic changes. But, as Briguglio sets out in detail, the speed and scope of these changes together with latent tensions between the Old and New Labour leaders erupted and led to the defeat of the reinvigorated party after only 22 months in office. His analysis of this unexpected turn is instructive.

In this slender, clearly written volume Michael Briguglio presents an excellent analysis of how the economic and social changes that have swept over Malta since independence have influenced its political landscape and, particularly, the ideology and strategy of the Malta Labour Party. Politicians, social scientists and Third Way advocates will greatly benefit from a careful study of Briguglio's insightful and painstaking analysis.