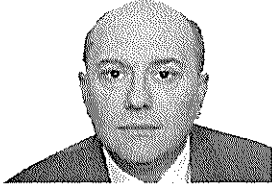


Debate & Analysis

Rewriting George Orwell's 'Animal Farm' the Maltese way



KEVIN AQUILINA

No, this piece is not a book review of George Orwell's famous satirical allegorical novel *Animal Farm*, published after the Second World War in 1945.

I am presuming that the reader is already familiar with it. If not, I suggest that it is read before going through this contribution. Normally I write on legal issues but for this time, I implored the Editor's clemency to please permit me to digress from law and justice subjects to roam freely into the wild exciting world of social literature and contemporary local politics. Of course, I could well have – like George M. Mangion writing in last Sunday's edition of this newspaper – chosen instead Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* by way of an analogy.

This article is an appreciation of Orwell's book from a purely Maltese perspective whilst attempting to identify commonalities between Orwell's *Animal Farm* and how the Maltese government has been influenced therefrom, whether consciously or unconsciously. Indeed, the latest events happening in Malta could not but inevitably remind me of that book. In it, the pigs assume leadership and full control of the farm where they, with other brethren animals, were brought up and have laboured since birth. The farm was hitherto administered by an exploitative human rascal who treated them in an animal-undignified fashion.

The four-legged animals and their brother/sister fowl consequently revolted, asserted their right to equality, prosperity, happiness, and freedom from the yoke of human oppression, assumed direct control of the farm, and successfully exiled the despicable human species from what now became 'their' farm. 'Manor Farm' was restyled 'Animal Farm'. The pigs that lead the animal rebellion took over the leadership of the farm, and subsequently – in cahoots with the old-age human perennial oppressor and prime

enemy – perpetrated the same abominable acts reminiscent of the bad old days onto the other non-pig animal community that remained on the farm. The lessons of history, clearly, were unlearned and history, once again, repeated itself.

This reminds me of the days when Joseph Muscat, as Leader of the Opposition, used to correctly criticise the Nationalist government on account of corruption; nepotism in public appointments; lack of transparency, accountability, good administration, and good governance; and what have you. All valid criticisms. But ... turn the clock to 2013 when the Labour Party under the leadership of the same Joseph Muscat was returned to government with an astounding mind-blowing majority unparalleled in the history of Malta.

One would have expected, as the animals did in Orwell's *Animal Farm*, that history was bygone history, that Malta had now turned totally a new leaf, and that all the societal scourges committed by the preceding government were banished from the Republic of Malta. But what happens next? Like in George Orwell's book the pigs move from slavery to freedom; from opposition to government. They now gave themselves the title of 'ministers'; but history has the monotonous habit of repeating itself. Indeed, the contradiction of contradictions is that the new 'pig' Labour government continues to repeat, day in day out, the same mistakes of the 'human' predecessor Nationalist government of Manor Farm now successfully rebranded as Malta.

Once in power, afflicted by perennial amnesia, the pig-ministers became more interested in their own power consolidation and in more mundane things such as regularizing – in breach of the rule of law – an illegally built swimming pool with no political consequences ensuing, or to developing a building outside the development zone, not to say appointing unmeritorious friends of friends to lucrative government positions. Their previous creed of abolishing poverty from Malta, legislating against foreign worker exploitation (who cares about socialism!), promoting merit in public office, or providing the homeless with decent accommodation and livelihood was all forgotten.

Whenever I read *Animal Farm*, I always conclude that revolutions or rebellions are a futile exercise. They might perhaps serve as a demographic measure for population control but none manage to change the status quo for the better. They simply replace a past oppressive regime with another autocratic leadership. Faces

change but old habits die hard; the status quo prevails but under a different guise. In revolutions or rebellions, as in normalcy, it is always the people at the bottom of the social ladder that continue to suffer. Revolutions and rebellions do not change life for the better of society except for those in a leadership position who, from non-entities they suddenly become respected and revered demi-gods. But these are a tiny proportion of the population who, like the pigs in George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, become automatically entitled to their piggish treats.

Take the Russian revolution. Vladimir Lenin and Leon Trotsky managed to overthrow the Tzarist regime but it ended up replaced by a Stalinist bureaucracy that grabbed power only for its own egoistic benefit. The working class, the proletariat as Marx called it, ended up dead and buried by the Stalinist regime, with Marx turning in his grave. What was the result of the October 1919 revolution when understood a century later? Essentially it was a simple change in government where one class (to use Marxist terminology) replaced another class. But even this did not happen exactly that way in the USSR as forecast by Marx for the bourgeoisie was replaced not by the proletariat in line with Marxist dogma but by the Soviet communist bureaucracy. Something went very wrong in the Marxist prediction. This is not exactly how Lenin and Trotsky envisaged the proletarian revolution to develop.

Instead of replacing the bourgeoisie as the oppressor and the working class as the oppressed, what the Soviet Revolution produced was the emergence of a new class, the Soviet Communist Bureaucracy, as the oppressor, and the proletariat, once again as the oppressed. The same happened, later, in Cuba and Nicaragua with the new leadership assuming, in both countries, a totalitarian leadership style. Things never change at the bottom or at the middle but only at the top. Yet, *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose!* The more things change, the more they remain the same! Revolutions or rebellions are like a game of snakes and ladders. You think that you have climbed all the ladders that take you straight to the top and have now solved all your past irritant problems but, instead, you end up bitten by the poisonous snakes that descend you to the underworld.

This is indeed what has happened in Malta. In 2013, a new government came into being. All top faces in government changed. We had a new Prime Minister, new Ministers, and new Parliamentary

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Secretaries. All but one Permanent Secretaries were changed. So were most chairpersons and chief executive officers of government entities. Blind and unconditional loyalty to the leadership replaced merit. We now had leading us a Labour Party that supposedly through lip service only placed the interests of the working class, the underprivileged, the poor, the vulnerable, the deprived, the homeless, and the dejected before the interests of capital, greed, corruption, self-advancement, fraud, and egoism that were considered by the Labour opposition to be the hallmarks of the previous Nationalist government.

Fast forward by ten years. What is the situation today? By and large, it is the situation of a soulless Labour Party that has renounced its historic roots, embraced a liberal-bourgeois philosophy, forgotten its social vision, ditched its socialist ideology, abandoned the working class, and instead has continued with the erstwhile continuously denounced and criticised good old tricks of its predecessor in government.

Labour's new ideology is popularism, selfishness, individualism, moral erosion, piggish craving, greed, maladministration, bad governance, and an urge for get-immediately-rich schemes. Even Robin Hood's strategy of robbing Peter to pay Paul was thrown to the dogs with the working class meeting the fate of being thrown to the wolves. Socialist values have been usurped by the emergent class – the new rich. Surely not the values of a Labour Party as led by Sir Paul Boffa, Dom Mintoff, Karmenu Mifsud Bonnici, and Alfred Sant. The latter were all hardcore socialists, convinced in their beliefs, and knew that there was a line that they would never cross. One might agree or disagree with them but one can never accuse them of not being socialists to the bone.

A stock taking of these last ten years irremediably leads to the

conclusion that George Orwell was right and the Maltese Labour government of the last decade has also proved him correct. A change in leadership whether through democratic or undemocratic means does not necessarily lead to a change for the better. At times, it has the obverse effect especially where the leadership is more interested in self-advancement, personal gain, and power grab to the detriment of the rest of society than to assist the underdog. The common good, general welfare, and public interest are words that no longer have any currency in Malta as they are antithetical to the new Labour philosophy enunciated above. Indeed, when a decision maker – parliament, government, ministers, and other state officers – is motivated primarily by greed, not by the concern of the community's common good, then the ensuing decisions are a travesty of robust societal values, repugnant to the good order of society, are of dubious moral value; they should attract the unconditional reprobation and disgust by the community.

In George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, the pigs were now in command. What is the difference between *Animal Farm* and Malta one would ask? Not really much, it appears. For even in Malta the 'pigs' are in command. They might take the shape of humans but their mentality is the same as that of the pigs of George Orwell's *Animal Farm*. And it is not I who state that the 'pigs' have now taken over the running of the country but one of the aspiring 'pigs' themselves, that was deprived from joining the pigsty to amass a fortune in a relative short period of time. For this is basically the creed of the piggish ideology that has replaced the once upon a time socialist one. Gone are indeed the days when the Labour Party was a synonym with the working class or with socialism.

On assuming power, the pigs changed the name of their farm. Perhaps the time is ripe to follow this precedent and change the name of Malta to something else. My gut feeling that government would prefer to opt for in so far as it reflects better its new modern and progressive philosophical outlook is 'Piggy Land' or, perhaps the 'Archipelago of the Pigs' or, why not call a spade a spade and rename it 'The Pigsty Republic of Malta'. After all, the government in the last decade has made it its avowed task of not interesting itself in advancing the common good of society but more of how private citizens in, next, or related to persons in, power can misappropriate state assets to become rich faster.

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Under the Leadership of Joseph Muscat and his successor, various criticisms have been levelled at the way how both maladministered the country when government contracts were awarded and stooges appointed to government office in a very unprofessional manner in full disregard of the principle of due diligence and merit. Whilst, in principle I have nothing against 'get rich fast schemes' when used properly (I always dreamt of winning the lottery ticket to take up early retirement from University, though to no avail!), the current government get rich fast schemes tend to be limited only to a few, achieved through the pilferage of state assets, are entirely exclusivist in nature as not everybody is eligible to apply or benefit therefrom, are discriminatory as they distinguish between first class people in power and second class workers, do not promote the

common good of society but the individual good of a select few, and are based on the immoral principles of greed, arrogance, and selfishness. Yet this makes our government proud as its new found anti-workers ideology gives a new identity to the nation. Labour has, since 2013, forgotten that government is for the common good of society not for the personal profit of those in government or their lackeys. The concept of service has not only been exiled from the Republic of Malta – in the same way that justice has long time ago been barricaded from attempting to enter the courts of justice building – but toppled over its head to serve the individual personal interests of the ruler, not the ruled.

It is a pity that George Orwell has passed away for he would have been tempted to write a sequel to *Animal Farm*. He could well have called it *Animal Farm 2: The Rise of the Pigs at Castille and the Fall of Socialism in Malta*. Who knows, perhaps,

some other novelist might want to take this task upon him/herself. S/he can get the inspiration from the latest Auditor General's report on the Vitals saga, that although indicating what an exercise in good governance should not be, the Abela 'Labour' (in name only not in deed) administration, in its frenzy to debunk any form of responsibility of what happened under the predecessor Muscat 'Labour' administration is only interested in attempting to extricate itself from a highly political anti-socialist embarrassing situation.

Its panic-stricken, self-harming, gruesome response that seeks to exculpate itself at all costs and unashamedly whilst shifting entirely the blame on the Muscat administration when it states that the Auditor General's report is proof how right the Abela administration was in the way it has handled (mishandled should have been a better term) the Vitals saga, gives the impression that be-

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tween 2013 and 2022 there was a phantom government not a 'Labour' government in office. And whilst disassociating itself with the previous 'Labour' administration the Abela administration continues to take no

positive, concrete action to undo the culture of impunity that it continues to foster by, for instance, implementing the Daphne Assassination Board of Inquiry report in its entirety.

It is only when government gives full effect – rather than lip service – to this report and other rule of law compliant measures that it will it start to gain an iota of credibility. It is only then that the Abela administration will no longer be considered a continuation of Muscat's maladministration and bad governance, to say the least. Now is the time to move from government-damage containment to decisive concrete legislative, civil, and criminal action, together with a thorough spring cleaning of the public administration from top to bottom. Now is the time to move from the pigsty Republic of Malta to Utopia.

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