

Chapter 3

The Malta Labour Party in Perspective: 1920-87

Introduction

In order to put the issue of this thesis into perspective, this chapter and the one following it will give a brief account of the history of the Malta Labour Party. I will refer to the social context in which the Party was born and how it has developed, its internal and external struggles, as well as its electoral results and political achievements. Particular emphasis will be given to the eras considered to be characterised by terms 'Old Labour' and 'New Labour'. Therefore, the period from 1971 to 1998 will be analysed in more detail than the period from 1920 to 1970.

This Chapter will put into perspective the Malta Labour Party in three eras, namely the Party's first years between the 1920s and the 1940s; the post-war years wherein Dom Mintoff assumed leadership of the Party; and the years characterised by 'Old Labour' Governments, from 1971 to 1987.

The First Years of the Malta Labour Party

Before achieving independent status in 1964, the Maltese Islands¹ were colonised by various foreign powers. These included the Phoenicians, the Romans, the Arabs, the Knights of St. John, the French (for two years), and the British.

According to Godfrey Baldacchino, the period under which Malta was colonised by the British (1800-1964) was economically characterised on the one hand by near complete dependence on employment in the military and administrative activities provided by the colonisers; and heavy unemployment and mass emigration to North Africa and other Mediterranean countries – encouraged by the British themselves – on the other (Baldacchino, 1988: 61-65). During the twentieth century many Maltese also emigrated to countries such as Australia and Canada. Henry Frendo adds that by the 1920s, Malta was more urbanised and secular than during the previous century (Frendo, H., 1991: 201).

During the first decades of the twentieth century, especially after the First World War, the Maltese working class, poor, highly illiterate and politically under-represented had become the victims of economic stagnation.

Various activities were carried out, aimed at improving the condition of Maltese workers. A notable example is that of Manwel Dimech, who, since the beginning of the twentieth century, had been striving to unite the workers in their struggle against the British colonial power, in favour of forming a Maltese republic (1991: 7). Dimech soon brought on him the condemnation

of the church and the British Government, until he was finally exiled to Egypt where he died (Frendo, 1971).

The inequalities that existed at the time led to the riots of June 1919 - the importers of grain were the main targets, and four workers died at the hands of British soldiers. The outcome of the riots was the granting of the constitution in 1921, which, however, did not secure the interests of the lower classes and did not include material improvement in its clauses. John Chircop states that the constitution retained the status quo by securing the interests of the colonial authorities and the traditional middle classes, made up of categories such as the clerical and the legal-professional. Incidentally, the two official languages earmarked in the constitution were English and Italian – the languages spoken by the dominant classes. The Maltese language, spoken by the lower classes, was out of sight (Chircop, 1991: 10-11). The language question was a very controversial issue at the time, due to its social and political implications.

It was in that tense atmosphere that the Labour Party in Malta was born.

The founding fathers of the Party belonged mainly to a dockyard union - the Imperial Government Workers Union. Indeed, the Dockyards have often been referred to as the “cradle of the Labour Movement” (Zammit, 1984: 42). Writing about Dockyard workers, sociologist Edward Zammit states that they “gained the reputation of being the most militant, organised, radical and united group of workers in Malta.” (1984: 43).

¹ The Maltese Islands have a land area of about 320 square kilometres. At the end of the second millennium Malta had a population of around 380,000, giving rise to a density of about 1,200 persons per square kilometre, one of the highest in the world.

It was one of the union branches affiliated with the British Workers' Union - the *Camera del Lavoro* - which formed a party in 1921 with the aim of representing workers. Band clubs and other organisations were invited to form part of the Party, and its first meeting was held on 15th March 1921 – the 30th anniversary of Pope Leo XIII's issuing of the *Rerum Novarum*, the Catholic Church's social encyclical. The Party was christened *Partit tal-Haddiema*^{2 3} (Chircop, 1991: 7-8).

Various founders of the Malta Labour Party, hailing from Catholic and populist backgrounds, were highly influenced by the *Rerum Novarum*. These included Gianni Bencini, Alfons Maria Galea, Canon Carmelo Bugeja, and Mgr. Professor Michael Gonzi. Such activists were particularly influential and powerful in the first few years of the Party, and they propagated the introduction of legislation that gave rights to workers along the Catholic teachings of the Catholic social encyclical (Chircop, 1991: 13-14).

The Malta Labour Party soon started participating in Malta's general elections. The Party, led by Colonel William Savona contested the general elections held in 1921 under the new Constitution that gave the country a measure of self-government. According to this constitution which provided for a bi-cameral legislative body, only persons above a certain income bracket could vote. The other three parties to contest the general elections were the conservative parties *Unione Politica Maltese* and *Partito Democratico Nazionalista*, as well as the pro-British Constitutional Party.

² Tr. from Maltese: 'Workers' Party', but referred to by the Party itself as 'Labour Party'.

³ To simplify matters, the Labour Party of Malta will be referred to as the Malta Labour Party, although the word 'Malta' did not appear in its official name in its early years.

The Malta Labour Party's electoral programme for these elections emphasised the Party's role as the defender of the interests of all Maltese people, but especially of workers. The programme emphasised the principles of Christian democracy, honesty and right, and stated that Labour would try as much as possible to improve matters such as economic conditions, moral values, technical skills and intellectual capabilities of those who earned their living by working physically and mentally⁴ (Bonnici, 1990: 39-40).

Henry Frendo states that the electoral programmes of the four political parties were rather similar, apart from the language question (Frendo, H., 1991: 187). In fact all four parties agreed on major issues such as Roman Catholicism being Malta's official religion, and the need to tackle the labour problem. As regards language, the *Unione Politica Maltese* and the *Partito Democratico Nazionale* were pro-Italian, whereas the Labour and Constitutional parties were pro-English and in favour of the use of Maltese (1991).

In the 1921 general elections Labour gained 31.3 per cent of the votes. Seven of its candidates were elected to the Legislative assembly and two more to the senate⁵. It was clear from the beginning that Labour had been successful in the industrial area of the Three Cities – Senglea, Cospicua and Vittoriosa, where many dockyard workers came from. Besides, the majority of the elected Labour candidates belonged to the Party's dominant pro-clerical section (Chircop, 1991: 21).

⁴ Among the proposals put forward by the Party, one could find the introduction of obligatory education, measures to reduce unemployment, industrial and agricultural incentives such as the dismantling of levies on raw materials and capital, emigration policy, introduction of laws regarding working time, working conditions, and work pay, the promotion of Malta as a ship repair and shipbuilding industry, granting official status to the Maltese language alongside English and Italian, Malta's loyalty to the Imperial Government, and the introduction of income tax (Bonnici, 1990: 39-40)

In 1922, contrarily to its previous pledge not to form coalitions with any party, Labour backed the *Unione Politica Maltese* coalition under the premiership of Joseph Howard, which lasted up to 2nd January 1923 (1984: 17).

In the 1924 elections Labour, still led by Savona, gained 19.24 per cent of the votes and retained its seven seats in the legislative assembly. Labour decided not to join any coalition Government but, at the same time, not to be of hindrance to any Government which accepted its proposals. In fact, the *Unione Politica Maltese* Government, led by Dr. Francesco Buhagiar carried out various policies which were proposed in Labour's programme (A.A. and E.C., 1971: 34-35).

By this time various conflicts had been brewing within the Malta Labour Party. The Party's relatively moderate Christian-Democratic stances as well as its collaboration with the *Unione Politica Maltese* were being questioned by leftist elements, such as Censu Bugeja, who demanded immediate and concrete reforms. According to Chircop, by 1926 and right through the 1930s, such elements – including Guze' Ellul Mercer and John F. Marks - became the dominant force within the Party's executive (Chircop, 1991: 18-19).

On 25th January 1926 the Compact between Constitutionals and the Malta Labour Party was signed. The common objectives of the two parties revolved around what was considered to be the imminent need for the industrialisation of Malta (1991: 50).

The Constitutional Party was led at the time by the Briton Sir Gerald Strickland, whose political style is defined by Chircop to be synonymous with that of a charismatic populist leader (1991:

⁵ One of Labour's elected candidates, Mgr. Michael Gonzi, became Archbishop of Malta later on during the century and led the Church's politico-religious dispute against the Malta Labour Party during the 1950s and the 1960s.

52). The backbone of the Party was made up of progressive elements of the middle classes, which included contractors, traders, pro-British importers, civil servants, employees in the civil service as well as capitalists who were prepared to invest in the manufacturing sector. However, according to Chircop many workers such as Dockyard workers also supported it (1991: 46-48).

The Labour-Constitutional alliance won the 1927 general elections, but Labour lost ground, gaining 13.9 per cent of votes, three seats in the legislative assembly and no representation in the Senate. Strickland became Prime Minister. Labour leader Savona was not elected, and the leadership of the Labour parliamentary group was entrusted to Colonel Michael Dundon.

On the other hand, the Constitutionalists gained 41 per cent of the votes, and the Nationalists/Independents 43.8 per cent. By means of this victory, the Malta Labour Party took the opportunity to propose new social laws such as the Workmen Compensation Act, the Widows' and Orphans' Pension Act, and the Rent Law (Chircop, 1991: 57). Also for the first time and on the insistence of the Malta Labour Party, Maltese was adopted as one of the languages of the Government. Indeed, the language question was a major political issue at this period, where on the one hand the Nationalists (born out of the *Unione Politica Maltese* and the *Partito Democratico Nazionalista*) supported Italian, and on the other hand the Stricklandians and Labour supported "English taught through the medium of Maltese" (Frendo, H., 1991: 203).

However, the Compact was not as rosy as many Labourites had wished it to be. Conflicts within Labour arose and William Savona resigned as President of the Party, being replaced by Dr. Paul Boffa (Chircop: 87). Boffa – a medical doctor by profession – also became leader of the parliamentary group and of the Party, replacing Dundon, who resigned due to health reasons (Galea, 2000: 218).

Henry Frendo states that Strickland's leadership led to a constitutional crisis and a deep politico-religious dispute (Frendo, H., 1991: 209). In fact in 1929 the Church started putting pressure on the Compact. On May 1st, 1930, the Bishops, in a pastoral letter, condemned the alliance, prohibiting the electorate from supporting the Constitutionals or Labour⁶. As the Constitutional Party was a pro-British party, the British Government retaliated by suspending the constitution (Chircop: 20-21).

In 1931 Labour leader Paul Boffa told the colonial 'Malta Royal Commission' in 1931 – which was visiting Malta in view of the constitutional crisis - that the root of evil in that context was the privileged “legal-clerical-political class” which wanted a “constitutional self-government” in order to dominate the population, most of which was illiterate. Boffa put forward his party's views in favour of the granting of official status to the Maltese language, proportional representation during elections, freedom of the press, the re-establishment of the constitution and the abolition of the senate and plural voting (A.A. and E.C., 1971: 78-79).

The Nationalist Party (*Partito Nazionalista*⁷), defeated the compact in the elections held in June 1932, obtaining twenty-one seats next to the ten seats obtained by the Constitutionals and the sole seat obtained by Labour. Sir Ugo Mifsud became Prime Minister of Malta. The only Labour candidate to be elected was Boffa.

The Nationalist Government was pro-Italian, having fascist irredentist tendencies, which worried the colonial authorities. In fact, the constitution was suspended again merely after nine months of

⁶ The pastoral was later on substituted by a more moderate one which advised the electorate to vote for candidates who guarantee the religious interests of Maltese Catholics (Chircop, 1991: 89)

Nationalist administration, on the argument that the Nationalists were disregarding conditions under which representative Government had been restored and because of bad financial administration. Malta was once more without any form of self-government, and the situation remained so until 1947. Direct Crown Colony Government was entrusted by the British to administer the Maltese islands⁸ (Chircop, 1991: 102-103).

In 1939, Labour elected one candidate in an assembly which did not have time to do much work due to the breaking out of the second world war during the same year.

That same year a 23-year-old Student, Dom Mintoff, wrote the following words in the *'Daily Malta Chronicle'*:

“Malta needs new members with fresh ideas which could unite all the progressive elements and transform the medieval social system into a system which would be envied by the rest of the world” (A.A. and E.C., 1971: 88).

Mintoff was to earn himself a leading place in Malta's history during the next sixty years⁹.

During the Second World War, not much political activity was carried out in Malta. One important political event during the war was the setting up of the General Workers Union (GWU) - led by Reggie Miller - in 1943. Edward L. Zammit states that the aims of this Union “were

⁷ Later on known in Maltese as *Partit Nazzjonalista*.

⁸ During this period the Seditious Propaganda Ordinance was proclaimed. The Governor of Malta was empowered to combat fascist and pro-Italian propaganda, yet this also affected socialist progressive propaganda. In fact, a sedition trial was carried out in 1933, condemning six members of the radical Labourite Socialist League to imprisonment (Chircop, 1991: 93).

⁹ Mario Vassallo states that Mintoff's plan was to secularise Malta and to diminish the power of traditional structures such as the Church (Vassallo, M., 1977: 238).

almost identical” to those of the Malta Labour Party (Zammit, 1984: 44)The union would play a very important role in future Labour history, and together with the Malta Labour Party they formed an informal alliance known as the *Malta Labour Movement*, with two respective wings, the political and the industrial.¹⁰ (1984).

During the war, Labour formed part of the Government Council which included representatives of the clergy, Labour Party clubs, the press, professionals, commercial associations, band clubs, social clubs and others. Labour representative Boffa resigned from this council on 22nd February 1945 after he was criticised for proposing that taxes be introduced in order to set up social services on the islands (Galea: 221-222).

Labour gained nine seats out of ten in the elections held during November 1945, in which, contrarily to previous elections, all men over twenty-one years of age were entitled to vote. The Party’s electoral programme, for the first time in Labour’s history, did not make any reference to religion.¹¹ (A.A. and E.C., 1971: 96).

Boffa’s Government was supported by the General Workers Union, and it carried out a number of reforms, such as the abolition of the senate, the abolition of plural votes, as well as the introduction of women’s right to vote. However, Labour deputies resigned from their posts in July 1946 due to mass redundancies at the Dockyards (1971: 102).

¹⁰ The Union’s stipulated objectives were to increase wages, introduce social benefits and provide a better education for workers’ children (Zammit, 1984: 44)

¹¹ The programme emphasised as main priority the Party’s aims to improve the standards of living of workers. Other proposals in the programme included the plans for a new constitution and the granting of self-government (A.A. and E.C., 1971: 96).

In the meantime, the 'MacMichael Constitution' had been introduced, granting self-government to the Maltese.

Labour's participation in the subsequent October 1947 elections was once again supported by the General Workers Union. The Party won 59.9 per cent of the vote and twenty-four seats out of the possible forty within the Legislative Assembly. Paul Boffa became Prime Minister whilst Dom Mintoff became Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Reconstruction. The Labour Government introduced Income Tax and Social Services for the first time in Malta.

Post-War Labour: Mintoff Takes Over

In 1949 a split occurred in the Malta Labour Party in view of an internal disagreement over the strategy to be adopted with regards to British Aid to Malta. Dom Mintoff was in favour of a hard line policy whilst Dr Boffa was more conciliatory to the British Government. The bubble burst over a Mintoff-produced memorandum - unanimously approved by the Cabinet - which Boffa was to present to the British Government. In this memorandum, Malta would have threatened that if by August 22nd of that year the British would not have requested Marshall Aid for Malta, the Maltese Government would ask the United States of America to submit aid to Malta in return for the use of the islands as a base. The British Government refused to meet Boffa unless the memorandum was withdrawn, leading to his reluctance to present the memorandum. In return Mintoff resigned his portfolio and threatened to retaliate (Pirota, J.M., 1987: 160-8).

Dom Mintoff, who had the support of a large number of labourites but not of the cabinet, held a number of mass meetings and publicly criticised Boffa and his cabinet. That was followed by a

Party General Conference and on October 9th it was decided that Boffa, whose political action was perceived as being futile by many Labourites, had to step down as Labour leader and Prime Minister. 244 of those present voted in favour of this step while 141 voted against (A.A. and E.C., 1971: 115). On October 16th Dom Mintoff was chosen as leader of the Party¹² (1971: 124-127).

Boffa and those who supported him formed a new party – the Workers’ Party, which managed to keep the Government in place until summer 1950 thanks to the support of small parties.

During this time Mintoff started using slogans such as the famous ‘*Malta l-ewwel u qabel kollox*¹³’, a battle cry which would be used interminably in the years to follow. Mintoff would also emphasise the struggle for Maltese national liberation. For example, he would state that Malta should be “either like the British or not with the British!”, and that “we will never be slaves and servants in our own country” (A.A. and E.C., 1971: 131-132).

The Boffa Government finally collapsed when its Budgetary Estimates for the year 1950-51 were not approved in Parliament. Elections were held in 1950, and the Malta Labour Party based its electoral campaign on Malta’s relationship with Great Britain, both economically and constitutionally¹⁴. In spite of the political instability, successive elections were also held in 1951 and 1953. Within these three elections, Labour increased its parliamentary seats each time and

¹² Dominic Mintoff, an architect, was born in Cospicua, the industrial heart of the Grand Harbour area, in 1916. His parents were comfortably well off working class people, his father servicing as a cook in the Royal Navy. Mintoff had previously studied in Oxford, England, where he had been in contact with the Fabian socialists (Galea, 2000: 150)

¹³ Tr. from Maltese: ‘Malta first and foremost’.

¹⁴ In the meantime, the General Workers’ Union, in a historical decision voted for unanimously by its National Executive, proclaimed that “it will take no direct part whatsoever in favour or against any political party or parties but will continue to uphold its cardinal principles and programme” (Schiavone, 1990: 29). This declaration appeared in the Union’s official organ ‘*The Torch*’ on July 13th, 1950.

Boffa's Party entered into coalition with the Nationalist Governments led by Dr. Enrico Mizzi and Dr. Gorg Borg Olivier respectively.

In 1951, the Malta Labour Party joined the Social Democratic and historically anti-Communist Socialist International. Indeed, Godfrey Pirotta states that in the post-war period, the Malta Labour Party, by means of its working class base, became Malta's "first genuine mass party" (Pirotta, G., 1994: 109). Joseph M. Pirotta adds that the Malta Labour Party aimed to develop the Maltese economy as fast as possible, and create a welfare state in order that the people's living standards could improve (Pirotta, J.M., 1991: 25).

By the mid-1950s Boffa's Workers' Party had disappeared completely from the political scene, losing its support from 24,616 votes and 11 seats in 1950 to 14,000 votes and 3 seats in 1953, and by 1955 a united Malta Labour Party once again won the general elections held that year, by obtaining 57 per cent of the vote and 23 out of the 40 seats in the Legislative Assembly. Labour's electoral battle cry once again focused on relations with the colonial power. The Party - once more supported by the General Workers' Union - now wanted at all costs to terminate colonial rule in Malta and advocated Integration with Britain¹⁵ (A.A. and E.C., 1971: 167-8). J.M. Pirotta argues that Mintoff believed that the only way to improve Malta's socio-economic condition was by means of hefty British financial assistance¹⁶ (Pirotta, J.M., 1991: 25). The Party also emphasised its aim to create work for everyone (Azzopardi, 1986: 2).

During the electoral campaign, Mintoff explained his party's Integration plan. This would include the following conditions:

¹⁵ The Malta Labour Party had already put forward its Integration plans in its electoral programme of 1950 (Pirotta, J.M., 1991: 20)

1. The Maltese would enjoy the same social services as the British;
2. The Maltese would have the same working opportunities and conditions as the British;
3. An economic plan revolving around the concept of work-for-everybody would be in place;
4. The British Parliament would include Maltese representation;
5. Defence and foreign policy would be in the hands of the British Government;
6. Local issues such as education and religion would be in the hands of the Maltese Government; (*Ghaqda Zghazagh Socjalisti*, 1974: 26).

Mintoff's Government organised a referendum about the Integration issue during February 1956¹⁷. Previously, in a pastoral letter, the Bishops had indirectly stated that they did not agree with the Integration proposal. By the time of the referendum, various religious organisations and priests were vehemently opposing the proposal (Azzopardi, 1986: 9). In a radio broadcast Archbishop Michael Gonzi made it rather clear that Integration was a threat to the Catholic faith and morals. And thus he "could not advise the people to support it" (Pirota, J.M., 1991: 159-60).

On the party-political front, the Nationalists boycotted the referendum due to their argument that Integration would result in the dominance of Protestantism over Catholicism, leading to the introduction of civil marriage, divorce and birth control (1991: 28). The Progressive Constitutionalists, led by Strickland's daughter Mabel, appealed to the Maltese to vote 'no'. On

¹⁶ In fact, Labour's alternative to Integration, were the project to fail, was self-determination, which "was not considered to be able to engender economic well-being" (Pirota, J.M.: 25)

¹⁷ In a 1970s' publication by Labour's socialist youths, the situation was described as follows:

"as usual, the servants of the British Government, when realising that Mintoff's plan was slowly but steadily moving forward, did their utmost to agitate the meek Maltese against Integration with Britain. They alarmed the Maltese that the [Catholic] religion would be smashed, and told them that even the use of fireworks would not be allowed. They scared them that Maltese soldiers would start dying in foreign wars, that Maltese culture would be lost, that English workers would take the place of Maltese workers at the Dockyards, and so on" (*Ghaqda Zghazagh Socjalisti*, 1974: 29)

the other hand, Labour appealed to voters to vote 'yes'. According to J.M. Pirotta, given that the Malta Labour Party was mainly supported by the working class, most of whom depended on the British for employment, proposals that would guarantee employment and standards of living similar to those of the British were likely to be supported (1991: 26-27). The referendum took place with a turnout of 45.2 per cent of the electorate. 56 per cent of those who voted agreed that Malta should integrate with Britain.

The British Government did not accept the outcome of the referendum. No agreement was reached on the Integration issue¹⁸ as well as on other issues, and the British Government made matters worse by announcing that it was discharging employees from the Naval Dockyards (Galea, 2000: 229).

It was now becoming clear that changes in British defence policies were going to result in massive rundowns of the British presence in Malta. Economist Lino Briguglio states that by then the need was felt to implement a co-ordinated development plan to diversify Malta's economy (Briguglio, L. 1988: 189).

The Maltese Government resigned from office as a protest action against the British on 24th March 1958 and a few days later the British revoked the Constitution. At a mass meeting in Floriana on 6th April, Mintoff, in anti-colonial rhetoric, stated that the British had no concern for the Maltese and their hardships. Therefore, given that "suitable arguments for civil negotiations were no longer of any use" (Pirotta, J.M., 1991: 441), he proclaimed that the Maltese should

¹⁸ J.M. Pirotta states that Integration became even less attractive to the British due to Britain's Middle East and Suez Canal fiascos, which "killed once and for all Britain's pretensions to world power status" and brought about "disastrous" economic consequences (Pirotta, J.M., 1991: 287)

struggle in the streets where “voices [would be] rising up from the streets and squares” (1991: 441).

Eventually a historic general strike was held on April 28th, in the midst of violence and intimidation by the police and military forces. Public meetings and demonstrations were banned and the Labour Party adopted passive resistance. Subsequently, direct rule by the British was introduced, following the Nationalist Party’s refusal to lead a minority government (Azzopardi, 1986: 29-31). The Malta Labour Party was now to start demanding Independence for Malta (Pirota, J.M., 1991: 441).

On November 19th, 1958, a Malta Labour Party delegation led by Mintoff flew to London, making its first official request for Malta’s Independence. In the first Labour mass meeting to be held the following year, Mintoff stated that his party would transform Malta’s economy from one based on destruction to one based on friendship and peace (*Ghaqda Zghazagh Socjalisti*, 1974: 44-45).

In an article entitled ‘*A New Plan for Malta*’, which appeared in the acclaimed ‘New Statesman’ magazine, Mintoff elaborated his vision for Malta. He stated that Malta should become a neutral port whose freedom was to be guaranteed by the Council of the United Nations. In his words, “As a nuclear-free zone with a free and stable society, we would quickly develop into a Switzerland in the heart of the Mediterranean” (Azzopardi, 1986: 39). Mintoff proposed that Malta would form part of the European common market and should adopt similar commercial ties with the island’s Arab neighbours. “We possess the capability, the strength and the social capital to build a New Malta, the meeting point of unity and commerce between the European continent and the Arab nations” (1986).

Mintoff's slogan '*Malta l-ewwel u qabel kollox*' was amplified in many of his speeches and writings during that period. Indeed, Mintoff's rhetoric was very similar to that of various anti-colonial movements of the time such as Nasser of Egypt and Makarios of Cyprus.

As the 1960s came in, the church, lead by Archbishop Gonzi, continued to oppose the Malta Labour Party. In this regard, Mario Vassallo holds that between the 1950s and the 1960s the Church was determined to keep Mintoff out of power especially due to his socialism and secularist plans (Vassallo, M., 1977: 238). In a pastoral letter issued in 1960 the church made it clear that "no-one can be a good socialist and a sincere Christian at the same time" (Azzopardi, 1986: 45). The Malta Labour Party's continuous insistence that it was not against the church and that its social policies were synonymous with Christian beliefs were to no avail. Lorry Sant, a militant trade-unionist, editor of Labour newspaper '*The Struggle*' and future Minister, was given the Interdict by the Church authorities for criticising the Archbishop's pastoral letter in one of his articles. Eventually, during 1961, the Church imposed the Interdict on all members of the Party National Executive for allegedly swinging the Party too much to the left. In a mass meeting in Zabbar, Mintoff replied to the Church's decision by stating that

"We worked and still work in the interest of workers, just as our Lord Jesus Christ taught us. We put these teachings in practice. We were indicted because we were courageous enough to say that we are against the British in our struggle for Independence. We will keep on struggling for our country, but we will tell them 'do not collaborate with the British Government'. Then we would be able to meet like brothers, because we still are brothers. In this holy and just struggle for freedom, God is with us" (*Ghaqda Zghazagh Socjalisti*, 1974: 61-62).

Eventually, reading Labour newspapers or attending Labour meetings were declared by the Church to be mortal sins, as was the act of voting Labour in the 1962 elections. Between 1961 and 1963 seven Labour activists who died, including former Minister and prolific writer Guze' Ellul Mercer were buried in the *mizbla*¹⁹, the non-Catholic cemetery. Besides, not only the Nationalist Party, but also the Christian Workers Party, the Nationalist Democratic Party, the Progressive Constitutional Party and the Christian Democratic Party, were clearly anti-Labour (Galea, 2000: 232).

Other actions were carried out against the Malta Labour Party. For example, members of the Catholic lay organisation would blow whistles with all their might during Labour meetings; church bells would be rung during such activities (*Ghaqda Zghazagh Socjalisti*, 1974: 63-64).

In the elections that followed in 1962, Labour's programmes proposed, among other policies, that freedom of conscience, equal rights, and the nation's sovereign rights form part of Maltese jurisdiction, in line with the Charter of the United Nations. The Party stated that it would not go against Catholic principles, and that it advocated "the removal of medieval privileges that held back social and economic progress" (*Ghaqda Zghazagh Socjalisti*, 1974: 65). Labour proceeded to obtain 16 seats out of 50 and 33.8 per cent of votes. The Nationalists gained 25 seats and Borg Olivier became Prime Minister once again.

During the first half of the 1960s Malta experienced a severe rundown of British Military expenditure, which accounted for around 15 per cent of the Malta's Gross Domestic Product, and

¹⁹ Tr. from Maltese: 'rubbish dump'. This refers to a segregated part of Malta's main cemetery where the interdicted were buried.

unemployment topped the 8 per cent mark in 1964, up from 4.1 per cent in four years (Briguglio, L. 1988: 191-3). Besides, the cost of living rose sharply, national debt increased and levels of education were low (Galea, 2000: 234).

During the 1962-66 legislature, negotiations on Malta's Independence were held between the British and Maltese Governments. The Malta Labour Party made various proposals and amendments for the constitution, but most of them were ignored. Azzopardi states that various proposals and amendments were made to try and bring about reconciliation with the Church as well as modern democratic reforms²⁰ (Azzopardi, 1986: 99-100).

Eventually the referendum for Independence followed, between May 2nd and 4th, 1964, amid much controversy. Given the circumstances, particularly that dealing with the constitution, Labour declared that "the referendum is not going to be free and Malta would not achieve true Independence" (1986: 102).

56 per cent of voters (or 45 per cent of the electorate) declared that they were for Independence, and Malta achieved Independence. However, the British Government still held power in various spheres. These included the use of the Grand Harbour, the Dockyards, the airport as well as telecommunications. In the 1966 elections the Church once more imposed spiritual sanctions against the Malta Labour Party, albeit to a lesser extent than in the previous elections.

²⁰ These included the recognition that Catholicism is the official religion of Malta, equality of all citizens in front of the law, freedom of conscience, civil marriages, religious education in state schools, fundamental human rights, freedom of expression, and the end of 'corrupt practices', referring to one's liberty to vote as one wishes without interference from any spiritual power (Azzopardi, 1986: 99-100)

Labour fared better than it had done in 1962, winning 22 seats out of 50 in Parliament and 43.1 per cent of the votes. The small anti-Labour parties failed to elect candidates, meaning that all 28 seats were won by the Nationalists. Borg Olivier remained Prime Minister.

The relationship between the Malta Labour Party and the Catholic Church was eventually patched, up after lengthy discussions. A formal agreement was reached in April 1969 when the church promised not to interfere in politics (Galea, 2000: 141).

During the second half of the 1960s, the Maltese economy was faring better than in the previous five years. Henry Frendo states that given that the Nationalist Government maintained a healthy and friendly relationship with the British, with NATO and with other Western forces, investment was attracted and the economy was transformed from a military base to a modern one based on manufacturing, tourism and agriculture (Frendo, H., 1991: 214).

In fact, there were fast increases in employment levels and corresponding decreases in the rate of unemployment, especially due to the construction boom. Indeed, unemployment decreased from 8.1 per cent in 1964 to 3.7 per cent in 1969 (Briguglio, L. 1988: 193). However, between 1962 and 1970, 44,000 people out of a population of 314,216 emigrated to countries such as Australia and Canada in search for better economic prospects (Galea, 2000: 234).

During the late 1960s and prior to the elections of 1971 the Labour opposition - still led by Mintoff – and the General Workers' Union pressured the Government to insist for better treatment from the British and organised various industrial actions. They included a seven-month deadlock at the Dockyards (Zammit, 1984: 50).

The Old Labour Years

For the 1971 general elections, the Malta Labour Party and the General Workers Union presented a joint programme entitled '*Malta Maltija fil-Paci u l-Progress*'²¹. The programme was defined as democratic-socialist, and its main promises included the setting up of an agreement on foreign military basis in Malta, the introduction of social legislation such as the 40-hour week, the minimum wage, income tax reform and an economic plan which emphasised education, industry, agriculture and fisheries, tourism, housing, children's allowance and other forms of social welfare (*Moviment tal-Haddiema*, 1971).

The programme emphasised equal rights without any distinctions of race, colour or belief, as well as the duty to stop hardship resulting from inequality between the rich and the poor. Labour also promised to introduce 50 per cent Union participation in the Dockyard management in order to improve its economic outcome (1971: 15).

The electoral campaign that followed was rather quiet. The Malta Labour Party won the elections, obtaining 28 out of 55 seats in Parliament, and 50.8 per cent of votes, as against the 48.1 per cent of votes obtained by the Nationalists and the 1 per cent obtained by the Progressive Constitutionalists. Later on, one of the Nationalist MPs crossed over to Labour and Labour deputy Paul Carachi asked the Speaker of the House for a chair in the middle so as to have independent status (*The Malta Independent*, 9th November 1997).

Mintoff's Government carried out immediate changes. The British governor was substituted by the first- ever Maltese governor, Sir Anthony Mamo. American warships were banned from using

Malta's ports, and N.A.T.O's commander in Malta was declared a *persona non grata*, resulting in the commander leaving the island and the closing down of the N.A.T.O. headquarters in Malta. In March 1972 an agreement was reached whereby Malta would receive 14 million pounds sterling from Britain each year until March 1979, when Malta would become free from the British Military (Galea, 2000: 235).

In the meantime Mintoff's Government carried out agreements with various countries. When oil prices rose internationally during the 1973 oil crisis, it was agreed that Libya would give Malta all the oil it needed for its economy (*Ghaqda Zghazagh Socjalisti*, 1974: 99). Other foreign policy milestones during these years included Mintoff's visit to Mao's China, one of the first of its kind from a Western leader, as well as his relentless efforts to bring peace in the Mediterranean, such as during the Helsinki conference in 1975. Malta also eventually became a member of the Non-Aligned Movement, which included various third world countries such as India, Cuba and Algeria. The country even joined of the Group of 77.

With regard to the ever-controversial Dockyards, where Labour promised to introduce a 50 per cent Union participation in management, Mintoff ensured that this reform would not be carried out before other rationalisation measures. In a meeting for Dockyard workers on March 15th 1973 at Gavino Gulia square in Bormla, Mintoff scolded the workers for their lack of effort and told them that they had three choices, namely, his resignation, the Dockyards' bankruptcy, or that Mintoff should have his way for the following six months. The workers voted for the third choice with a show of hands, and Mintoff told them of various measures that would be carried out, such as the dismantling of the shift system (Boissevain, 1994: 415). This resulted in the first ever

²¹ Tr. from Maltese: 'Maltese Malta in Peace and Progress'

profit-making year for the Dockyards. The profit-making period lasted seven years (The Times, October 8, 2001).

The Labour Government also reached an *ad hoc* agreement with General Workers' Union wherein two Union officials would attend Cabinet meetings in order to discuss the Budgetary Estimates which would be presented by Government in Parliament. The two officials were bound by secrecy and could not ask for approval by the Union's council (*L-Invell*, October 1978).

Other measures that were carried out by the Mintoff Government of the 1971-1976 legislature included the following:

- Various nationalisations as well as the founding of various state-owned companies, such as Air Malta, Sea Malta, Bank of Valletta, Mid-Med Bank, TeleMalta, *Xandir*²² Malta;
- Reduced salary differentials between the highest and lowest grades in the civil service;
- The granting of cost of living increases and bonuses by flat rate rather than by percentages;
- The introduction of Pay-As-You-Earn and a higher ceiling with regards to income tax;
- The establishment of a national health scheme;
- The demolition of slums and the construction of various housing units for workers and their families;
- The bulk-buying of imports such as milk, sugar and butter at cheap prices;
- Various reforms in industrial legislation such as the reduction of the working week to 40 hours and the law in favour of equal pay for women;

²² Tr. from Maltese: 'Broadcasting' (referring to Malta's national television station)

- The increase in social services expenditure as well as the introduction of services such as Children's Allowance;
- The elimination of streaming and examinations in State schools;
- Various tourist projects;
- The introduction of work corps such as the 'Pioneers' Corps', which would carry out various construction work. Members of such corps were denied the right to join trade unions.

The Labour Government believed in state intervention within the economy, especially where the private sector failed to take the initiative (Briguglio, L. 1988: 190).

On December 13th 1974, Malta officially became a Republic, and a new constitution was introduced. The constitution, which – just like Italy's constitution - declared that Malta was a republic based on work, introduced various new articles, such as the one allowing people of 18 years of age to vote in general elections. 49 members of Parliament voted in favour of the new constitution, with only 6 Nationalist members abstaining.

By 1974, unemployment stood at 5.8 per cent compared to 3.7 per cent during 1969 (1988: 190). Malta's Gross Domestic Product had grown at a slower rate during the previous five years than during 1965-69. According to Lino Briguglio, "had employment not been artificially created in Government labour corps, the number of persons employed would have actually decreased" (1988: 192).

In 1976, the first elections under the new constitution of the Republic of Malta were held.

The Malta Labour Movement's electoral programme, '*Lejn Malta Socjalista 'l Quddiem fis-Sliem*'²³ emphasised the 'socialist' credentials of the Labour Government. Indeed, it was stated that the Labour Movement believed in democratic socialism, and that Malta could evolve into one big "socialist family." (*Moviment tal-Haddiema*, 1976: 15). It was also declared that "the first requirement for human emancipation is work" (1976: 87).

Among other proposals, the programme stated that a next Labour Government would carry out the following measures:

- The attainment of full-employment;
- The placing of commercial activities, as much as possible, under Maltese ownership;
- The continuation of the non-alignment policy;

Labour emerged victorious once again, winning 51.5 per cent of votes and 34 seats next to the Nationalists' 48.5 per cent of votes and 31 seats. Mr. Mintoff was confirmed Prime Minister. The Nationalists were once again led by Dr. Borg Olivier, who was replaced by future Prime Minister Dr. Eddie Fenech Adami in 1977.

Mintoff's Government continued practising much of its socialist policies during this legislature, and Mintoff remained as powerful as ever. However, two major characteristics of this legislature were the escalation of industrial disputes and political violence. One of Mintoff's most popular sayings at the time was '*Min mhux maghna kontra taghna*'.²⁴

²³ Tr. from Maltese: 'Towards a Socialist Malta, Moving Forward in Serenity'

²⁴ Tr. from Maltese: 'Those not with us are against us'.

One dispute occurred in 1977, when the Office of the Prime Minister issued a circular stating that although the Government recognised the right to strike, the right to partial industrial action would no longer be recognised. The circular also stated that those who refused to work overtime would have no overtime granted to them till the end of the year. Following the issuing of this circular, various industrial actions and protests took place and the Government suspended and transferred some government workers (Nationalist Party Information Office, 1981a: 13-14).

The Government also threatened bank employees that unless they complied with the management's directives, it would liquidate the two commercial banks on the islands and form one bank instead, thus making a number of workers redundant. The industrial action that followed resulted in the suspension of a number of workers. A similar case also occurred at TeleMalta, where a number of workers were suspended for a number of months. With regards to the latter case, the Government made use of the labour corps, which were subject to military discipline, as strike-breakers (1981a: 14).

Another large dispute took place with doctors. The issue arose due to two major issues, the first of which was the Government's policy that students who graduated as doctors should undertake a compulsory two-year registration period at hospital, and the second of which being the Government's decision to change the status and powers of the Medical Council. Various doctors reacted by resorting to partial industrial action and many of them were immediately locked-out of government hospitals. Subsequently various doctors were fired and had to leave the country. The Government, meanwhile imported foreign doctors to take their place, was criticised by various medical associations such as the World Medical Association (1981a.: 14). At the height of these disputes, a letter bomb killed Karen Grech, daughter of future Labour Minister Edwin Grech, who had accepted to work at hospital, thus defying the doctors' industrial actions.

With regard to the Health sector, Mintoff's Government also forced the private hospitals to close down and introduced free medical services to all in 1979. Besides, various state polyclinics were opened in 1981.

The Labour Government also implemented various changes within Malta's educational system. In 1977 examinations were re-introduced for all children from seven years of age. In 1981 a tripartite educational system was started, wherein, contrarily to the policy of comprehensive schooling adopted in 1972, streaming became intensified. This was especially due to the fact that Junior Lyceums were set up, to be attended by students over 11 years of age who passed an entrance examination.

With regards to University, a student-worker scheme was established. Under this scheme, students were obliged not only to have the necessary qualifications but also to alternate periods of work with periods of study. Entry to University became determined not only on the basis of qualifications, but also on preference of employers. A special 'Students Selection Board' ultimately decided which student-workers were to be chosen. Besides, various courses were halted and the faculties of Arts and Science closed down. Consequently, many lecturers and students left University. Stiff opposition was offered by students and academics to these reforms, and the distinguished sociologist Ralf Dahrendorf, who was hired by the Government for consultancy services, stated that these reforms added nothing to education or social Integration, as they produced "either unhappy workers or underqualified students, or both" (Nationalist Party Information Office, 1981a: 24).

On November 8th, 1977, during graduation day, university student Michael Frendo addressed those present by emphasising the need for graduates “to propagate the distinction between truth and propaganda, sincerity and hypocrisy, integrity and opportunism, freedom and slavery” (1981a: 9). This speech caused havoc. The President of the Republic and the Minister of Education walked out, and a number of Labour supporters entered the campus and the hall, intimidating those present. Dennis Sammut, Administrative Secretary of the Malta Labour Party and Joe Debono Grech, a Labour Member of Parliament accompanied the Labourites. Some of them forced themselves into Students’ House, but hundreds of students barricaded themselves in the building. Subsequently no one was arrested but Frendo was sued for defamation by two high officials. However he was ultimately acquitted (1981a). A year later, on October 5th, policemen and Labour supporters beat up students while these were returning to the University campus following a rally to commemorate Students’ Day (1981a: 61).

On May 21st, 1978, the two components of the Malta Labour Movement, namely the Malta Labour Party and the General Workers Union became statutory partners. Thus their alliance achieved formal status (*L-Orizzont*, 22nd May 1978). Both organisations carried out statutory changes, which were approved by the delegates of the respective organisations. These included the following changes:

- The creation of a committee which was to co-ordinate the leadership of the two organisations;
- The participation of the Union’s President and General Secretary in cabinet meetings which directly concerned the interests of workers. The decisions taken during the meetings would be final and would bind the General Workers’ Union (Schiavone, 1990: 77).

The agreement was very similar to the *ad hoc* agreement reached by the Union and the Party during the 1971-1976 legislature.

In various instances, such as during a meeting at Blata l-Bajda on April 28th, 1979, Mintoff also invited other trade unions, such as those that formed the Confederation of Malta Trade Unions, to join the Malta Labour Movement. However, no other union accepted the offer (Nationalist Party Information Office, 1981b: 142).

In 1979 Malta became free from the British Military. Freedom Day was proclaimed on March 31st, and it was given more importance by Mintoff's Government than Independence Day.

During this period Malta witnessed an escalation of political violence, which reached its apex on October 15th, 1979, a day which earned the title of '*Black Monday*'. About forty Labour supporters broke into Nationalist leader Fenech Adami's private residence while he was in Parliament, beat up his wife and ransacked the house. During the same day, the same Labourites broke into the Progress Press and the offices of *The Times* newspaper, damaging all the machinery and gutting the building. The European Parliament as well as various European leaders deplored both these incidents (1981a: 22).

Three days after the Black Monday incidents, Mintoff wrote to Mabel Strickland, owner of the Progress Press, expressing his regret over what happened (Nationalist Party Information Office, 1981b: 58). Mintoff also condemned these violent acts in a notorious interview with top Italian newspaper '*Panorama*' on November 11th (1981b: 57).

On January 3rd 1981, the Courts of Justice were suspended by the Government. The courts were closed for over a month and were reconstituted when the Government introduced a Parliamentary Bill which severely restricted one's right to sue government and which set up a watch-dog Law Courts Commission. Dr. Fenech Adami considered this Bill to be "a return to the divine rights of Kings" (Nationalist Party Information Office, 1981a: 7).

Notwithstanding the political and industrial situation during the second half of the 1970s, by 1979 the Labour Government managed to increase Malta's Gross Domestic Product by more than double the amount of 1974. During the same period unemployment decreased from 5.8 per cent to 2.7 per cent (Briguglio, L. 1988: 190). Employment increased at a fast rate, mainly due to the expansion of the manufacturing sector and tourism. By now, British Military expenditure had gone down to nil (Briguglio, L. 1988: 193-5).

During the 1976-1981 legislature, the Labour Government's foreign policy was at times very critical of Western European Governments and of the European Common Market and at times more conciliatory. In 1978 Mintoff pronounced the following highly notorious statement in Parliament,

"Today there are two Europes: The Europe of Cain and the Europe of Abel. The Europe of Cain only wants to conquer, and the Europe of Abel is progressive. It is with this Europe that one day we will reach agreement" (Nationalist Party Information Office, 1981b: 44).

Mintoff also spoke about the Europe of Cain and Abel during a European forum in Strasbourg. However, Mintoff never ruled out Malta's entry in the European Community. In his words,

“Today we are telling Europe to reach agreement with the Arabs just like we have done. Get powerful enough to get rid of the American and Soviet military bases. When this is achieved we will join you” (1981b: 48).

In another instance, during an interview with the *Adhkron* news agency, Mintoff explained how his Government did not want Malta to be a satellite of any of the two superpowers, and wanted to reach an agreement with Italy and France on one side and Libya and Algeria on the other. He stated that while Italy and France offered goodwill declarations, Libya and Algeria provided concrete assistance (1981b: 111). In the meantime, his Government had also reached an important neutrality agreement and established financial protocol with the Italian Government, in 1980.

1981 proved to be a very controversial year especially due to the general elections that were held during that year. The Malta Labour Party and the General Workers’ Union contested jointly behind the banner of the Malta Labour Movement, against Nationalist Party led by Eddie Fenech Adami.

The joint electoral programme of the Malta Labour Party and the General Workers Union, ‘*Mit-Tajjeb għall-Ahjar*’²⁵ was approved by delegates of the two organisations in their respective general and national conferences (Malta Labour Party/General Workers Union, 1981).

The General Conference of the Malta Labour Party, held on November 9th, 1981, appealed to “manual and mental workers of Malta and Gozo” to keep in mind that “for the first time in our

country's history, by means of the political wing, the [Malta] Labour Party, and the industrial wing, the General Workers' Union, the workers have managed to elevate the Maltese people to a nation free from all foreign interference" (1981: introduction). The Party's General Conference also appealed to workers to measure the progress that was being made by the country "without bloodshed, without violence and with the minimum of sacrifice" (1981). Finally, the conference stated that by means of *ghaqal* and *bzulija*²⁶ and the Socialist belief, Malta was capable of moving from a good situation to a better one (1981).

The proposals in that electoral programme included the following:

- The continuation of collective purchases and bulk-buying of raw materials and commodities to keep prices low;
- Further construction of housing units, distribution of plots, and granting of subsidised loans in order to build one's own house (1981).

A record of 96.1 per cent of the electorate voted during the 1981 general elections, and the Malta Labour Party, although obtaining a minority of votes (49.1 per cent), won more seats than the Nationalists, who won 50.9 per cent of votes. Labour was constitutionally entitled to govern, but the electoral result was described as 'perverse'. Indeed, according to Francis Galea, Mintoff wanted new elections to take place within a year, but his Ministers did not agree with him (Galea, 2000: 152).

²⁵ Tr. from Maltese: 'From Good to Better'

²⁶ *Qhaqal* (Tr. from Maltese: 'Prudence') refers to a combination of quiet cautious submissiveness with sensibility, self-restraint and thriftiness; *Bzulija* (Tr. from Maltese: Diligence) refers to a natural inclination for working hard (Zammit, 1994: 486). These two values, according to Zammit, (1984, 1994) form part of the Maltese work-ethic together with the value of honour.

The Nationalists reacted to the election result by declaring the Labour Government a minority Government. No Nationalist member of Parliament attended the parliamentary sittings for three years, and a number of boycotts were ordered by the Nationalists. They included boycotts on state television (which was the only local television station), as well as on certain retail outlets. In the meantime various threats and bomb explosions at houses of prominent people occurred, bringing about a great deal of instability in the country (2000: 238).

On October 15th 1982, Dr. Karmenu Mifsud Bonnici²⁷ was appointed Designate Leader of the Malta Labour Party following a motion by Dom Mintoff. Mintoff had previously proposed that Mifsud Bonnici be appointed Deputy Leader of the Party. In fact the lawyer was appointed deputy leader on May 29th, 1980. He was co-opted in Parliament on May 2nd 1983 and became Minister of Education.

During the same time that Dr. Mifsud Bonnici was appointed Designate Leader, the 1983 Budget was presented. That Budget included a hotly contested wage freeze that was maintained under that Labour legislation. It was accompanied by a price freeze.

In 1984, the Labour Government clashed with the Church over the Church schools issue. The Labour Government insisted that Church schools had to be free of charge, and not financed by fees paid by parents. During that conflict, Karmenu Mifsud Bonnici, the Minister for Education, adopted the slogan '*Jew b'xejn jew xejn*'²⁸, and he used it in many of his speeches.

²⁷ Karmenu Mifsud Bonnici, a lawyer, was born in Cospicua, the son of a doctor and a teacher. He previously held the post of legal advisor for the General Workers Union, and was also active in the Catholic Action and the Young Christian Workers during his youth (Galea, 2000: 146). His relatives included various successful political figures, such as Dr. Ugo Mifsud Bonnici, a Nationalist member of Parliament and future Minister and President of the Republic.

The Government also faced another controversial educational issue at the time, which dealt with the revision of teachers' salaries. Following a failure in negotiations, the Malta Union of Teachers ordered its members to work under the 'work-to-rule' condition (Schiavone, 1990: 158).

The teachers who refused to sign a government declaration stating that they would keep on working, were locked out without payment. The Malta Union of Teachers reacted and a seven-week strike followed. The Government called for volunteers to take the place of teachers, and later on they were paid for their services. At that time, too, a bomb exploded next to a building that belonged to relatives of the Union's president. In the meantime, the Confederation of Malta Trade Unions ordered a general strike on October 10th, 1984 as a sign of sympathy towards the teachers who were locked out (1990). The lock out was condemned internationally by the European Confederation of Trade Unions and other international unions and organisations. Following the strike, various teachers were transferred to other schools (*Partit Nazzjonalista*, 1987: I[9]).

On 22nd December 1984, following Mintoff's resignation from the post of Prime Minister, Karmenu Mifsud Bonnici made his first address to the Nation as Prime Minister. In that address, he stated that the Socialist Government would give priority to fight against the biggest problem that it was facing: the lack of employment for workers and youth. Mifsud Bonnici added that his Government also had another important problem to deal with – the number of bombs that were still to be found in various places in Malta. Other priorities put forward by the Prime Minister in his inaugural speech included the efforts being taken to improve international relations with

²⁸ Tr. from Maltese: 'Either free of charge or nothing'

countries and blocks such as Italy, the Vatican, the European Community and Arab countries (Malta Labour Party Department of Information, 1987: 7).

Mifsud Bonnici had inherited a situation characterised by political instability as well as various economic difficulties. Unemployment soared to 8.6 per cent from the 2.7 per cent in 1979 (Briguglio, L. 1988: 190), employment decreased by the fastest rate since 1960, and the rate of Gross Domestic Product growth was very low. Lino Briguglio holds that the unemployment rate would have been even higher had the number of people willing to work not decreased (1987: 193).

On April 27th, 1985, an agreement was reached by the Government of Malta and the Vatican regarding Church schools. By means of the agreement, Church schools became free of charge, and a common entrance examination was introduced for all students who wished to enter Church secondary schools, regardless of whether they attended Church primary schools or not. The agreement also covered aspects regarding Church property.

In the meantime, Dom Mintoff, who had kept his place in Parliament following his resignation as Prime Minister, worked for the necessary changes in the constitution (Galea, 2000: 238). On the 20th December 1986 agreement was reached between the two Parties in Parliament and the Constitution was changed. The new provisions included the following changes:

1. That Malta be neutral and non-aligned;
2. That foreign intervention be declared as corrupt practice;
3. That the Party which gets the majority of votes during general elections would be entitled to govern the country.

Sixty-four out of sixty-five members of Parliament voted in favour of these changes.

The foreign policy of the Labour Government during 1981-1987 was in many respects a continuation of that which had been practised by the same Government during the previous legislature. Historian Dominic Fenech, who at the time was the Party's General Secretary, states that that Government pursued a policy of trade diversification with various countries "unfettered by the obligations of EEC membership" (Fenech, D. 1988: 136). Indeed various trade and security agreements, including the agreement to barter, were reached with countries such as China, Libya, North Korea, Italy, Algeria as well as with the European Community. Certain agreements were also reached with the Vatican.

During the 1981-1987 legislature various acts of violence were committed. Both major political parties were associated with various acts of violence, yet the Malta Labour Party was perhaps associated with the most infamous acts, especially since the state apparatus was sometimes involved in certain incidents. The most notorious violent acts included the following:

- The beating up of Nationalist supporters who obeyed the Nationalist Party's directives in favour of civil disobedience during *Mnarja*²⁹ 1982.
- The ransacking of the Archbishop's Curia and the Courts of Justice during the Church schools question by Dockyard workers during a demonstration. Various workers descended from trucks, one of which held Karmenu Mifsud Bonnici on it;
- Violence by Labourite elements including policemen during a Nationalist meeting at *Tal-Barrani*, a Labour stronghold in Zejtun;

- The murder of Raymond Caruana at the Nationalist Party club in Gudja following sporadic shooting from a car in front of the club, and the subsequent frame-up of Nationalist activist Pietru Pawl Busuttill who was charged with his involvement in the act, but who was later on released after being found innocent;
- Various other beatings and shootings during public activities and at police premises. In 1987 there were about fifty cases of alleged torture by people who had evidence proving what they experienced (*Partit Nazzjonalista*, 1987: I[9]);
- Attacks against environmentalists during their protests.³⁰ (Boissevain, 2000: 6).

During these years there were also various cases of alleged corruption, especially in bulk-buying licensing as well as in building permits which were granted by Public Works Minister Lorry Sant. Cases of political discrimination arose, too. The law courts condemned various Labour ministers regarding political discrimination (*Partit Nazzjonalista*, 1987: I[9]).

The Labour Government set the 9th of May 1987 as the date for the following general elections. During the ten months preceding the general elections, a massive amount of 8,000 persons were given employment with the Government (The Times, 24th July 1992).

The general elections were held in the midst of a fierce and highly polarised electoral campaign. Describing the campaign, Dominic Fenech states that the Nationalist Party made a major electoral issue of the intense party polarisation in the country, “maintaining that the country was needlessly divided, and laying the blame on the methods of rule used by the [Malta] Labour

²⁹ A public holiday related to the feast of St. Peter and St. Paul.

³⁰ The Labour Government had a rather bleak environmental record. One of the most harming policies was the introduction of a law in 1983 which gave the concerned Minister power to issue building permits even in green areas. This resulted in construction in various areas of agricultural and archaeological importance such as Nigret,

Party” (Fenech, D. 1988: 134). The Nationalists emphasised issues of a “non-class nature”, which included national reconciliation, freedom of choice, and the promotion of Christian democratic values. Besides, the Nationalists also adopted popular issues that had to do with social services, welfare schemes and working conditions (1988). The electoral slogan used by the Nationalist Party was ‘*Xoghol, Gustizzja, Liberta*’.³¹

On the other hand, the Malta Labour Movement’s battle cry was ‘*Ghall-Paci u l-Progress*’.³² According to Fenech, Labour stressed “as its overriding concern the interest of workers, centred as usual on social issues” (1988: 134). These included the protection of workers’ living standards, participation, social services, housing and jobs. Fenech stresses that Labour also projected itself as the “real guardian of national interests and democracy” (1988: 134), given the previous struggles with the British and the Church and its policy against social privilege.

Emphasising once again that Malta came first and foremost, Labour’s programme declared that in the years to follow a Labour Government would do its best to maintain and broaden civil and individual rights as in modern societies. The participation of citizens in general, consumers and women in particular were also highlighted (*Moviment tal-Haddiema*, 1987).

Moreover, the electoral programme stated that a Labour Government would be ready to revise economic policies such as bulk-buying and trade-reciprocity as soon as economic conditions improved. Regarding government-owned enterprises, the programme mentioned the need for them to be more efficient, flexible, and profitable “where possible and in line with the socialist ideology”, more profitable (1987: 16).

Wied il-Ghasel, *Tal-Brolli* in Birzebbugia, *Wied Filep* in Naxxar as well as close to the Buskett gardens. Besides, various tourist projects mushroomed along Malta’s coast (*Partit Nazzjonalista*, 1987: I[26])

As regards foreign policy, the programme reaffirmed Labour's beliefs in neutrality, non-alignment, equidistance from the superpowers and security in the Mediterranean (1987: 19).

The Nationalists won 50.9 per cent of votes against Labour's 48.87 per cent, thus winning the elections in which, once again, a record of 96.1 per cent of the electorate voted. Eddie Fenech Adami was appointed Prime Minister and Karmenu Mifsud Bonnici Leader of the Opposition. Given the constitutional amendment which guaranteed power to the Party which obtained 50 per cent plus one of the valid votes, the Nationalists were legitimately entitled to govern and to co-opt four additional members to Parliament in order to have a parliamentary majority. Two other political parties, the Democratic Party, led by Lino Briguglio, and the Communist Party, led by Anthony Vassallo, also participated in those elections, but they only managed to obtain a few hundred votes between them.

According to Dominic Fenech, as soon as the election results were announced, "Nationalist supporters looted and burned [Malta] Labour Party clubs and broke into the homes of several [Malta] Labour Party activists" (Fenech, D. 1988: 134).

Conclusion

In this chapter it has been shown how the Malta Labour Party developed from a moderate Social Democratic party with Catholic leanings from the 1920s to the 1940s to a more radical party which at first wanted Integration with Britain but, due to lack of success, then adopted the

³¹ Tr. from Maltese: 'Work, Justice, Liberty'

³² Tr. from Maltese: 'For Peace and Progress'

strategy of various anti-colonial movements. Emphasis has been made on the period being referred to as 'Old Labour', from 1971 to 1987, where the Malta Labour Party in government was characterised by the strong leadership of Dom Mintoff from 1971 to 1984 as well as by heavy emphasis on the role of the state within a socialistic framework. Throughout the years from 1920 to 1987 the Malta Labour Party was involved in several struggles with the Church, the British, as well as the Nationalist Party, and various acts of violence were carried out during its Old Labour years in power. On the other hand the Party had a strong ally in the General Workers Union in the post-war period, but especially during 1971 and 1987.

The following chapter will put into perspective the period from 1987 to 1998, where calls for reform of the Malta Labour Party were made, eventually leading to the creation of New Labour.