
MALTESE ADMINISTRATIONS AND RESERVED MATTERS 1921 – 1933

Joseph D. Bugeja

The Amery-Milner Constitution commenced operations in favourable conditions. The will to work the constitution was present, and popular enthusiasm showed that the process of democracy would operate in a proper way. In spite of difficulties, 'the activity of the young parliament' registered much progress¹ and the constitutional experiment was confirmed a real success.² However, friction arose where local and metropolitan interests conflicted, for the Imperial side of the dyarchy jealously guarded reserved matters against possible encroachment. The Imperial Government would not divest itself of any power in an island where internal security, which naturally impinged on domestic concerns, was inextricably mixed with defence interests. Therefore, during the period of responsible government the Imperial Government remained the sole arbiter of what was and what was not necessary in most spheres of Maltese life. However, the core of the problem was the Imperial attitude towards political parties, for it was certainly not impartial and made a distinction between a Nationalist and a Constitutional administration.

1. THE NATIONALIST ADMINISTRATION 1921 – 1927

The Nationalist administration sought practical methods to solve national difficulties concerned with emigration, industry and tourism, but the conflicting views of the Imperial Admiralty, the Treasury, and the War Department prevented cooperation for a solution to these problems. The Nationalist administration confronted the emigration question with energy. Special schools were set up³ and emigration was controlled at source.⁴ Stringent regulations by other Empire countries⁵ imposed restrictions on Maltese emigration.⁶ Yet, only

SOURCE REFERENCES

AGPVM	The Archives of the Governor's Palace, Valletta, Malta
Cmd	Command Papers
HANSARD	HANSARD, 5th Series
MCLP	Malta Constitution Letters Patent
RHLO	Rhodes House Library, Oxford
SCRHLO	The Scicluna Collection, Rhodes House Library, Oxford
<i>The Times</i> ,	<i>The Times</i> of London

1. *The Times*, 10 Oct. 1925.
2. *The Times*, 7 Oct. 1925.
3. *The Times*, 23 Aug. 1923.
4. *The Times*, 28 Apr. 1922.
5. H. Casolani, *Awake Malta or the Hard Lesson of Emigration* (Malta, Government Printing Office, 1930), p.14. SCRHLO.
The Times, 19 Oct. 1925.
6. *The Times*, 19 May 1924; 31 Jan. 1927.

mass emigration could solve the problem of Malta's surplus population.⁷ One must remember that what other countries might consider as a blessing, with Malta population increase was quite the reverse; the island was stifled and strangled by its own numbers.

This demographic problem and its political implications stemmed from remote causes not all directly attributable to Imperial responsibility. The high fertility rate was due to the rigid observance of Catholic rules of conduct. The weighty influence of the Church and its encouragement of large families had brought about a Malthusian-like population increase.⁸ However, it was also in the nature of the economic expansion, caused by colonialism, to promote higher marriage and birth rates in Malta.⁹ The problem of population growth was exacerbated by limitations of space. The absorption of arable land and of fishing beaches for expanding Imperial projects, ranging from barracks to cemeteries, and later from sea-plane bases to aerodromes, made emigration 'a matter of life and death'.¹⁰ Up to 1912, Maltese emigration was practically confined to the Mediterranean littoral,¹¹ but the Imperial Government shifted the emigration movement to

Table I

The Maltese Abroad 1825 – 1885
(Estimated Numbers)

Country	1825	1842	1865	1885
Algeria	—	5000	10000	15000
Tunis	—	3000	7000	11000
Tripoli	—	1000	2000	3000
Egypt	—	2000	5000	7000
Smyrna	—	500	1000	1500
Constantinople	—	1000	2000	3000
Ionian Islands	—	1000	2000	1500
Sicily	—	500	1000	1000
Marseilles	—	—	—	500
Gibraltar	—	—	—	1000
Elsewhere & in Motion	—	5000	10000	10000
Total	6500	20000	40000	55000

source: *Demographic Review 1963* (Malta, Central Office of Statistics, 1963) C.A. Price, *Malta and the Maltese: A Study in 19th Century Migration* (Melbourne, Georgian House, 1954).

English-speaking countries, because 'the interests of Malta and the Empire alike would best be served by the emigrants remaining under the British flag'.¹² Yet the

7. Lord Plumer to Viscount Milner, 4 Aug. 1919. Confidential. AGPVM.

8. *An Enquiry into Family Size in Malta and Gozo* (Malta, Central Office of Statistics, 1963), Foreword.

Demographic Review of the Maltese Islands (Malta, Central Office Statistics, 1961), p.i.

D. Seers, 'A Fertility Survey in the Maltese Islands', *Population Studies* X (1957), No.3.

9. *Royal Commission on the Finances, Economic Condition and Judicial Procedure in Malta, Parliamentary Papers 1912 – 1913*, XL (6090, 6280, 6281), p.13.

10. *The Times*, 23 Aug. 1923.

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Royal Commission on the Finances, Economic Condition and Judicial Procedure in Malta*, p.27.

Imperial Government failed to reckon with the serious language problem. The literacy tests were obstacles which thousands could not overcome. The search for emigration outlets was further frustrated by international political considerations. The scheme for settling Maltese in Palestine was considered inopportune¹³ because it might prejudice the Imperial position at the Peace Conference as regards Palestine.¹⁴ The emigration movement was also caught up in the currents of the adverse industrial conditions of many countries. This meant that certain countries could only absorb those emigrants who held the best technical qualifications.¹⁵ By 1923 there were 50,000 skilled mechanics settled in America most of whom were trained at the Malta Dockyard School.¹⁶ The fact that the selectivity of emigration robbed Malta of the male labour force trained at the service departments spelled a 'danger signal' to the Imperial Government.

The Admiralty had to contemplate the possibility of future conditions in the Mediterranean. This foreseen situation necessitated the 'extension of the Dockyard School';¹⁷ but when increased emigration of skilled dockyard workmen began 'to make itself felt on military works',¹⁸ indentured apprentices were to be denied 'all applications for passports'.¹⁹ The grant of a passport, was also a reserved matter²⁰ and was not 'sanctioned by any political law as a specific right'²¹ for Maltese British subjects. The issue had both social and political implications. Dockyard apprentices, some of them still minors, could not accompany their emigrating parents. Politically, the refusal to grant passports when the state of affairs was unsettled, caused 'serious dissatisfaction with the action of the Imperial administration'.²² The Admiralty's decision was contradictory: on the one hand, the reduction of dockyard employees was absolutely essential; on the other, emigration of skilled workers was inconsistent with Admiralty policy, for there must be interdependence between the Malta Dockyard and the Imperial Admiralty to ensure that the needs of the fleet, if and when it did return, would be fulfilled. Consequently, the principle of interdependence would not be applied in

13. Earl Curzon (F.O.) to Viscount Milner, 3 Mar. 1919, No.32520/M.E./44. Confidential. AGPVM.

14. General Clayton (Cairo) to Earl Curzon (F.O.), 25 Feb. 1919. Confidential. AGPVM.

15. *The Times*, 3 June 1920.

16. *The Times*, 23 Aug. 1923; 19 May 1924.

Note. Emigration figures for the 1920s are not available because records were not kept before the Central Office of Statistics was set up. However, the figure quoted by *The Times* is certainly inaccurate. It was true that during the widespread distress in the years just before and after the First World War, significant numbers turned their attention to the Americas, but the U.S.A. quota law of 1921 prevented them from sending for their families. Many Maltese emigrants had to leave good jobs in Detroit and return to the distress conditions in Malta. (See Demographic Review 1963, p.xxxix – xi).

17. Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty to W.S. Churchill, 26 July 1919, No.C.Sec.P.L. 3161/19. AGPVM.

18. Colonel i/c Administration to Lord Plumer, 29 Apr. 1920, No.Misc. 2315/20. AGPVM.

19. Senior Naval Officer (H.M. Dockyard) to W.C.F. Robertson, 9 June 1920, No.79/20. AGPVM.

W.C.F. Robertson to Senior Naval Officer, 1 July 1920, No.30421/20. AGPVM.

20. MCLP 1921, Section 41(1)(n).

21. H. Casolani (Government Emigration Officer) to W.C.F. Robertson, 28 June 1920, No.Naval 30421/20. AGPVM.

22. H. Casolani to W.C.F. Robertson, 27 June 1920, No.Naval 30421/20. AGPVM.

Malta's favour and emigration of skilled workers fluctuated with the shifting of weight of the Admiralty's judgement. The Malta Admiralty could only promise the Nationalist administration that applications from apprentices would be considered individually.²³ Meanwhile the Nationalist administration had the greater difficulty of running a system of government in a small island where the question of surplus manpower dogged the reformer at every step, and where the Navy Estimates had been 'cut considerably below the bone'.²⁴

The Nationalist administration sought other practical methods. They tried to improve those industrial resources²⁵ specially adapted for a shipping industry which Maltese workers were particularly competent to carry out.²⁶ Yet, when Maltese *entrepreneurs* put up a scheme for the breaking-up of ships,²⁷ especially since the Admiralty had a number of vessels for disposal,²⁸ they were informed that 'such a scheme was substantially political'.²⁹ Pressure on the Lords Commissioners brought no practical results: the necessity for strict economy in expenditure, and not Malta's problems, actuated the Admiralty 'to consider the scheme in connection with the other offers' from other countries,³⁰ and warships were instead broken up in Italy.³¹ The same fate awaited the project for ship-building and ship-repairing. The question of location and facilities for this industry seemed to bring interests into direct conflict.³² In the Imperial viewpoint, the construction of ships could not be undertaken economically as the dockyard was not equipped for the purpose; nor had the workers had the necessary experience.³³ This view was actually stimulated by the fear that commercial repair work would compete with naval requirements.³⁴ In other words, Malta's complete dependence on naval needs had to remain paramount during the Nationalist administration, even though 'the prolonged absence of both the garrison and the fleet had rendered the question of unemployment more menacing'.³⁵

The remarks offered by the Imperial Government were tantamount to a disbelief in a solution being found to the problem. Yet some degree of viability could have been achieved by a sound policy of industrialization (combined with the policy of mass emigration). Even Lord Plumer sounded a prophetic note when he warned:

It must be remembered that these harbours are practically her only natural asset, and future development of them should be carried out in such a way as to make the Maltese participators and partners in them, and not only owners of property which is being

23. J. Luce (Rear-Admiral, Malta) to Lord Plumer, 8 May 1923; 6 Nov. 1923, No.79/1920. AGPVM.

24. *The Times*, 20 May 1925.

25. *Address of the Governor to the Senate and Legislative Assembly*, p.5.

26. *Ibid.*

27. Lord Plumer to Devonshire, 30 Dec. 1922. Confidential. AGPVM.

28. Devonshire to Lord Plumer, 28 July 1922. AGPVM.

29. Devonshire to Lord Plumer, 8 Aug. 1922. AGPVM.

30. *Ibid.*

31. Devonshire to Lord Plumer, 28 July 1922. AGPVM.

32. *Address of the Governor to the Senate and Legislative Assembly*, p.5.

33. Devonshire to Lord Plumer, 9 May 1922, Malta No.93. AGPVM.

34. *Ibid.*

35. Lord Plumer to Devonshire, 30 Dec. 1922. AGPVM.

taken from them and used for purposes in which they have no concern. In my opinion, the value of the 'loyalty' of future generations of Maltese will depend greatly on this.³⁶

But the inconsistency of the Imperial authorities was patently apparent in the Address of the Governor to the Senate and Legislative Assembly on 3 November 1921: 'on the one hand it was undoubtedly to the interest of the Empire to encourage maritime commerce at all ports within the Empire, and on the other the requirements of H.M. Navy must be paramount'. Maltese harbours could not be thrown open to commercial enterprise.³⁷ Such contradictions could not but lead to the belief that a Maltese administration would never receive the cooperation of the Imperial Government. Other reserved matters greatly limited the field of action: for example legislation proposed for the Workmen's Compensation Act was considered as falling outside the powers of the Legislature. In the opinion of the Imperial Treasury, such legislation dealt with persons employed in the services establishments. Any legislation which 'injuriously affected such labour' was consequently detrimental to the interests of the Imperial Government as owner of the dockyard, and the Maltese Legislature should not impose a charge upon the Imperial Exchequer. The proposed legislation of the Nationalist Government had either to exclude all Imperial workmen or include provisions acceptable to the Imperial Government. Since compensation would be payable from funds to be provided by the Imperial Government, it would be anomalous that the Maltese Legislature should impose a charge upon the Imperial Exchequer and the Imperial Departments should be liable to be sued in the Maltese Courts.³⁸

Nevertheless, in the matter of finance, the Nationalist administration did well: they effected economies and met capital expenditure on education by indirect taxation. It was true that in the field of education they enforced *pari passu* instruction,³⁹ – the storm centre of Maltese politics – but they also introduced compulsory attendance⁴⁰ as 'half way house'⁴¹ to compulsory education.⁴² Parents were not obliged to send their children to school but once a child was registered, attendance became compulsory under law until the age of fourteen.⁴³ The sound financial position based on a well-conducted system⁴⁴ encouraged the Nationalist administration to undertake improvement schemes⁴⁵ for making Malta a popular holiday centre.⁴⁶ But even in the field of tourism, Imperial defence requirements crippled the activities of the Nationalist administration.

One special case, connected with the question of lands and buildings held by the Imperial War Department, raised serious friction.⁴⁷ The Imperial Govern-

36. Lord Plumer to J.H. Thomas, 19 April 1924. Confidential. AGPVM.

37. *Address of the Governor to the Senate and Legislative Assembly*, p.5.

38. Devonshire to Lord Plumer, 4 Feb. 1922. Confidential. AGPVM.

39. *Debates of the Senate*, 1923, vol.2, p.369.

40. *Debates of the Legislative Assembly*, 1924 – 1927, Part 1, vol.8, p.572.

41. *The Times*, 24 May 1926.

42. Compulsory Education, as distinct from Compulsory Attendance, came into force in 1946.

43. Cmd 3993, p.123.

44. *The Times*, 7 July 1925; 7 Oct. 1925.

45. *The Times*, 7 Aug. 1925.

46. *The Times*, 14 July 1925; 24 May 1926.

47. Only the recent Agreement provided an amicable solution. See: *Agreement with respect to the*

ment had appointed Sir Edgar Harper, as Arbitrator, to settle the question of lands and buildings, then held by the Imperial authorities. In the opinion of Harper, modern conditions of war had nullified the value of certain localities formerly regarded as essential for defence. He decided that (1) lands and buildings no longer required were to revert to the Maltese Government;⁴⁸ (2) all clearance rights should be abandoned, except those which were necessary to enable the forts to fire seawards; (3) the War Department should hold, on payment of a rental, any grounds for the training of troops, and all government buildings occupied as officers' residences.⁴⁹ His procedure of settling this important question was considered satisfactory by the Nationalist administration.⁵⁰ However, the Army Council refused to implement Harper's decisions. They contended that as Harper gave a decision instead of a recommendation, his award was null and void. They would not recognize the judgement of a non-military arbitrator unskilled in such technical matters.⁵¹ In their view, the correct interpretation of the term 'defence' as applied to Malta was not defence of Malta itself but the defence of the whole Empire. Such a role included not only the acquisition of any grounds for the training and recreation of troops but also the retention, without payment, of certain lands and buildings necessary for effective defence. On the issue of clearance rights, the Army Council were unable to define which areas were to be preserved.⁵² They would not even agree to the suggestion that the points at issue should be submitted to the Law Officers of the Crown.⁵³ Maltese Ministers were completely baffled why the impartial opinion of an Arbitrator supported by the Governor⁵⁴ should be ignored by the Army Council. Consequently, the Maltese Government could not use these historical buildings occupied as officers' residences. Moreover, clearance rights caused harm to the building industry and tourism and consequently obstructed the means of relieving unemployment.⁵⁵ In short, six years of Nationalist administration saw no relaxation of the control imposed by various Imperial authorities.

The refusal of the Army Council to implement Harper's award tended to have regrettable political effects.⁵⁶ The confrontation came when a Governor's Ordinance subjected private property to certain restrictions and servitudes in the interests of military training.⁵⁷ The Ordinance authorized the troops to enter on any lands; yet it precluded recourse to a civil Tribunal for damage, and substituted compulsory arbitration. The Imperial authorities maintained that the matter was

Use of Military Facilities in Malta, (London, H.M.S.O., Treaty Series No.44, 1972). Cmd. 4943.

48. See: Order in Council, 26 Oct. 1896, Clause 25.

49. Lord Plumer to Devonshire, 24 July 1922, Malta No.150. AGPVM.

50. Lord Plumer to J.H. Thomas, 19 Apr. 1924. Confidential. AGPVM.

51. J.H. Thomas to W.N. Congreve, 21 Oct. 1924. Confidential. AGPVM.

52. A.E. Widders (The War Office) to Under Secretary of State, 24 Aug. 1926. AGPVM.

53. J.H. Thomas to W.N. Congreve, 21 Oct. 1924. Confidential. AGPVM.

54. Lord Plumer to J.H. Thomas, 19 April, 1924. AGPVM.

Lord Plumer to Devonshire, 24 July 1922. Malta No.152, AGPVM.

55. J. Howard (Head of Ministry) to Lord Plumer, 16 July 1923. AGPVM.

56. Devonshire to Lord Plumer, 13 Oct. 1923: Confidential. AGPVM.

57. L.S. Amery to W.N. Congreve, 1 Apr. 1926: Copy of the Imperial Forces Training Ordinance 1926. AGPVM.

a reserved one. This difference of view gave rise to considerable controversy⁵⁸ and public agitation.⁵⁹ The Imperial authorities removed it from the field of political dispute when the Strickland administration was in power, confirming the suspicion that a Nationalist party in power would enjoy fewer political prerogatives than a Strickland administration.⁶⁰

2. THE STRICKLAND ADMINISTRATION 1927 – 1932

Both sides of the dyarchy were subject to the enforcement of the written rules of the Maltese Constitution. And since the constitution defined their respective spheres, the Maltese Imperial Government was equally placed under the rule of constitutional statutes which in actual fact it was powerless to change without encroaching on the Maltese sphere. However, the Strickland ministry created opportunities for Imperial intervention in Maltese affairs even though the Legislature, let alone one House, could not transfer its delegated power to the Imperial Government. Strickland's consent provided the Imperial Government with sufficient power to change the constitution to the benefit of his administration.

A. The Constitutional Question

The Strickland administration was conscious of its mission to promote Imperial interests. This condition could only be achieved by an extension of parliamentary power. Strickland wanted to dig into the Reserve Fund which the Nationalist administration had built up. He could not pass the appropriation bill at a joint sitting unless the power of the Senate was curbed⁶¹ and the supremacy of the Legislative Assembly in financial matters was secured.⁶² The Constitution could be amended, but only with two-thirds majority.⁶³ When Strickland tried to pass the appropriation bill, the two-thirds majority clause limited the scope of his action and provided a deadlock for his government. Therefore he appealed to the Imperial Government to change the constitutional restriction to a simple majority. Strickland believed that by extending the powers of the Legislative Assembly at the expense of the Senate he would secure 'a more real and effective control over local affairs',⁶⁴ and strengthen 'the principles of popular government'.⁶⁵ The Government must be carried on, even if the constitutional provisions were to be interpreted, extended and stretched to accord with this view. Strickland took the view that his government was elected to transform Maltese society. In this respect, politics was not a matter of compromise between interests and opinions but a

59. Cmd 3993, pp.18 – 19.

60. The Nationalists could accomplish very little because (1) they had to continue the programme of works which the Imperial administration had initiated in 1920; (2) much time was spent on the language issue and on bringing legislation up to date, (3) the Maltese Government was still very much influenced by the other side of the dyarchy, especially after the 1924 general election, when E. Mizzi began to dominate the policy of the Nationalists.

61. Cmd 3993, pp.25 – 26.

62. Cmd 3993, pp.26 – 27.

63. MCLP 1921, Section 41(6). Cmd 3993, pp.100 – 101.

64. J.P. Du Cane to L.S. Amery, 13 July 1928, Malta No.98: Bartolo to Strickland. AGPVM.

65. J.P. Du Cane to L.S. Amery, 31 May 1928, Malta No.75: Memorandum by Ministers to J.P. Du Cane. AGPVM.

matter of advancing towards a known objective. However, by appealing to the Imperial Government to change the constitution, the Strickland administration solicited extra-constitutional intervention.

Consequently the question revolved: (1) a) on the right of the Imperial Government to obtain an amendment which appeared to be in direct conflict with the dyarchical spirit of the constitution,⁶⁶ and b) on the right of the people to control Malta's affairs, since by guarantee they were entitled to be the ultimate director in local matters in accordance with the principle of dyarchy, and had to decide for themselves whether or not to amend the constitution. (2) The problem centred on (a) whether the law of majority voting in one House could bind the Senate as well, even though it did not presuppose unanimity on a crucial constitutional issue, and (b) whether the general interest of the people should be paramount over the derivative will of the Strickland Government with its particular interest, since Strickland should by right have dissolved the Legislative Assembly and sought re-election. (3) The subject related to the theory of the so-called specific mandate, whether the electoral result bound the members of the Legislature to the electoral programme, or whether the Legislature could go beyond the wishes of the constituents. (4) On the judgement of the constitutional question depended the future solution whether there should or should not be a Senate having adequate powers to check Ministers.⁶⁷

It could be argued that the two-thirds majority clause was introduced by the Imperial Government to influence the subsequent course of Maltese political thinking in the democratic process, and that practical politicians would have recourse to this stage only as the ultimate measure. But if the Imperial Government believed that discussion of competing ideas would lead to a compromise in which all the plans of action would ultimately be reconciled and accepted by antagonistic Houses, they established parliamentary democracy on an idealistic rather than a practical basis. If the Imperial Government expected the Nationalist Opposition to take for granted the democratization of politics, to show considerable flexibility in their actions, they seriously underrated the complexity of the Constitution. Of course, Maltese politicians could not then realize that what was controversial politics at one moment might, after experience and reflection, easily become the common ground of both administration and opposition alike. The point was that no matter what the merits and defects of the two-thirds majority clause were, bicameral checks, which may have helped to induce a habit of compromise in England during the democratization of politics, were not quite appropriate to the needs of Malta. The proposed amendment of the constitution would have produced a system more like the English but it also brought about a period of great political unrest in the country.

The democratization of politics necessitated that the Constitutional Party, when in opposition, should not be too readily overborne; and the Nationalist Par-

66. Ugo P. Mifsud to L.S. Amery, 5 May 1928 in J.P. Du Cane to L.S. Amery, 21 May 1928, Malta No.75: AGPVM.

67. Ugo P. Mifsud to J.P. Du Cane, 23 May 1928. AGPVM.
The 1947 Constitution made provision for only a unicameral legislature. (See: Cmd 7014, p.7; Cmd 1261, p.71.)

ty when in office had to learn that parliamentary politics was an arena in which hard knocks were given and taken. The Strickland party had exercised a wholesome influence upon parliamentary debate. Its elected members constituted a standing censorship of the Government subjecting all its measures to a close scrutiny. But while the Strickland opposition offered a valuable security against any misconduct of the Nationalist administration, it was liable to abuse and was easily perverted to factious and unpatriotic ends. It was made the vehicle for personal acrimony and false accusations; and it pandered to the popular passions for selfish and sectional advantage. Theoretically, it should have been kept in check by two considerations: (1) that in the event of success attending Strickland's endeavours to replace the Nationalist administration, it would have, for the sake of consistency, to allow its own parliamentary proceedings to be reviewed and criticized by the constituent opposition body: (2) to give a practical effect in office to the constitution, it should have to be guided by the limitations of the constitutional provisions. The view of these contingencies should have exercised a sobering effect upon the character of Strickland while in opposition and should have kept him within the bounds of moderation.⁶⁸

The structural change threatened the status of the Senate, a major conservative institution and also a Nationalist stronghold. Moreover, the Legislature had not only passed an Act (as the Constitution indeed permitted) conferring on itself all 'the privileges immunities and powers held and enjoyed and exercised by the House of Commons',⁶⁹ but the Senate had also unanimously declared itself opposed to any curtailment of its rights.⁷⁰ The Nationalist opposition realized that the constitutional crisis occurred because Strickland found that the political norms should be changed to fight a holding operation. The Nationalists contended that in a democratic government, there was no permanent right to power and the Strickland Government should submit itself to the judgement of those who felt the consequences of its acts.

The Nationalists further argued that many wholesome proposals of the National Assembly had been ignored. For instance, in the case of an amendment of a *reserved* section relating to religion,⁷¹ (proposed by the Bishop, the National Assembly, and many other bodies in Malta in 1921),⁷² the Secretary of State had refused to accede to the request of the Maltese people; whereas in the case of a reform of the powers of the Senate established by *unreserved* sections of the Letters Patent, the Secretary of State then proposed to supply the temporary majority in the Legislative Assembly alone with machinery for amending such sections to bolster up the Ministry in power.⁷³ As the Nationalist leader claimed:

68. See: Memorandum by the Legal Adviser to the Crown, A.P. Mahaffy, 30 June 1924. AGPVM.

69. *Debates of the Legislative Assembly, 1924–1927*, Part IV, vol.II, p.4264. Cmd 3993, pp.62–63. See: MCLP 1921, Section 39(1).

70. Ugo P. Mifsud to L.S. Amery, 5 May 1928 in J.P. Du Cane to L.S. Amery, 21 May 1928, Malta No.75. AGVPM. *Debates of the Senate, 1927–1928*, vol.7, pp.358–369.

71. MCLP 1921, Section 56(1).

72. L.S. Amery to Lord Plumer, 8 Apr. 1921, Malta No.80. AGPVM.

73. U.P. Mifsud to G. Strickland, 11 July 1928 in J.P. Du Cane to L.S. Amery, 13 July 1928, Malta No.98. AGPVM.

A more partisan consideration could not have been invented than the proposed amendment to help the Strickland party in power to carry on against the other in opposition... It could not be conceived that because the Strickland Ministry had encountered hostility from the Senate, the Imperial Government should want to declare the legislative system defective and be prevailed upon to alter it by affecting a diminution of the rights and privileges enjoyed by the Upper House.⁷⁴

In short, unless the Imperial Government wanted to add to the power of one political party, there was 'no general need for revision of the Constitution from outside'.⁷⁵

The consent to reform the Constitution could not be obtained from the people. 'Downing Street certainly could not supersede that which could only be legitimately done by the Maltese nation'.⁷⁶ The Crown had reserved to itself the exclusive right to legislate on 'matters touching the public safety and the defence of the Empire', but gave the Legislature the power to make laws.⁷⁷ Therefore the Crown could not take back the right granted to the Legislature of repealing such parts of the Constitution as did not relate to 'reserved matters'. If it were possible to revoke this one vital provision, the whole fabric of the Maltese Constitution would depend on the caprice of Downing Street.⁷⁸ The Senate in South Africa as originally constituted could not be changed for ten years.⁷⁹ The Australian constitution could be altered only when every proposed law was passed by an absolute majority of each House, then approved by a majority of the electors in the Commonwealth as a whole.⁸⁰ Moreover, when the Crown granted a Legislative Assembly to a colony, its powers of legislation by Order in Council, unless expressly reserved, were lost.⁸¹ Therefore, under responsible government, the Nationalists argued, the way of finding a solution to questions and controversies should be left to the representatives in parliament, and failing the normal constitutional process, they should be left to the Maltese people themselves.⁸²

The Nationalist Opposition also contended that the Maltese electorate voted in the knowledge that their behaviour at the polls determined not only the composition of the Government but also the policy to be followed upon the dominant issue of the day. This was a very debatable argument. The Nationalist administra-

74. U.P. Mifsud to L.S. Amery, 5 May 1928 in J.P. Du Cane to L.S. Amery, 21 May 1928, Malta No.75. AGPVM.

75. Cmd 3993, p.96.

76. U.P. Mifsud to G. Strickland, 11 July 1928 in J.P. Du Cane to L.S. Amery, 13 July 1928, Malta No.98. AGPVM.

77. MCLP 1921, Section 41.

78. U.P. Mifsud to G. Strickland, 11 July 1928 in J.P. Du Cane to L.S. Amery, 13 July 1928, Malta No.98. AGPVM.

79. *Ibid.* The South Africa Act 1909, Sections 10, 152. AGPVM.

80. *Ibid.* Memorandum by the Legal Adviser to the Crown. AGPVM. J.A.R. Marriot, *Second Chambers* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1927), pp.122 – 124.

81. J.P. Du Cane to L.S. Amery, 13 July 1928, Malta No.98: Memorandum by the Legal Adviser to the Crown. AGPVM.

W.R. Anson, *The Law and Custom of the Constitution*, Part II. *The Crown*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1935, Fourth Ed.), ii.77.

82. U.P. Mifsud to L.S. Amery, 5 May 1928 in J.P. Du Cane to L.S. Amery, 21 May 1928, Malta No.75. AGPVM.

tion had followed the doctrine of the mandate because political conditions, such as the temporary support of independent allies, made this observance tactfully appropriate, while the Strickland party when in power felt free to ignore it in other circumstances. Secondly, election results demonstrated that electors gave their second and third choice to candidates of a different party; or even voted for the whole list.⁸³ Electors were influenced by personal attitudes and by the changing image of the political parties and their leaders. In fact, 'political opinion was largely dependent on the personal popularity of the individual candidate'.⁸⁴ Consequently, the majority of electors did not decide how to vote on the basis of the policies outlined in the party manifestos.

On the other hand, it was clearly fallacious to stress that success at the election indicated that the electorate had fully endorsed the dubious policy advocated by the Strickland government. It was true that this administration had a mandate to govern. It was to a certain extent free to pursue whatever policies it thought appropriate, but it was not truly entitled to introduce a major constitutional change. In general, therefore, the doctrine of the mandate could not convincingly be invoked to justify the arguments of either side.

To conclude, Milner had made it clear that 'the object of the dyarchical principle was to give the Maltese people real and complete responsibility for the conduct, both by legislation and administration, of their own local affairs'.⁸⁵ The Maltese Government, 'controlled by the wishes of the inhabitants expressed through popular institutions', was specifically 'responsible to the Maltese electorate'.⁸⁶ Malta's Court of Appeal also confirmed that 'It was not within the powers of the Imperial side of the Maltese dyarchy to amend the constitution, directly or indirectly'.⁸⁷ Yet the Letters Patent of 7 August 1928, secured the supremacy of the Legislative Assembly in regard to money bills and considerably altered the powers of the Senate.⁸⁸ That is to say, the Legislature was empowered to amend two sections of the Constitution by bare majority of two Houses sitting together instead of by the two-thirds majority.⁸⁹ This interference in local affairs gave the Strickland administration advantages which it could not possibly have gained without the extra-constitutional assistance of the Secretary of State. Amery had confidently expressed:

The people of Malta should henceforth recognize and keep in mind one thing, that the

83. W.C.F. Robertson to J.H. Thomas, 27 June 1924. Confidential AGPVM. Cmd 3993, pp.90–92.

84. W.C.F. Robertson to J.H. Thomas, 27 June 1924. Confidential. AGPVM.

85. Viscount Milner to Lord Plumer, 28 May 1920, Malta No.151. AGPVM L.S. Amery to Lord Plumer, 9 Apr. 1921, Malta No.80. AGPVM. Cmd 1321, p.584. Cmd 3993, pp.15–16.

86. Cmd 1321, p.585.

87. Cmd 3393, pp.68–72.

'The ample and exclusive power conferred upon the Court of Appeal by section 33 of the Maltese Constitution 1921, was a contrast to the limited powers vested in English judges by various Acts'. This power meant that the Legislature could be legally challenged by another authority. (See Cmd 3993, pp.63–65).

88. *Ibid.*, p.135.

89. *Ibid.*, p.145; Chap.XI: The Amending Letters Patent 1928 & 1929.

Government now established in Malta will be their own Government. The Ministers who compose the Government will be members of a Legislature which the people of Malta will elect, and which they can change, responsible to the Legislature and to their fellow citizens. If the Government makes mistakes in administration or législation, there is no outside authority to which the blame for these mistakes can be imputed. The responsibility of those mistakes and for correcting them by bringing about a change of government will rest with the people themselves. That is the whole meaning of Responsible Government.⁹⁰

It was true that the two-thirds majority clause hampered Maltese responsible government and its removal was an advantage to any administration. However, (1) the principle of dyarchy meant that the Imperial Government should not encroach on the Maltese sphere: the question at issue was not a reserved matter and therefore not within the jurisdiction of the Imperial Government. (2) The Ordinance of the Government (confirmed by the Secretary of State) was *ultra vires* because he exceeded the constitutional powers conferred upon him, among which the power to amend the constitution was not included. The Secretary of State turned out to be the coercive power who, bound by the rules of dyarchy, could not enforce anything in defiance of those rules. The Secretary of State acted in a partisan spirit since the issue favoured the Strickland administration. Strickland should have dissolved and sought re-election on the issue. In short, the complex two-thirds majority clause created not just an uncomfortable situation but the dilemma of Maltese sovereignty in local matters. Still, Imperial theory required strategy, and the task of strategy meant the retention of Strickland in office. This was the method most favourable to Imperial policy in Malta.

B. The Politico-Religious Question

In passing judgement on the politico-religious question, account must be taken of the highly complicated correspondence,⁹¹ and the wide implications of the whole issue, which interested the British Empire.

Roman Catholic beliefs and practices were woven into the very fabric of Maltese society. The Catholic religion – the exercise of a perpetual, consistent and unceasing spiritual authority by the Pope – was an integral element and a psychic need of Maltese life. The Church had developed distinctive orientations which influenced the institutional structure of society. The people held most tenaciously to their religious customs and surrounded the Bishops and clergy with profound veneration. This special condition and legal situation was acknowledged and sanctioned by the Imperial Government.⁹² Moreover, Catholicism implied an obedience to another sovereignty. Yet, the Constitutional provision was made to harmonize with Imperial administration and not with the beliefs of the Maltese

90. L.S. Amery to Lord Plumer, 9 Apr. 1921, Malta No.80. AGPVM.

91. See: *Exposition of the Malta Question with Documents* (Translation): Feb.1929 – June 1930 (Vatican City, Vatican Poliglot Press, 1930). SCRHL0.

Correspondence with the Holy See Relative to Maltese Affairs: Jan. 1929 – May 1930 (London, H.M.S.O., 1930), Cmd 3588.

92. *Exposition of the Malta Question*, p.8.

people. The relations with the Vatican were included under foreign affairs,⁹³ and thus reserved to a government which lacked understanding of Catholic viewpoints. Even negotiations were conducted through the Foreign and Colonial Office.⁹⁴ The conception of religious affairs – the most domestic and intimate matters – as foreign affairs was a false one. It meant that the exercise of spiritual authority was channelled through the jurisdiction of the Imperial Government. In spite of responsible government, religious interests fell under the control of the Imperial Government whose conception of the relation between religion and politics was a Protestant one.

The intrusion of personalities into the matter must also be considered. To Strickland, Michael Gonzi, the Bishop of Gozo, was ‘ambitious and aggressive’.⁹⁵ To H.G. Chilton, of the Imperial Legation to the Holy See, Gonzi was ‘a busy body of the first water and anti-Strickland of course’.⁹⁶ To the Governor, Gonzi had ‘a tendency to religious prejudice that made it unlikely that his relations with the Imperial authorities would be harmonious were he to become Archbishop of Malta’.⁹⁷ Du Cane’s later remarks on the Vatican’s Delegate to Malta were more derogatory: ‘He is a double-faced sneak and if all Vatican diplomats are like him, heaven help you’.⁹⁸ The judgement of Imperial administrators was entirely unfavourable to the position of the Church representatives. However, the Church dignitaries did not mince words in their criticism of Strickland’s policies and personal actions. The fact that ‘personalities entered to a most extraordinary degree’⁹⁹ made the politico-religious issue a highly inflammable quarrel.

The systematic use and abuse of religion for political purposes brought the Strickland ministry into conflict with the ecclesiastical authorities. Strickland was a Catholic, but virulent attacks identified Strickland with anti-clericalism and every sinister implication was attributed to his actions; on the other hand, the Strickland press¹⁰⁰ identified the Nationalist Opposition with irredentism and disloyalty to the Empire and implicated not only the Church in Malta but also the relations between Mussolini and the Vatican.¹⁰¹ On the one hand, the Church was believed to be associated with the Nationalist party, on the other, the compliance of the British Government with certain activities of Strickland was evident, though frequently camouflaged.¹⁰² The Strickland Ministry had faced a Senate

93. *Parl. Papers 1929–30*, xxxi (3588), pp.505–506: Randall to Gasparri, 4 Oct. 1929.

94. Lord Passfield to J.P. Du Cane, 7 Nov. 1929. Confidential. AGPVM.

95. *Parl. Papers 1929–30*, xxxi (3588), p.494: Memorandum from Maltese Ministers, 19 July 1929.

96. H.G. Chilton to A. Henderson, 11 July 1929. Confidential. AGPVM.

97. J.P. Du Cane to L.S. Amery, 28 Jan. 1928. Secret. AGPVM.

98. J.P. Du Cane to Ogilvie Forbes, 30 June 1930. Private Letter. AGPVM.

99. *Hansard*, 1930, 242. 1005.

100. Strickland had financial interests in the *Times of Malta*, *Progress* and *Ix-Xemx*; Bartolo in the *Daily Malta Chronicle*.

101. *Parl. Papers 1929–30*, xxxi (3588), p.578: Gasparri to Chilton, 29 Jan. 1930.

102. See, for instance, Foreign Office to Ogilvie Forbes (Holy See), 18 June 1930. Code Telegram No.47(R). AGPVM, where Strickland’s reply to the Vatican’s allegations against him was to be communicated officially with an intimation that it was of course a personal statement in regard to which H.M. Government were not consulted.

which was in a position to block its measures. Imperial intervention had eliminated the difficulty of the government minority. However, the representatives of the clergy had voted with the Nationalist Opposition on the appropriation bill; but when newspaper attacks incited the people against them and forced them 'to abstain from sitting in the Senate' until normal conditions were restored, Strickland considered this as a 'threat' and 'a declaration of war'.¹⁰³ The politico-religious dispute in Malta, escalated by a series of dynamic changes, dragged the Imperial Government into controversy with the Holy See.

(i) *Dynamic changes: the visit of the Protestant Bishops.* The religious atmosphere was not conducive to toleration. When in 1929 the Governor allowed three Protestant Bishops to hold a course in 'propaganda conferences'¹⁰⁴ at the Palace, his official residence, instead of in a Protestant church, he seemed to give recognition to the Protestant creed. The Governor's 'tactless' and 'foolish' action¹⁰⁵ drew a public condemnation from Michael Gonzi, the Bishop of Gozo. The Protestant Bishops' visit and the 'extensive distribution of Protestant books'¹⁰⁶ were interpreted as a British campaign against the Catholic religion.¹⁰⁷ The official reception was 'offensive' to Catholic sentiments and convictions and 'painful to the Holy See'. The Vatican requested that the Imperial Government should show 'their disapproval of what had occurred',¹⁰⁸ but got no response.

The Church enforced her doctrine. It was the duty of the Bishop 'to defend the rights of the Church' against Imperial encroachment and to censure a Governor from the pulpit if the need arose:

For what I say in the churches of my diocese, I am responsible to His Holiness the Pope by whom alone Roman Catholic Bishops are appointed and to whom alone they are responsible... Every Catholic Bishop is bound to reject secular interference with his Office.¹⁰⁹

As Malta was entirely Roman Catholic the moral and legal rights of other denominations to propaganda ought to be curtailed, if this propaganda showed signs of converting Roman Catholics. Since Malta had only one true religion then it was the fundamental duty of the Church to stifle all direct assaults upon it. The Imperial authorities could not take exception to such opinions and to the Vatican's note which practically amounted to a reprimand. This seemed to demand that official civilities should not be extended to other religious communities,¹¹⁰ and that the feeling of the members of the Church of England should

103. Cmd 3993, pp.30 – 32.

104. *Exposition of the Malta Question*, p.66.

105. *Hansard*, 1930, 242. 1006.

The Government was expected to be attacked on the question of addresses being given by Bishops of the Church of England in the Palace. But Lord Strickland said that they (the ecclesiastical authorities) had no grounds to base a protest'. (J.P. Du Cane to L.S. Amery, 28 Jan. 1929 Secret.) AGPVM.

106. *Exposition of the Malta Question*, p.17.

107. J.P. Du Cane to Lord Askwith, Chairman of the 1931 Royal Commission: Extract from correspondence from J.P. Du Cane to Secretary of State, 17 Jan. 1929. Secret. AGPVM.

108. Gasparri to H.G. Chilton, 23 Feb. 1929. AGPVM. H.G. Chilton to Austen Chamberlain, 1 Mar. 1929. AGPVM.

109. Michael Gonzi to J.P. Du Cane, 24 Jan. 1929. Private Letter. AGPVM.

110. Austen Chamberlain to H.G. Chilton, 19 Mar. 1929. AGPVM.

be considered.¹¹¹ Consequently, the Church was concerned with the system of proselytization; the Imperial authorities with the interests of non-Roman Catholics. Both sides appeared to be right.

(ii) *The political significance of the Father Carta case.* The Micallef incident, the second dynamic change occurring swiftly afterwards, raised 'vast and fundamental questions bearing on the relations of independence between Church and State'.¹¹² It also involved the question of the *privilegium fori* which interested the whole Empire.¹¹³ The question revolved on whether Father Carta, an Italian religious superior in Malta,¹¹⁴ was justified in ordering Father Guido Micallef, a British subject, to leave British territory because of his political opinions and his support of the Constitutional Party.¹¹⁵ Father Micallef, 'a political partisan,¹¹⁶ enlisted Strickland's support against Father Carta's order to transfer him to Sicily, as a result of which a pretext was found for opening criminal proceedings against Carta. Carta was accused of acting in the interests of Fascism. He had interfered in politics. He had sent letters without Maltese stamps contrary to Maltese postal regulations.¹¹⁷

The Carta incident was considered as crowning Strickland's career of anti-clericalism. Strickland was accused of pretending to protect Catholics against the intrigues of foreign ecclesiastics; 'a pretext which resembled sufficiently the assertions of Luther at the time of the Reformation'.¹¹⁸ To take criminal proceedings against Carta¹¹⁹ was contrary to the codex of Canon Law which carried the threat of excommunication. Moreover, 'the Maltese Law Courts should not examine, still less decide religious matters'.¹²⁰ But if the claims of the Church were not formally repudiated by the Imperial Government, one section of the community would be superior to the law. Consequently, in the stand against the Church, Strickland was fighting Britain's vested interests in the Empire.¹²¹

(iii) *The investigation of the Apostolic Delegate.* When the Vatican was asked to conduct an independent inquiry, Mgr Paschal Robinson, an Apostolic Delegate and a statesman,¹²² based the request 'on broader grounds than merely the Micallef incident'.¹²³ The Imperial Government believed that this investigation would discourage the political agitation by priests: 'The disregard of this rule and the intense participation of Maltese priests in local politics lay at the root of

111. J.P. Du Cane to L.S. Amery, 28 Jan. 1929. Secret. AGPVM.

112. *Parl. Papers 1929–30*, xxxi (3588), p.473: Du Cane to Amery, 29 May 1929.

113. *Hansard*, 1930, 78. 145, 160.

114. *Hansard*, 1930, 242. 1006.

115. *Parl. Papers 1929-30*, xxxi (3588), p.472: Chilton to Gasparri, 1 Mar. 1929. Cmd 2993, p.39

116. *Hansard*, 1930, 78. 138.

117. *Parl. Papers, 1929–30*, xxxi (3588), p.472: Gasparri to Chilton, 23 Feb. 1929. Cmd 3993, pp.39–40.

118. *Exposition of the Malta Question*, p.86.

119. *Hansard*, 1930, 78. 145.

120. *Parl. Papers 1929-30*, xxxi (3588), p.508: Pizzardo to Randall, 14 Oct. 1929.

121. *Hansard*, 1930, 242. 999.

122. *Parl. Papers 1929–30*, xxxi (3588), p.474: Gasparri to Chilton 9 Mar. 1929. *Exposition of the Malta Question*, p.18.

123. *Parl. Papers 1929–30*, xxxi (3588), p.530: Chilton to Henderson, 14 Mar. 1930. *Hansard*, 1939, 242. 1008.

the trouble'.¹²⁴ But this attitude of the Imperial Government merely stressed the characteristic doctrine of Protestantism which tended to subordinate the authority of the Church to the sovereignty of the state. The widely different atmosphere of Britain was conducive to such ideas; but in a clerically controlled country, the complete compartmentalization of religious belief and political action was not possible. Although it seemed convenient to think in terms of 'political man', the more complex reality in Malta should have shown how difficult it was to maintain the boundaries between politics and religion. Moreover, in appealing to the Vatican, the Imperial Government had been totally inconsistent. No foreign authority was allowed to exercise power within the British dependencies. And, as will be seen later, the crux of the matter was that, throughout the proceedings, the Imperial Government believed that they were treating diplomatically with the temporal sovereignty of the political Vatican State whereas, in Roman Catholic theory and in the Vatican and Catholic view, they were encroaching on the religious office of the Pope.

Strickland, with the support of the Imperial Government,¹²⁵ had embarked on a campaign to reform some aspects of the Maltese religious world. He presented Mgr Robinson with certain notes as the basis of a Concordat which the Imperial Government was keen on signing.¹²⁶ This action 'followed closely on the settlement of the Roman Question',¹²⁷ that is the Italo-Vatican Agreement of 11 February 1929. This Agreement was concerned with the religious obligations of Roman Catholic citizens in their political action. Of course, an Anglo-Vatican Concordat was of interest to the whole Empire, and Malta could therefore prove the testing ground of power politics. Little did Strickland realize that his dispute with the ecclesiastical authorities was being utilized in a more formidable game.

The Imperial Government was obviously interested in the relations of independence between the Church and State even though the Proclamation of 1828, issued with the consent of the Pope, had regulated relations between Church and State.¹²⁸ Among other propositions representing the purely political interests of Strickland, two were noteworthy: (1) A memorandum stressed that Malta was to be unequivocally considered as a possession of the Crown totally independent in all its relations with Italy and every foreign power. (2) The Bishops and clergy were to be deprived not only of the privileges which the Constitution accorded them but also of a great part of that liberty which was indispensable in the exercise of their sacred ministry.¹²⁹ An examination of the Concordat Notes convinced Robinson of 'the Erastian mentality and policy of Strickland who desired at all costs to subject the Church to the State and to reduce the Bishops and priests to mere employees of that Government'.¹³⁰ A Concordat presupposed both that the reciprocal relations between Church and State were not well defined, and that

124. Cmd 3993, pp.40 – 42.

125. *Parl. Papers 1929 – 30*, xxi (3588), pp.526 – 527; Henderson to Chilton, 24 Feb. 1930.

126. *Hansard*, 1930, 78. 130.

127. Austen Chamberlain to H.G. Chilton, 19 May 1929. Confidential. AGPVM.

128. B. Hilary, Ed., *The Malta Year Book 1973* (London, Mitre House, 1973), p.131.

129. *Exposition of the Malta Question*, p.23.

130. Cmd 3993, pp.43 – 44.

there was a sincere desire of the contracting parties to reach a friendly understanding in virtue of opportune concessions. But for a Maltese Concordat the latter condition was thoroughly missing and in the Papal view the former was also missing.¹³¹ Moreover, no progress could be made towards such an agreement, 'as long as Strickland was in power'.¹³² 'The Pope had said so quite definitely'.¹³³ However, the hope that a Concordat would remove the Church from the political sphere was maintained.¹³⁴ A situation could be created to constrain the Vatican to capitulate.

Robinson's hostile report accused the Strickland administration of exceeding its powers and of violating the constitutional limitations. Strickland should be made to modify his politics or some way should be found to eliminate him peacefully from the political field.¹³⁵ The Imperial Government should admit that he was the 'principal cause of the disturbed religious condition'.¹³⁶ The Imperial Government, which had hitherto supported the views of Strickland,¹³⁷ should put an end to his subversive conduct,¹³⁸ or divorce their responsibility from his.¹³⁹ The *aide memoire* even stressed that 'Malta was being subjected to a reign of terror and despotism'¹⁴⁰ which implied that 'the Imperial Government connived at tyranny and persecution'.¹⁴¹ It was made clear that the Holy Father would put an end to a line of action harmful to religion and to the *superior* authorities in Malta.¹⁴² A *pro-memoria* further emphasized that the requirements of all conventions entailed that, if religious interests were in question, diplomatic channels need not be used: the Vatican treated of such interests directly with the Bishops of all nations, not excepting Britain.¹⁴³ The Imperial Government insisted on treating the spiritual authority of the Pope and bishops in Malta as though it were to be conducted through the diplomatic means appropriate to temporal canons of the Papacy. But it was in the exercise of His ecclesiastical sovereignty that the Pope supported the action of the Bishops in censuring Strickland's activities, for if political affairs touched upon religion, it was the right of the Church to intervene.¹⁴⁴ The Report of the Apostolic Delegate was so hostile that the Vatican did not wish to publish it.¹⁴⁵ A dynamic change occurred when the Vatican, asked

131. *Exposition of the Malta Question*, p.21.

132. Cmd 3993, pp.51 – 52.

133. *Parl. Papers 1929 – 30*, xxxi (3588), p.530: Chilton to Henderson, 14 Mar. 1930.

134. *Parl. Papers 1929 – 30*, xxxi (3588), p.514: Du Cane to Passfield, 24 Dec. 1929. *Parl. Papers 1929 – 30*, xxxi (3588), pp.526 – 527: Henderson to Chilton, 24 Feb. 1930.

135. *Exposition of the Malta Question*, p.86. Cmd 3993, p.45.

136. *Exposition of the Malta Question*, pp.35 – 36. *Hansard*, 1930, 78. 158 – 159.

137. Cmd 3993, pp.48 – 49.

138. *Ibid.*, p.45.

139. *Parl. Papers 1929 – 30*, xxxi (3588), p.477: Gasparri to Chilton, 2 July 1929.

140. Cmd 3993, pp.45 – 46. *Parl. Papers 1929 – 30*, xxxi (3588), p.477: Gasparri to Chilton, 2 July 1929.

141. *Hansard*, 1930, 242. 1002.

142. Cmd 3993, pp.44 – 45.

143. *Parl. Papers 1929 – 30*, xxxi (3588), p.507: Pizzardo to Randall, 14 Oct. 1929.

144. *Parl. Papers 1929 – 30*, xxxi (3588), pp.476 – 477: Gasparri to Chilton, 2 July 1929. *Parl. Papers 1929 – 30*, xxxi (3588), p.512: Chilton to Henderson, 27 Dec. 1930. Cmd 3993, p.45.

145. *Hansard*, 1930, 242. 1007.

to grant an interview to Strickland,¹⁴⁶ declared Strickland *persona non grata* to the Holy See.¹⁴⁷ However, the note declaring such action and the resumé of the Apostolic Delegate's investigation were strictly confidential documents destined to enlighten His Majesty's Government. Instead they were communicated to Strickland who published them in newspapers in Malta and in England. This rash publication made the politico-religious situation, already serious, still more painful.¹⁴⁸

(iv) *The electoral truce.* Naturally, this treatment of a Prime Minister of a British dependency could not but be considered by the Imperial Government as an intervention that must be met 'with the strongest reprobation'. The Vatican's instructions practically constituted a direct incitement to resist the freely and constitutionally elected Government. The only remedy to restrain Strickland's activities lay with the electorate.¹⁴⁹ Consequently, if the Vatican were to prevent the clergy from taking part in the 1930 elections, Strickland would urge caution and, as far as possible, prevent renewal of polemics.¹⁵⁰ In reality, the electorate truce implied that while Strickland's promise was hedged with reservations, the clergy had to pledge themselves definitely. Concessions for the forthcoming elections were favourable solely to Strickland.¹⁵¹

Of course, there would have been fewer opportunities for controversy if the Church representatives did not sit in the Legislature, but there were sound reasons for their continuing to do so. Maltese ecclesiastics had had a voice in the Government from time immemorial.¹⁵² Moreover, not only did the action of the clergy aid in forming parties, but they also had the right to be elected members of the Legislature and to intervene in politics even outside the Legislature: 'pronouncements on lines of action at the time of an election were clearly unexceptional'.¹⁵³ However, in opposition to this state of affairs, Strickland's administration had constantly taken a line of action which practically attempted to destroy this situation, to the detriment of religion.¹⁵⁴ The Vatican was therefore stressing that since the Constitution had satisfied Maltese needs so effectively in the past, the Church was committed to continuity and consequently to the preservation of the character of its organization in the political sphere. As the promoter of the *status quo*, the Church could not but clash with the orientations of the Imperial Government; but while one side maintained that Strickland's anti-clerical attitude was the cause of the trouble, the other insisted that the intense political participa-

146. *Hansard*, 1930, 78. 135.

147. *Parl. Papers 1929-30*, xxxi (3588), p.476: Gasparri to Chilton, 2 July 1929. *Parl. Papers 1929-30*, xxxi (3588), p.511: Chilton to Henderson, 27 Dec. 1929. Cmd 3993, p.45.

148. *Exposition of the Malta Question*, p.32. *Parl. Papers, 1929-30*, xxxi (3588), pp.502-505: Gasparri to Chilton, 10 Aug. 1929.

149. Cmd 3993, pp.46-48.

150. *Parl. Papers 1929-30*, xxxi (3588), p.525: Memorandum from Ministers, 12 Feb. 1930.

151. *Exposition of the Malta Question*, pp.44-45. *Parl. Papers 1929-30*, xxxi (3588), p.556: Gasparri to Chilton, 7 May 1930.

152. See also: *Parl. Papers 1870*, xlix (251), pp.605-612: Extracts of the Correspondence with Reference to the Admission of Ecclesiastics into the Council of Government.

153. Cmd 3993, pp.160-162.

154. *Parl. Papers 1929-30*, xxxi (3588), pp.515-523: Gasparri to Chilton, 29 Jan. 1930.

tion of the clergy lay at the root of the dispute. In short, the Imperial Government saw the special position and the power of the Church as a threat to democratic government. The diplomacy of the Two Powers could do nothing more than emphasize the irreconcilable position of the two points of view.

But the irreconcilable position of the Two Powers embodied more profound implications. The Codex of Canon Law (Canon 139 para.4) subjected participation of priests in politics to the authority of the Holy See and to the local Bishops. In their political actions, Maltese priests had to follow the direction of the Bishop.¹⁵⁵ Naturally since the Maltese Bishops controlled the ecclesiastical system, their appeal to faithfulness, discipline and obedience were intrinsic measures of organizational loyalty. The value of obedience was of course ranked far ahead of intellectual autonomy, which was associated with Protestantism. The rationalistic orientations of men like Strickland who believed that they could dissociate ‘purely civil affairs’ from ‘matters purely spiritual’¹⁵⁶ could not but meet with resistance from a traditionalistic ecclesiastical authority. The Bishops would certainly not allow both clergy and people to discover, by rational means, the answer to politico-religious problems raised by Strickland and his kind. Malta’s problems were well-known and therefore it was wise ‘not to scorn our centuries – old Catholic traditions’.¹⁵⁷ In short, the growth of intellectual autonomy which the Imperial Government was dutifully bound to foster could hardly have any effect in the Church continued her appeals for obedience to ecclesiastical discipline.

(v) *The Pastoral Letter of May 1930.* The Bishops’ Pastoral was the most controversial in the series of dynamic changes. The Letter forbade the Maltese electorate from voting for persons notoriously harmful to religion, but only for candidates who offered assurances to safeguard religious welfare.¹⁵⁸ The effect of the Pastoral Letter was obviously to limit electors to voting for the Nationalist candidates.¹⁵⁹ From an Imperial view, the Pastoral Letter, threatening severe spiritual penalties against electors, ‘was a violation of the privilege of British citizens and an abuse of ecclesiastical power’.¹⁶⁰ The Church authorities had clearly shown that they did not know how to distinguish between religion and politics, at all events according to British ideas.¹⁶¹ Theirs was not guidance for public good but a partisan directive and therefore a political intervention against the Constitutional Party ‘which no British Government could possibly allow’.¹⁶² That the Bishops should publish their apostolic letter was certainly a political blunder but no person would admit that such circumstances were uncommon in Malta,¹⁶³ or that it was not the clear duty of the Bishops to give moral guidance to

155. *Parl. Papers 1929–30*, xxxi (3588), p.528: Randall to Henderson, 7 Mar. 1930.

156. *Parl. Papers 1929–30*, xxxi (3588), p.479: Resolution of the Legislative Assembly, 25 July 1929.

157. *Parl. Papers 1929–30*, xxxi (3588), pp.548–551: Joint Pastoral of the Bishops, 1 May 1930.

158. *Cmd 3993*, pp.53, 54.

159. *Hansard*, 1930, 78. 150, 151. *Cmd 3993*, p.162.

160. *Hansard*, 1930, 242. 995.

161. *Hansard*, 1930, 78. 130.

162. *Hansard*, 1930, 78. 153.

163. *Malta Government Gazette*, No.4083, Sat. 31 Dec. 1888, p.936.

their flock. The condemnation of Strickland, the Church maintained, was not directed against the platform of the Constitutional Party but against a doctrine which, on a number of points, was contrary to the teaching of the Church. Thus while the Imperial Government regarded the nature of the Pastoral Letter as political, the Church determined that it was religious.

From an Imperial standpoint, religion, though a recognized system, should be a matter of individual choice; moreover, according to Protestant doctrine, moral truth could be ascertained, not by escaping from temptation but by struggling with error (Milton). It was therefore hard for the Imperial Government to understand a quarrel which, the Church maintained, was carried on within the limits of Catholic morality and to reconcile themselves to the view that a Bishop could declare it a mortal sin to vote for Strickland and his colleagues. On British convictions, the conscience of an electorate should not be subject to human compulsion. As a faculty of reason operating through reflection and consideration, the conscience of every British subject should be free and the motive power of political participation. To allow the supreme guidance of a bishop to be substituted for that freedom of conscience meant that the very political principles, on which the Maltese democratic government was largely based, were actually being undermined.¹⁶⁴ Consequently, the general trend of political evolution should be in the direction of mollifying the restrictions in the religious field so that democracy, a synthesis of free wills, would not be dominated by the mind and will of one. Herein lay the crux of the politico-religious question.

The monarchical constitution of the Church which vested ultimate human sovereignty in one man was partly responsible for the strong heteronomic orientation of Maltese ecclesiastics and people alike; but the highly elaborated system of rules, regulations, doctrines and religious sanctions was no less a determining factor. The Maltese people had been indoctrinated to believe that liberty of conscience was to be practised in accordance with the laws of the Church. Thus the Church claimed, as her undeniable right, to direct the conscience of the Maltese electorate when grave questions of faith and morals were at stake. This phrase 'faith and morals' which the Church employed to define her sphere of action was extremely broad and inclusive. That is, the jurisdiction over morals extended to conduct and opinion in every department of Maltese life. The Maltese 'the most religious people of the world',¹⁶⁵ would never question the prescriptive assertion that if politics included morals and morals were integrally a part of religion, then the jurisdiction of the Church was supreme in mixed political and religious matters.¹⁶⁶ In short, if it was within the province of the Church to decide which were moral questions and which were not, then the Church could assert that when political questions became moral questions, she had paramount sovereignty over the Maltese electorate.

The conception of a universal moral law was certainly a strong one in Malta¹⁶⁷ and the Pastoral Letter merely applied the principles of Catholic moral theology

164. *Hansard*, 1930, 242. 1001.

165. *Exposition of the Malta Question*, p.8.

166. *Parl. Papers 1929-30*, xxxi (3588), pp.512-513: Chilton to Henderson, 27 Dec. 1929.

167. *Hansard*, 1930, 242. 1004.

which forbade Catholics from voting for persons harmful to religion. The Catholic Church, the authoritative interpreter of moral law, claimed the sacrosanct right to pass judgement on the morality of political action and solemnly affirmed:

Freedom is neither lessened nor restricted by moral law which but regulates its use, assigns the boundaries between what is optional and what is licit, and finds freedom to respect those boundaries, but on the contrary freedom is by the moral law protected and saved from generating into mere licentiousness.¹⁶⁸

Moral law did not restrict true liberty but supported and protected it against abuse. The Bishops acted in accordance with the voice of conscience. The action of the Holy See did not constitute an intervention of the internal political life of a British dependency. The Pope solely safeguarded the religious interests of the people as was his right and duty.¹⁶⁹ Moreover, the Holy See could not renounce her rights to the two complete societies, ecclesiastical and civil. She could not give complete freedom to the electorate to exercise their political judgement.¹⁷⁰ In other words, not only were the Pontiff's instructions imparted as law but religion was popularly accorded an authority *superior* to the claims of the Imperial Government who, from the start, had given assurances that the Catholic religion would be protected and defended.¹⁷¹

As Malta's *Magna Carta* of 1802 had indicated, there was never any compromise on matters of religion. Assurances on the security of the Catholic faith were repeatedly given. Amery confirmed the situation:

The security, well-being and public recognition of the Catholic Church in Malta; the education of the Maltese people; all matters in fact which pertain to the safeguarding of their religious institutions and the maintenance of the faith of their fathers are left in their (Maltese) hands.¹⁷²

Once Britain had recognized the ecclesiastical sovereignty of the Holy See, she had also acknowledged the hallowed jurisdiction of the Pontiff. Yet when the Imperial Government declared that Malta should not be subjected to any foreign power, this also involved the Vatican which, to the Imperial mind, was a 'foreign Power'.¹⁷³ Of course, as a civil State, the Vatican had no right to interfere in temporal affairs, but it had the undeniable right, according to its theory, to intervene in a political issue which embodied a religious or moral question. To the Vatican any form of intervention was the exercise of the Pontiff's spiritual authority over religious and moral issues; to the Imperial Government such function appeared as a meddling behaviour of a foreign Power in the domestic policies of a British dependency. Consequently, the Maltese combination of a double sovereignty, ecclesiastical and secular, made the politico-religious issue a highly 'complicated case' and 'a difficult dispute'¹⁷⁴ which interested the whole Empire.

168. Cmd 3993, pp.59 – 60.

169. *Parl. Papers 1929 – 30*, xxxi (3588), p.553: Gasparri to Chilton, 7 May 1930. *Exposition of the Malta Question*, p.50.

170. *Parl. Papers 1929 – 30*, xxxi (3588), p.561: Gasparri to Chilton, 20 May 1930. Cmd 3993, pp.57 – 58.

171. *Exposition of the Malta Question*, p.52.

172. L.S. Amery to Lord Plumer, 9 Apr. 1921, Malta No.80. AGPVM.

173. *Hansard*, 1930, 242. 998.

174. *Hansard*, 1930, 78. 138.

(vi) *The suspension of the Constitution.* By its nature, the Malta Question involved the interests of a great empire and those of the Roman Catholic Church in all quarters of the world.¹⁷⁵ The issue received discussion in both Houses of Parliament and at Cabinet level¹⁷⁶ as well as at the Papal Allocation to the Cardinals in Consistory.¹⁷⁷ Each side defended and affirmed the position it had taken. The Imperial Government decided that the nature of the conflict was political. Negotiations could be conducted further if the Maltese priesthood were excluded from politics. The episcopal authorities should restore complete freedom to the electorate to exercise their political judgement.¹⁷⁶ The Imperial Government was the authoritative guardian of democracy. Britain's safeguards to guarantee full freedom of choice to any elector had been won after generations of struggle. That protection should be equally secured in Malta.¹⁷⁷ The Imperial Government was determined not to allow national elections to be affected, and a political party embarrassed, if not destroyed, by the law and will of the Pontiff imposed through Roman Catholic solidarity.

The events that succeeded followed predictably from the attitudes of the Imperial Government and the Vatican. When the Imperial Government decided that the diplomatic correspondence should be laid for judgement before the British Parliament,¹⁷⁸ it put the Holy See 'to the necessity of enlightening public opinion in any manner at Her disposal'.¹⁷⁹ The consideration included the publication of 'new documents'¹⁸⁰ which purported 'to present both sides'¹⁸¹ of the Malta Question. Moreover, Sir Henry Chilton was 'promoted' and no Minister was appointed to the Vatican.¹⁸² The 1930 general election was suspended¹⁸³ and soon afterwards crown colony rule was temporarily set up in Malta. However, such a system, resented by the Nationalist Opposition and the ecclesiastical authorities, made it 'impossible to resume negotiations for a Concordat with the Vatican'.¹⁸⁴ Thus, the politico-religious controversy which surrounded the division between the spiritual and the temporal had reached an impasse.

The constitutional move was an anticlimax in a series of dynamic changes. If

175. *Hansard*, 1930, 78. 156 – 157.

176. Lord Passfield to J.P. Du Cane, 19 June 1930, Telegram (Secret & Confidential). AGPVM.

177. Cmd 3993, pp.59 – 60.

176. *Parl. Papers 1929 – 30*, xxxi (3588), p.557: Chilton to Gasparri, 16 May 1930. Cmd 3993, pp.51 – 52.

177. *Hansard*, 1930, 242. 1003.

178. *Parl. Papers 1929 – 30*, xxxi (3588), p.557: Chilton, to Gasparri 16 May 1930.

179. *Parl. Papers 1929 – 30*, xxxi (3588), p.560: Gasparri to Chilton, 20 May 1930.

180. *Exposition of the Malta Question*, p.8 The plan of the Concordat was eliminated from the English Blue Book, but 'the Vatican had only published that part of Robinson's recommendations on the subject of local ecclesiastical reforms'. (Ogilvie Forbes to J. Simon, 11 Dec. 1931: Memorandum of remarks by Mgr. Robinson. No. 169(15/118/31). MSS Brit. Empire S.286. RHLO.)

181. *Hansard*, 1930, 242. 996.

182. Cmd 3993, pp.58 – 59.

181. *Hansard*, 1930, 242. 996.

182. Cmd 3993, pp.58 – 59.

183. *Parl. Papers 1929 – 30*, xxxi (3588), p.557: Chilton to Gasparri, 9 May 1930.

184. J.P. Du Cane to Lord Passfield, 20 June 1930. Secret. Telegram. AGPVM.

the suspension of the election was received with 'bitter derision', that of the constitution was laughed at as a 'grotesque joke'.¹⁸⁵ In suspending the constitution, a move deplored even in the House of Commons,¹⁸⁶ Britain was clearly acting illegally and not in accordance with the terms of the constitution.¹⁸⁷ There were no stress of war¹⁸⁸ or grounds of emergency touching 'the public safety and defence of the Empire'.¹⁸⁹ Moreover, Strickland and his Ministers were retained in Office,¹⁹⁰ doubtlessly to serve the purposes of the Imperial Government.¹⁹¹ The retention of Strickland would force the Vatican to capitulate. However, by securing his services in a more consultative capacity¹⁹² not only was there a *diminutio capitis* of the status of ministers, but also an undermining of Strickland's authority. After all his authority depended on the popular constitution and not on His Majesty's Government.¹⁹³ A constitutional Prime Minister could no longer 'pretend' to the position of adviser and continue to recognize the authority of an autocratic governor 'for an indefinite period of time'.¹⁹⁴ Consequently, Imperial intervention had not only boomeranged on Strickland but, during the interregnum, Strickland became a mere pawn in the game of power politics.¹⁹⁵

The suspension of the Constitution and the retention of Strickland's Ministry aimed at compelling the Vatican to capitulate. A free election was possible 'either by the Vatican reopening negotiations and climbing down or by local legislation defining undue influence and ensuring that it would unseat those in whose favour it was exercised'.¹⁹⁶ Thus the Imperial Government was creating enough explosive matter to make the position in Malta 'an abnormal one'.¹⁹⁷ Under such a condition, the Imperial Government could make 'adjustments of various kinds'¹⁹⁸ which of course would later be confirmed by a Royal Commission.¹⁹⁹ Britain had often shown the ability to instil loyalty without arousing suspicion, but to use the Maltese Constitution in her diplomatic manoeuvring was intolerable to the Maltese people.

The way Britain handled the situation made it questionable whether the Empire was really being governed in the interests of democracy. If the Constitution was really suspended on the ground that the 1930 general election could not be

185. Cmd 3993, p.156.

186. *Hansard*, 1930, 242. 995.

187. See J.P. Du Cane to Lord Passfield, 23 June 1930. Secret Telegram. AGPVM. J.P. Du Cane to Lord Passfield, 20 June 1930. Secret Telegram. AGPVM.

188. *Hansard*, 1930, 78. 143.

189. MCLP 1921, Section 41.

190. Lord Passfield to J.P. Du Cane, 19 June 1930. Secret Telegram. AGPVM.

191. Cmd 3993, p.156.

192. Lord Passfield to J.P. Du Cane, 1 Aug. 1930. Confidential. AGPVM.

193. *Hansard*, 1930, 78. 136.

194. *Hansard*, 1930, 78. 144.

195. *Hansard*, 1930, 78. 158.

D.G.M. Campbell to P. Cunliffe-Lister, 3 Mar. 1932. Secret. MSS. Brit. Empire S.286. RHLO.

196. J.P. Du Cane to Ogilvie Forbes, 30 June 1930. Private Letter. AGPVM.

197. *Hansard*, 1930, 1012.

198. *Ibid.*

199. Cmd 3993, Chapter XIV.

free,²⁰⁰ then the Imperial Government was virtually saying that Catholic beliefs were incompatible with democratic government. If the Imperial Government raised the question of what were the proper occasions upon which the Church might make pronouncements upon politics or denied that such occasions existed, then it would create an awkward situation in other parts of the Empire. Britain might as well have suspended the Canadian Constitution possibly for some interference in Quebec.

C. The Language Question

In Malta culture, education and language were influenced by foreign competition. The issue of whose cultural traditions (English, Italian, Maltese) were to be transmitted was the cause of much discontent; but the real importance of language was exaggerated on all-sides for devious political ends. The clash among three languages was also a clash among three cultural groups seeking to retain or gain the power of political rule. In this respect the linguistic cleavages strikingly illustrated the trichotomy of the three political parties as well as their respective ideals of nationalism, anglicization and Italianity. The language problem was worked up into an intricate national puzzle by a clever class of politicians; but with the coming into power of the Strickland administration, Malta reached another crossroad. A definite choice had to be made. This parting of the ways implied adding the linguistic controversy to the politico-religious question. But while one led to the temporary suspension of the constitution, the other brought about its withdrawal.

Language, made a question of politics and a central article of the state creed, had led to the ruin of public instruction. In the administration of Malta, the Imperial Government substituted English but left Italian to have complete sway in the Law Courts. The Imperial Government adopted the fatal policy of the *pari passu* system – the greatest misnomer in Maltese politics – to reduce Italian influence by staged development. The difficulties arising out of the use of two languages when none of these was the home language left most people in a state of ignorance. Thus after a century of British rule, Malta was still educationally a very underdeveloped society.

The complexity of trilingualism²⁰¹ was made more difficult when the constitution established language as a reserved matter. With a Nationalist administration in power, the time had not yet come for the Imperial Government to enforce a change. In fact, the prolongation of the *pari passu* system was expedient: Italian was the language of the cultured professional class whom the Imperial Government did not wish to antagonize by untimely changes. However, the constitution had protected the English language.²⁰² Such special protection was not extended to the Italian language and the Strickland government had power to use or refrain from using Italian practically as they wished.²⁰³ The psychological moment for ef-

200. *Hansard*, 1930, 78. 154.

201. D.G.M. Campbell to P. Cunliffe–Lister, 24 Feb. 1932. Secret. MSS Brit. Empire, S.286, Luke 2/1. RHLO.

202. MCLP 1921, Section 57.

203. L.S. Amery to A. Chamberlain, 24 Feb. 1928. ACPVM. MCLP 1921, Section 40 (1)(2)(3).

fecting the change was not simply when ‘the common use of Italian appeared to be decreasing’²⁰⁴ but also when Strickland was in power.

Of course, there were serious reasons which demanded the extinction of one extraneous language. In a British dependency the language to be encouraged ought naturally to be English. Moreover *pari passu* had tended to become a hard dogma permitting no elasticity. Not only was it out of date but also condemned as unsatisfactory by educational authorities. *Pari Passu*, especially in the elementary schools, was contrary to the advice of the Imperial Education Conference (1923): ‘bilingual teaching necessarily implied that the learning of a third language was not desirable before the secondary school stage’.²⁰⁵ Furthermore, the Imperial Government could not but take seriously the warnings of anthropologists about the consequences of trilingualism. Under examination this problem demanded the extinction of one language. Italian must be pushed out of the position it had previously enjoyed. In short, once the people were given political power, Britain could no longer wait to give them an educational system on correct lines.

Strickland’s coming to power coincided with ‘the new cultural policy’.²⁰⁶ By establishing the dominance of the English language in the academic life of Malta, the Imperial Government intended to further the anglicization policy. Both the Constitutional Party and the Labour Party strongly desired an education which equipped the people with better advantages. Previously education had been largely geared to training for the professions and ignored wider social needs. However, the spread of the English language gained much ground among the middle-class of the population. Therefore Strickland, together with Augustus Bartolo, ‘Malta’s leading Imperialist’,²⁰⁷ threw himself with renewed energy into the language struggle in which he played such a conspicuous part when he was Chief Secretary to the Governor.²⁰⁸ Thus the language problem was a political revival of Joseph Chamberlain’s previous policy of anglicization at the turn of the century.

Equally important was the need for reconciling the English language with economic factors and the emigration policy. The close connection and indeed interdependence of the language question and that of emigration was obvious. Emigration had increasingly been directed to English-speaking countries. Therefore the efforts to encourage the study of English were to place the Maltese in a more satisfactory position.²⁰⁹ But migration within the Empire further fostered the knowledge of English to the corresponding detriment of Italian. This naturally alarmed the Nationalist Opposition; but their efforts to induce the people to settle in latin countries abroad²¹⁰ did not meet with much success.

Education in Malta had a vocational and not a symbolic value. The child was an economic asset on which the family depended. The parents wanted their

204. Cmd 3993, p.117.

205. Cmd 3993, p.125.

206. T.A.V. Best to L.S. Amery, 18 Oct. 1928, Malta No.156: Memorandum by A. Bartolo, Acting Head of Ministry. AGPVM.

207. *The Times*, 25 Jan. 1927.

208. R. Graham to A. Chamberlain, 27 Jan. 1928. No.72 (143/1/28). AGPVM.

209. R. Graham to A. Chamberlain, 9 April 1928, No.299 143/15/28. Secret. AGPVM.

210. T.A.V. Best to L.S. Amery, 18 Oct. 1928, Malta No.156: Memorandum by Bartolo. AGPVM.

children to obtain employment and better jobs,²¹¹ and the learning of the English language accomplished this purpose. English was the most useful language for entry into the various government departments and for employment in the merchant and royal navy and service establishments; at the same time, an English education of a vocational type increased the efficiency of the working people on whom the service establishments depended. As long as examination requirements for employment continued, the dominant attitude was a desire for as much education in that area as could be obtained. The educational policy was therefore linked to the pressures not only for learning English to gain employment opportunities but also for fulfilling the needs of the Imperial Government. Consequently, the vocational aspect of education, firmly associated with Britain's economic policy, was in accordance with the anglicization process.

There were two sets of pressures working in the same direction. One was political, the other specifically educational. The educational pressure came from the interest shown by the parents.²¹² The political pressure came from the Imperial Government. To further this aim, the Strickland administration made the principle of 'free choice' of languages the chief plank in the political platform.²¹³ One must admit, however, that the policy of free choice between English and Italian could not really be free if the Imperial Government had followed the policy of pre-determining the dominance of the English language in several spheres of Maltese life. In other words, even if there were no direct compulsion to learn English instead of Italian, there was definitely an indirect force under which the Italian language could not survive. Since the prevalence of the English language was related to vocational aspects, economic factors and political power, this educational policy was not at all disingenuous.

Irrespective of British cultural ideals, the national individuality of a self-governing community, could not be realized as long as Italian influence was perpetuated. Therefore, the Labour Party was determined to assert Maltese nationality by promoting the Maltese language. This move meant relegating Italian to the secondary schools which only a minority of the school-attending population ever reached. On this point of eliminating the influence of the Italian Language, the Constitutional Party and the Labour Party held common views.²¹⁴ Therefore one of the subjects of the agreement between them, in 1927, which caused them to be known as the 'Compact Parties' was to raise the Maltese language to a cultural position. If in the process of uplifting Maltese and furthering English, Italian were to suffer, the result could be only attributed to the force of circumstances.²¹⁵ Briefly then, for political ends the Compact Parties appealed to the Maltese nationalism of the masses against Italian culture, which the Nationalist Opposition continued to champion.

211. Cmd 3993, pp.122 – 123.

212. *Ibid.*, p.124.

213. *The Times*, 10 May 1924.

214. *The Times*, 18, 25 Jan. 1926; 21 June 1927.

215. T.A.V. Best to L.S. Amery, 18 Oct. 1928, Malta No.156. Memorandum by Bartolo.

Maltese language, the compendium of the Island's history, had been practically banished from children's education. In fact the *pari passu* had restricted its teaching to one hour a week. Moreover, the Labour Party had been formed to defend the neglected masses against the professional classes whose privileged position and traditional cleavage had always rested on the knowledge of Italian.²¹⁶ The adoption of the Maltese language in education, legislation, and administration (apart from its essentials for practical everyday needs, and apart from the necessity of doing away with social distinctions) was the means of asserting national individuality. Thus the people were caught up in a developing nationalism largely advocated by the Labour Party but supported, for other political ends, by the Constitutional Party.

The Compact Parties were determined to amend the language sections of the Constitution for official recognition of Maltese.²¹⁷ But the Constitutional changes were reserved matters which the Compact Parties could not touch without the compliance of the Imperial Government. However, the interest of many Maltese people could no longer be sacrificed to the politics of the Nationalist Opposition. In fact the Act to introduce the Maltese Language into legal proceedings was to settle a grievance of long standing. The Act aimed at giving a Maltese person the right to be tried in his own language – a right already enjoyed by an Englishman.²¹⁸ By giving the Maltese language an improved position in the law courts at the expense of Italian, the Imperial Government touched upon a matter of hot dispute. For the policy of introducing Maltese in jurisprudence and of establishing English in the academic life of the island was the source of a political struggle in which Italy was extremely interested. That struggle was to arrest the progress of ten years of Constitutional development to which the Nationalist Party had nevertheless made a substantial contribution.

The policy of the Nationalist Opposition was the unchangeable supremacy of Italian culture, reluctant toleration of the English language, and complete ostracism of Maltese. To the Nationalists, the language problem represented a struggle to protect Italian cultural traits. Their objection to a language policy of 'free choice' as against that of the *pari passu* system was that Italian would be uprooted unless compulsorily taught. They believed they were fighting to defend an ancient way of life menaced by the policy of Imperial Britain. This cultural defence strikingly illustrated the cleavage between the upper class and the workers. It was also a demonstration against the authoritarianism of the Compact Parties.

The political opponents of the Nationalists assailed them with a theory of *Italianità* in a political sense: The theory involved accusations of penetration by Italy, of advocating irredentism and of disloyalty to the Crown.²¹⁹ These charges were warmly resented. After all, six years of Nationalist administration showed no process of unification with Italy. However, being acutely sensitive to their inferior political prerogatives during the Strickland administration, they could not

216. *The Times*, 23 May 1925.

217. L.S. Amery to A. Chamberlain, 24 Feb. 1928. Confidential. AGPVM.

218. Lord Passfield to J.P. Du Cane, 19 Dec. 1928. Confidential. AGPVM.

219. Cmd 3993, p.116. *The Times*, 24 May 1926.

but accept the cultural challenge with renewed vigour and apply it for political ends.

Enrico Mizzi, the champion propogandist of *Italianità*, was to them a political instrument which could help them enlist the services of Italy in combatting Strickland's policy of anglicization. The Nationalist Party as a whole did not share his views, but neither did they repudiate them.²²⁰ In this respect, Mizzi, the leader of a coterie of pro-Italian extremists, was a clever tactician. He was accused of wanting to retain Italian culture in preparation for the day when Malta would be united to Italy. Ever since the Fascist Party came to power in Italy, Mizzi had often claimed that Malta's inclusion in the British Empire did violence to the ethnographic character of the Maltese. However, his views that Malta's natural place politically should be within the Kingdom of Italy and that union with Italy would solve all the national problems of the Maltese,²²¹ had no following in Malta. On the contrary, 'with the exception of his coterie the suggestion, that Malta should belong to Italy, was regarded with dismay by all the inhabitants of Malta'.²²² Mizzi was considered in many quarters as the real motive force in the Nationalist Party but it could never be proved that he was disloyal to the Crown. Mizzi later made it clear that he had no desire to weaken England's rights; he only wished to defend Malta's cultural traits and by this means consolidate the good relations with Italy.²²³

As editor of the newspaper *Malta*, he reproduced Italian articles which offered opinions about Malta. However, these Italian attacks on the Strickland administration were frequently based on information originally supplied from Malta.²²⁴ Mizzi hoped to work up opinion in Italy, so that any attempt to further the teaching of English would meet with a similar fate as when Joseph Chamberlain, in deference to Italy, withdrew the 1899 Order in Council intended to settle the language question. His object was to produce a general atmosphere, favourable to the sentiment that Italy had a right to intervene in Maltese politics.²²⁵ In short, Mizzi transferred his cause to the parliamentary associations and to cultural and press circles in Italy,²²⁶ and hoped, that by calling the attention of the Italian public, concessions might be obtained from England on the language question:

The Fascist press, for other political ends, openly took up Mizzi's cause. The press campaign in Italy intensified with the promulgation of the Letters Patent of 7 August 1928,²²⁷ but the real reasons why the accusations became so aggressive

220. H.C. Luke to J.P. Du Cane, 10 Nov. 1930. AGPVM.

221. *The Times*, 10 May 1924.

222. J.P. Du Cane to L.S. Amery, 29 Feb. 1928. Secret. AGPVM.

223. J.H. Thomas, to D.G.M. Campbell, 8 Oct. 1931. Confidential AGPVM. J. Murray (Rome) to Marquis of Reading, 17 Sept. 1931. No.708(169/6/31). AGPVM.

224. J.P. Du Cane to Lord Passfield, 13 Nov. 1929. Secret. AGPVM.

A. Chamberlain to L.S. Amery, 29 March 1928, (2236/121/22). AGPVM.

225. J.P. Du Cane to L.S. Amery, 29 Feb. 1928. Secret. AGPVM.

226. *The Significance of the Nationalist Triumph at the Last General Election of 1932* (Malta, Government Printing Office, 1933), p.47.

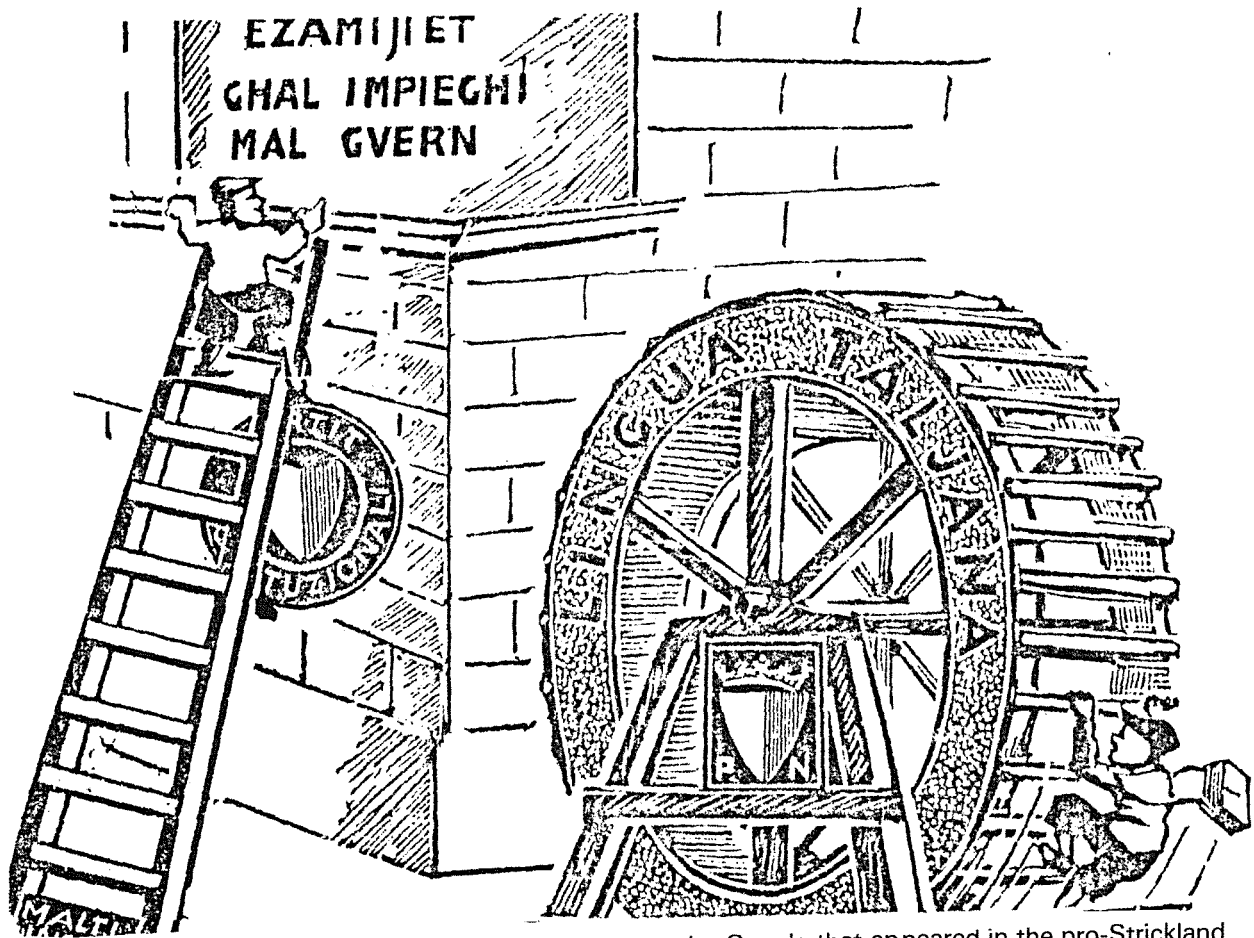
227. T.A.V. Best to L.S. Amery 18 Oct. 1928. Malta No.157: Memorandum from Ministers, AGPVM.

must be sought elsewhere. First, as a 'revisionist' power, Italy retained feelings of scorn for the League of Nations which to the Fascists represented the guarantor of unjust treaties to their country. Their exasperated patriotism, and their distrust of former allies had remained. Secondly, although Britain's traditional friendship was still needed, Mussolini was bent upon fostering the martial spirit. Italy was gradually being educated for war. The preparation for the time when Italian aeroplanes would obscure the sun was already alarmingly aggressive.²²⁸ Thirdly, the series of articles on the suppression of the German language in the Upper Adige published in the *Manchester Guardian* sparked off a surprising counter blast in the *Giornale d'Italia*²²⁹ The views of the *Giornale d'Italia* were supported by the Italian Government, which stated that 'if the Italian Government were suppressing the German language in the Tyrol, the Maltese Government were acting in similar sense as regards Italian'.²³⁰ Journals throughout Italy took up the outcry and published articles referring to Malta as a former Italian possession. They criticized the British Government and abused Maltese politicians supposed to be anti-Italian.²³¹ Naturally, the Fascist-controlled press considered Malta as part and parcel of Mussolini's imperialistic designs to establish an Italian Empire that would restore to Italy the past glories of ancient Rome.

The Italian press used the tactic of drawing on the culture and religious ties between Italy and Malta. It was contended that Malta was a natural outpost in the Mediterranean on which an Italian character had been imprinted by the forces of religion and language.²³² Britain was exhibiting signs of 'a new moral and cultural Imperialism', and launching an Anglo-Saxon crusade which brutally effaced all traces of other civilizations. The English language was the medium of political power. It was also the symbol of Masonic Lodges.²³³ Consequently, Catholic Malta should not tolerate Protestant interference in its territory.²³⁴ A cultural change endangered the power of Catholicism. The introduction of British ideas would necessarily in time bring about the emancipation of the popular mind from spiritual tutelage and consequently undermine the power of religion. Moreover, 'those who in Malta opposed Italian traditions were also against Catholic traditions'.²³⁵ The articles regarding the affairs of Malta could not be ignored.²³⁶

Any information which tended to identify, with any appearance of probability, the pro-British element in Malta with anti-Catholicism was certain to be taken seriously here

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228. *The Times*, 18 Aug. 1927.
 229. R. Graham to A. Chamberlain 27 Jan. 1928, No.72(143/1/28): *Giornale d'Italia* 25, 27 Jan. 1928. AGPVM.
 230. R. Graham to A. Chamberlain, 9 Apr. 1928, No.299 (143/15/28). Secret. AGPVM.
 231. J.P. Du Cane to L.S. Amery, 28 Feb. 1928. Secret. AGPVM.
 232. C. Wingfield (Rome) to Lord Cushendun, 5 Oct. 1928, No.725(143/34/28): *Tribuna*, 4 Oct. 1928. AGPVM.
 233. A widely circulated affidavit accused Strickland of being a freemason (Cmd 3993 p.20), but Strickland refuted this charge.
 234. M. Palairat to A. Henderson, 27 Sept. 1929. No.656(233/26/29): *Gazzetta del Popolo*. AGPVM. Lord Passfield to J.P. Du Cane, 17 Oct. 1928. Secret. AGPVM.
 235. M. Palairat (Rome) to A. Henderson (F.O.), 27 Sept. 1929. No.656(233/26/29): *Gazzetta del Popolo*. AGVPM.
 236. L.S. Amery to J.P. Du Cane, 12 Apr. 1928. AGPVM.



A partisan view of the language question — a cartoon by Gerada that appeared in the pro-Strickland *il-Berqa* of 13.12.1933

(Rome), and would result in a considerable widening of the sphere of anti-British propaganda on this subject. Malta has the reputation of being so completely devoted to the Roman Catholic Religion, that any suggestion to the contrary, and above all, any hint that an attempt was being made by those in authority to weaken the devotion, would be bound to cause something of a shock in Catholic circles.²³⁷

It was true that Britain had often attempted to prevent Italy from regaining control of the Church in Malta by indirect means; but the Italian press made capital out of the politico-religious dispute and dished up accusations of ‘forcibly converting Malta to Protestantism’.²³⁸ If Italy made determined efforts to create a patriotic issue of the Anglo-Vatican quarrel, then the politico-religious question would transcend its local limitations and religious boundaries. The object was to emphasize the existence of a ‘Maltese Question’ from an international point of view.²³⁹

It was an attempt to create an atmosphere which would enable Italy, on some future occasion of international adjustments, to claim the island as being Italian, historically, geographically, racially, linguistically, and possibly religiously.²⁴⁰ The Colonial Office was not only subjecting its political methods to revision while Strickland was in power, but was also meddling directly in the internal politics of Malta against the Italians.²⁴¹ The ‘decidedly anti-Italian and constitutionally illegal attitude of Mr. Amery had come to the assistance of the local tyrant’. Anglo-Italian friendship could only be maintained by respect for Italian civilization in the Mediterranean so valuable to Britain, but also so dear to Fascist Italy.²⁴² It was wrong for Italophobe agents to anglicize the island by banning everything that savoured of Italian.²⁴³ This mad persecution by liberal England was false to all her traditions.²⁴⁴ In short the Italian press was directly contributing towards Mussolini’s Imperialistic designs under the pretext of defending cultural, religious and historical traditions in Malta; this policy was nothing more than an advocacy of irredentism.

The campaign in the Italian newspapers was calculated to raise false impressions both in Italy and in Malta.²⁴⁵ But while Italy was very vocal about the ‘wrongs’ of those communities outside her frontiers, she nevertheless loudly pro-

237. A.W.G. Randall (Holy See) to Lord Cushendun, 26 Sept. 1928, No.109(3/21/28). AGPVM.

238. *The Times*, 31 July 1929.

239. J.P. Du Cane to L.S. Amery, 29 Feb. 1928. Secret. AGPVM.

240. C. Wingfield (Rome) to Lord Cushendun, 5 Oct. 1928, No.725(143/34/28): *Tribuna*, 4 Oct. 1928. AGPVM.

R. Graham (Rome) to A. Chamberlain, 27 Jan. 1928, No.72(143/1/28). AGPVM. *Parl. Papers 1929–30*, xxxi (3588), p.493: Memorandum from Ministers, 19 July 1929. J.P. Du Cane to L.S. Amery 29 Feb. 1928, Secret. AGPVM. D.G.M. Campbell to P. Cunliffe–Lister, 14 Feb. 1933. Secret. MSS Brit. Empire S.286. Luke 2/2. RHLO.

241. A. Henderson to Lord Passfield, 30 Sept. 1929 (C 7297/24/22): *Giornale d’Italia* 19 Sept. 1929. AGPVM.

242. L.S. Amery to J.P. Du Cane, 26 Sept. 1928. Malta No.147: *Tevere*, 1 Sept. 1928. AGPVM.

243. T.A.V. Best to L.S. Amery, 18 Oct. 1928, Malta No.157: *Tribuna*, 19 July 1928. AGPVM.

244. C. Wingfield (Rome) to Lord Cushendun, 5 Oct. 1928. No.725(143/34/28): *Volontà d’Italia*, 29 Sept. 1928. AGPVM.

245. R. Graham to A. Chamberlain, 9 Apr. 1928, No. 299, (143/15/28). Secret. AGPVM.

claimed her right to Italianize her newly annexed frontier provinces.²⁴⁶ Though the Italians, both in Italy and in Malta, had been working for pacific penetration into Malta,²⁴⁷ the Italian propaganda, which obviously had irrendist implications, was threatening England with the loss of friendship. Provocative language was not only calculated to create a bitter feeling between Italy and Britain but was also extremely misleading to Italian opinion which might assimilate the totally erroneous idea that Malta really was an *Isola Italianissima*,²⁴⁸ and that the Maltese really aspired to 'redemption'.²⁴⁹ In the interests of general foreign policy, it seemed desirable that some protest should be made against such propaganda in the officially controlled Italian press.²⁵⁰

Yet the Imperial Government was once more caught in a dilemma. First of all, the substance of many newspaper articles originated in Malta. Secondly, insulting expressions against Mussolini, the Fascist Italian anthem and Italy in general,²⁵¹ by Strickland's supporters were not only 'a source of friction'²⁵² but also provocative measures. Thirdly, the Strickland press had vehemently attacked the Italian Government,²⁵³ and the Italian colony in Malta.²⁵⁴ Fourthly, the new Press Law²⁵⁵ prevented all that was thought and published in Italy from reaching Malta.²⁵⁶ Though the Italian press campaign was the real cause of these unpleasant incidents,²⁵⁷ the Italian Government had not failed to lodge protests. Obviously, the Imperial Government would not redress the Italian grievances. As a constitutional state, H.M. Government could only intervene to a very limited extent to check incidents in Malta.²⁵⁸ As a constitutional minister, Strickland was not subject to the control by H.M. Government as long as he acted within the bounds of the Constitution.²⁵⁹ However, the Strickland administration had no method open to it of protesting against the statements in the Italian press except through H.M. Government.²⁶⁰ Since the Maltese Government could not deal with foreign relations, it was entitled to the assistance of the Imperial Government. A

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246. C. Wingfield (Rome) to Lord Cushendun, 5 Oct. 1928. No.725(143/34/28). AGPVM. Michael Kissaun (Commissioner of Police) to J.P. Du Cane, 6 Feb. 1928. AGPVM.
247. T.A.V. Best to L.S. Amery, 26 Oct. 1928. Malta No.164: Memorandum by Bartolo. See: D.G.M. Campbell to P. Cunliffe - Lister, 29 May 1933. Secret. MSS Brit. Empire. S.286 Luke. 2/2. RHLO.
248. R. Graham (Rome) to A. Henderson, 11 Nov. 1929. No.758 (233/36/29). AGPVM.
249. R. Graham (Rome) to A. Chamberlain, 27 Jan. 1928. No.72 (143/1/28). AGPVM.
250. L.S. Amery to A. Chamberlain, 24 Feb. 1928. AGPVM.
251. Consul for Italy to T.A.V. Best, 10 Sept. 1928. AGPVM.
252. Lord Cushendun to L.S. Amery, 20 Oct. 1928 (C. 7738/121/22). AGPVM.
253. J.P. Du Cane to Lord Passfield, 13 Nov. 1929, Secret: Cuttings from the *Daily Malta Chronicle*. AGPVM.
254. T.A.V. Best to Lord Passfield, 16 July 1929. Confidential. AGPVM.
255. This new Press Law checked the practice of sending communications to the Italian Press and afterwards having them reproduced in the Maltese newspapers.
256. M. Palaret (Rome) to A. Henderson, 27 Sept. 1929. No.656 (233/26/29): *Corriere della Sera*, 22 Sept. 1929. AGPVM.
257. L.S. Amery to Lord Cushendun, 15 Nov. 1928, No.39059/28. AGPVM. L.S. Amery to J.P. Du Cane, 19 Nov. 1928, Malta No.171. AGPVM.
258. R. Graham to A. Chamberlain, 9 Apr. 1928, No.99 (143/15/28). Secret. AGPVM.
259. A. Chamberlain to R. Graham, 2 Mar. 1928, No.266 (C.1491/121/22). AGPVM.
260. J.P. Du Cane to Lord Passfield, 13 Nov. 1929. Secret. AGPVM.

discreet authorization from the Foreign Office to mention the matter to the Italian Government,²⁶¹ was later changed to official instructions and Sir Ronald Graham protested against the unfairness of many statements about the internal conditions of Malta.²⁶² Thus the propaganda of Fascist Italy had not only increased the animus between the political parties in Malta, it had also increased mistrust of England. Peace between Italy and England over Malta had reigned since Joseph Chamberlain repealed the Order in Council in deference to Italy, but was strained when the old issues were revived in a new setting. Yet the political tactic previously used to fight Chamberlain's anglicization policy failed because the relations between Britain and Italy had changed.

The political situation was complicated not only by the development of Italianizing influences but by many a tangle of local political interests. First, the decision to amend the Maltese Constitution in favour of the Strickland administration was difficult to reconcile with Imperial constitutional practice.²⁶³ On the other hand, the Court of Appeal held that the Act amending the Constitution and the Electoral Act were null and void: it also declared *ultra vires* the Governor's Ordinances²⁶⁴ which validated the legislation of the Strickland Government.²⁶⁵ The Court's judgement, though correctly stating the law of Malta, claimed for the Courts the right to correct the rulings of His Majesty's representative in Malta. Secondly, the retention of the Strickland ministry in quasi-office not only weakened the support of the Constitutional Party²⁶⁶ but also made relations between political parties more acrimonious. In fact, on 23 May 1930 an attempt was made to assassinate Strickland.²⁶⁷ More recruits were drawn to the Nationalist banner through authoritarian methods (especially since Strickland seemed always to have his way) than through political dislike of Britain. Thirdly, as Mizzi's coterie came to guide the policy of the Nationalist party and continued to exploit religion for political ends,²⁶⁸ not only did the situation continue to occupy much space in the Italian press,²⁶⁹ but Fascist propaganda was intensified both in Malta²⁷⁰ and in Italy.²⁷¹ The press would not remember that both Guelfs and Ghibellines were equally good Catholics as were the Nationalists and the members of the Compact Parties. Naturally, the Imperial Government could not allow the Fascist press to create a feeling of hatred against England by making it

261. A. Chamberlain to L.S. Amery, 29 Mar. 1928. No.C2236/121/22. AGPVM.

262. Lord Passfield to J.P. Du Cane, 31 Dec. 1929. Secret. AGPVM.

263. Lord Passfield to J.P. Du Cane, 13 June 1930: Ugo Mifsud's Visit to London. Confidential. AGPVM.

264. J.P. Du Cane to Lord Passfield, 20 June 1930. Secret. AGVPM. *Malta Government Gazette*, 2 July 1930. No.7331.

265. J.P. Du Cane to Lord Passfield, 20 June 1930. Secret. AGPVM. Cmd 3993, pp.61 – 76. The Court of Appeal declared null and void the 26 laws passed by the Strickland administration.

266. J.P. Du Cane to Lord Passfield, 18 Nov. 1930. Secret. AGPVM.

267. *The Times*, 24 May 1930. Cmd 3993, p.156.

268. J.P. Du Cane to Lord Passfield, 18 Nov. 1930. Secret. AGPVM.

269. R. Graham to Lord Passfield, 6 June 1930. No.401(85/10/30). AGPVM.

270. J.P. Du Cane to Lord Passfield, 26 July 1930: Lord Strickland to J.P. Du Cane, Confidential. AGVPM.

271. Lord Passfield to J.P. Du Cane, 28 May 1930, Malta No.49. AGVPM. D.G. Osborne (Rome) to A. Henderson, 25 Apr. 1930, No.287. (95/2/30). AGVPM.

appear as if Britain's policy was the outcome of a deliberate anti-Catholic campaign. Fourthly, the Imperial Government received no assistance from the Vatican for the resumption of a normal state of things,²⁷² nor was there a change of attitude on the part of the Church in Malta.²⁷³ In fact, the banning of certain newspapers of the Strickland press indicated a hardening of attitude. Though, on higher orders, Strickland made a fuller apology than the one he had already made,²⁷⁴ the fresh apology was not accepted until a few days before the 1930 general election, so candidates were nominated under an ecclesiastical ban.²⁷⁵ In other words, the politico-religious deadlock could not be solved until the issue between Strickland and the Church was decided by the electorate. Fifthly, the *untimely* suspension of the Constitution burdened gubernatorial administration with financial difficulties. The fiscal deficit had to be made good, not by drawing on the Consolidated Revenue Fund – politically an extremely undesirable move²⁷⁶ – but by additional taxation²⁷⁷ and by wage-cuts of large numbers of Maltese workmen, though the Imperial Administration feared political consequences.²⁷⁸ The deterioration of the situation caused political ferment. The Imperial Government realized that the situation could be resolved by turning the usual trump card: the appointment of a Royal Commission would restore an amended Constitution²⁷⁹ in which more matters were reserved to the Imperial Government,²⁸⁰ thus furthering Imperial policy in Malta.²⁸¹ The modification of the Maltese Constitution represented a step backward in constitutional development and a stage before the abrogation of the Constitution in 1936. The Governor's appreciation of the political situation summarized the Imperial dilemma and the action it was forced to take:

It has been quite clear that the Church's intention had been (a) to cause the elections to be suspended, or (b) to insure the return of what is looked upon as "the Church Party" (Nationalists) by an overwhelming majority. I, personally, have no doubt that it would much prefer the former alternative, for the following reasons: A. In view of the pledges given to the people of Malta when Great Britain took over these Islands, the Church, under Crown Colony Government, has always been in a much safer and more protected position, than it can ever be under Responsible Government. B. If His Majesty's Government were to stop the elections, this would be directed against the Imperial

272. *Hansard*, 1930 – 31, 80.224.

273. D.G.M. Campbell to R. Cunliffe – Lister, 8 Mar. 1932, Secret. MSS Brit. Empire, S.286. Luke 2/1. RHLO.

274. *Hansard*, 1930 – 31, 80.225, 230.

275. *Hansard*, 1931 – 32, 267.2214.

276. J.P. Du Cane to Lord Passfield, 9 Jan. 1931. Secret Telegram. AGPVM. Lord Passfield to J.P. Du Cane, 17 Feb. 1931. Secret. AGPVM.

277. *Malta Government Gazette*, 21 Feb. 1931, No.7404: An Ordinance to Amend the Import Duties Act.

278. N. Chamberlain to Viscount Hailsham, (War Office), 22 Nov. 1933. AGPVM.

279. *Hansard*, 1931, 80. 224. P. Cunliffe-Lister to D.G.M. Campbell, 17 Feb. 1932, Secret Telegram No.10. MSS Brit. Empire S.286. Luke 2/1. RHLO. P. Cunliffe – Lister to D.G.M. Campbell, 26 Feb. 1932. Secret Telegram No.17. MSS Brit. Empire S.286. Luke 2/1. RHLO.

280. J.P. Du Cane to Lord Passfield, 18 Nov. 1930. Secret. AGPVM.

281. P. Cunliffe – Lister to D.G.M. Campbell, 12 Jan. 1933: Correspondence from Legation to the Holy See regarding interview with Mgr Caruana, Archbishop of Malta, No.94(34/114/32). AGPVM.

Government, and the responsibility of the Church in causing the elections to be stopped would be overlooked... If, on the other hand, the elections are allowed to take place, then the whole of the bitterness of the Compact Parties will be directed against the Church, and these Parties will go from strength to strength. The question that appears to me to be of vital importance to His Majesty's Government in deciding their policy is: Is it in the interests of His Majesty's Government: A. To have a strong and stable Catholic Church in Malta, or B. Would it be better to see the influence of the Church weaken?

A. The Catholic Church in Malta is so utterly impossible to deal with, its outlook so narrow, and so entirely self-centred, that as long as it remains the dominating force in Malta, as it is now, there can, I fear, never be peace. B. On the other hand, any weakening of the Church's authority must come from the people of Malta, themselves, and must in no way be connectable with any action on the part of His Majesty's Government. It must be through the Compact Parties that the influence of the Roman Catholic Church must be weakened, and weakened to such an extent that, in order to protect itself, it will be compelled to assist and not to hinder His Majesty's Government in the administration of these Islands. The salvation of Malta must come from within, and not from without. It will do so if the elections are allowed to take place.

...It is, however, necessary to try to look into the future, ...In order to do this, the relationship between the Church and the Nationalist Party requires consideration...The leaders of the Nationalist Party want to Italianize Malta, and some wish definitely to see Malta under Italian rule. The Church wishes to Italianize Malta as it considers the Roman Catholic Religion is far more secure if Malta is Italianized, than if she is Anglicized. In consequence, when the Nationalist Party comes into power... a bitter fight with His Majesty's Government on the language question seems to be inevitable... In conclusion... I am led to the belief that the only conditions under which the Church would have issued a *favourable* Pastoral would have been: A. if Lord Strickland had retired from politics and from Malta, either voluntarily or involuntarily. B. If he had been prepared to grovel to the Church in such a manner as to destroy, completely, his influence over those under him. C. If they had considered that the Compact Parties would gain such strength by the elections being held with the Pastoral in force that they would become a real menace to the power of the Church.²⁸²

Moreover, the British Prime Minister emphasized:

The Royal Commission unfortunately made their recommendation in favour of restoration of Constitution an unconditional one... But of far greater importance than my difficulties, if the elections are suspended, is the future. It would mean that the Pastoral would remain in force indefinitely... It is my belief that only by means of ultimate victory of Compact Parties at some future election can they (the Bishops) be dislodged from their present position.²⁸³

Further still, in 1930 'elections were stopped under reserved powers, *ostensibly* because grave disturbances were feared. At present this cannot be said to be the case.²⁸⁴ These statements need no comment. They explain why elections could not be stayed; nor the Constitution permanently withdrawn. However, by resorting to this *temporary* measure, the Imperial Government minimized political friction in a strategic island and gained time to view better the development of the situation in the Mediterranean.

282. D.G.M. Campbell to P. Cunliffe – Lister, 27 May 1932. MSS Brit. Empire. S.286. Luke 2/1. RHLO.

283. *Paraphrase of Cypher Message Addressed to Secretary of State*, 27 May 1932, No.67. Secret. MSS Brit. Empire S.286. Luke 2/1. RHLO.

284. *Paraphrase of Cablegram (Cypher) Despatched to P. Cunliffe – Lister* 25 May 1932. Secret. MSS Brit. Empire S.286. Luke 2/1. RHLO.

3. GUBERNATORIAL ADMINISTRATION 1933

The re-establishment of the Constitution and the conclusive victory of the Nationalist Party in the general election brought about a relaxation of political tension. However, the Nationalist administration, conscious of its newly acquired strength, gradually played into the hands of the Imperial Government, still hesitant to confront Mussolini openly: 'Mussolini had not decided whether to throw in his lot with Hitler or with England'.²⁸⁵ First, the Nationalists lost no opportunity to manufacture a grievance.²⁸⁶ Secondly, further Italian propaganda assumed disquieting proportions. The junior branches of the Fascist organization, the *Avanguardista* and the *Balilla*, intensified their activities while the many visits of Italian lecturers and other personalities was a new move of Italian penetration. Accumulative evidence indicated that propagandist activities were financially supported from Italy.²⁸⁷ Thirdly, Mizzi's irredentist campaign tended not only to imperil the security of Malta but also to involve the Imperial Government in an untimely controversy with Mussolini's Government. Consequently, the whole British Cabinet decided that Mizzi should not be allowed to remain a minister:

The unanimous decision of the Cabinet is sure to be followed by any future cabinet (Labour or Liberal) since it is based not on political or party grounds, but of reasons of Imperial interests and defence. *Salus reipublicae suprema lex esto* is the basis on which the decision was taken.²⁸⁸

Fourthly, the Nationalists continually encroached upon a field expressly denied by the new terms of the Constitution.²⁸⁹ The establishment of voluntary classes after school hours was an indirect method of circumventing Imperial cultural policy.²⁹⁰ One financial item for the teaching of Italian appeared in a supplementary expenditure. The decrease in reserves of the Consolidated Fund was considered a reckless financial policy.²⁹¹ The Imperial Government declared a state of emergency in November 1933. Not only were the Ministers dismissed,²⁹² but the

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285. *Paraphrase of Cypher Cablegram from the Secretary of State*, 30 Mar. 1933, No.16. Secret. MSS Brit. Empire S.286. Luke 2/2. RHLO. D.G.M. Campbell to H.C. Luke, 20 Aug. 1933. Private Letter. MSS Brit. Empire S.286, Luke 2/2. RHLO.
286. P. Cunliffe - Lister to N. Chamberlain, 3 Nov. 1933. AGPVM.
287. D.G.M. Campbell to P. Cunliffe - Lister, 1 Oct. 1932; 25 Oct. 1932; 31 Oct. 1932; 10 Dec. 1932; Secret. MSS Brit. Empire S.286. Luke 2/2. RHLO.
288. M. Macdonald to P. Cunliffe - Lister transmitting secret letter from Colombos (Maltese Agent in London) to Mifsud Bonnici, 15 Nov. 1933, Private Letter. ('Colombos seems to get a great deal of information of what takes place in the Cabinet and we believe that he gets his information from the Prime Minister's son'). MSS Brit. Empire S.286. Luke 3/1. RHLO.
289. P. Cunliffe - Lister to D.G.M. Campbell, 18 July 1933. AGPVM.
290. D.G.M. Campbell to C. Cunliffe - Lister, 1 Oct. 1932; 6 Oct. 1932, Secret. MSS Brit. Empire S.286, Luke 2/2. RHLO.
291. H.C. Luke to D.G.M. Campbell, 31 Aug. 1933, Secret. MSS Brit. Empire S.286, Luke 2/2. RHLO.
292. P. Cunliffe - Lister to D.G.M. Campbell, 7 Dec. 1933. AGPVM. *Malta Government Gazette*, 2 Nov. 1933, No.7824. This decision was preceded by a series of Imperial manoeuvres. In Sept. 1933 the Governor took over the control of the police force and prohibited political meetings in the Nationalists clubs. The Imperial Government also demanded that Ministers should revoke a series of administrative measures. This condition was unacceptable. The Imperial Government had manoeuvred the Nationalist administration into a difficult position because it was determined to suspend the Constitution. See: P. Cunliffe - Lister to D.G.M. Campbell, 10 Oct. 1933, Secret. MSS Brit. Empire S.286 Luke 2/2. RHLO.

Constitution was once more suspended and the Governor directed to assume complete control.²⁹³ Though to Strickland the Constitution was suspended by a trick,²⁹⁴ Imperial action appeared to follow logically from the Nationalists' recalcitrancy.²⁹⁵ Strickland's influence in the House of Lords and his claim to form a new government²⁹⁶ failed to elicit any response. Imperial action was not, of course, in consonance with parliamentary democracy, but the party system had to be eliminated to make way to the higher pressures of international forces.

The strong government by colonial autocracy made its policy to safeguard Imperial interests from indirect penetration. It was determined 'to stimulate pro-British feelings in the Island'.²⁹⁷ Autocratic rule counteracted Italian influence by a course of action²⁹⁸ which culminated in The Aliens Ordinance, empowering the Governor 'to license aliens practising a profession, owning or teaching or managing educational institutions'. The application of this Ordinance naturally controlled not only Italian state-aided schools but also those under the direction of Religious Orders. This measure was questioned by the Vatican,²⁹⁹ but relations between the Holy See and the Imperial Government were gradually drawing very close because of external and internal factors. It was believed that a secret clause of the Lateran Treaty was of political help to Mussolini in Malta and Tunis.³⁰⁰ Even if this were not true, a definite clash of principle had occurred between the Vatican and the Fascist State on education and the control of Italian youth.³⁰¹ The fear that Fascist penetration and Imperial action might be equally detrimental to Maltese welfare³⁰² led the Vatican to offer a gesture of friendship. In fact, after Strickland's apology and electoral defeat, the Vatican gave instructions that the Maltese clergy should avoid intervention in the political disputes of the Nationalist Party.³⁰³ The Imperial Government reappointed a Minister to the Holy

293. *Paraphrase of Cablegrams from P. Cunliffe – Lister*, 10 Oct. 1933; 16 Oct. 1933; 21 Oct. 1933; 26 Oct. 1933; MSS Brit. Empire S.286, Luke 2/2. RHLO. *Paraphrase of Cypher Cablegrams Addressed to P. Cunliffe – Lister*, 9 Oct. 1933; 2 Nov. 1933, MSS Brit. Empire S.286, Luke 2/2. RHLO.
Hansard, 1932 – 33, 281.31 – 2; 1933 – 34, 292.655 – 6.
The Times, 2, 3 Nov. 1933.
294. D.G.M. Campbell to P. Cunliffe – Lister, 11 Dec. 1933, MSS Brit. Empire S.286, Luke 3/1. RHLO.
295. *Paraphrase of Cypher Cablegram Addressed to P. Cunliffe – Lister*, 2 Nov. 1933, Secret. No.129. MSS Brit. Empire S.286, Luke 2/2. RHLO. *Paraphrase of Cypher Cablegram Received from the Secretary of State*, 3 Nov. 1933, Secret No.144, MSS Brit. Empire S.286, Luke 2/2. RHLO.
296. *Hansard*, 1933 – 34, 90.194, 195, 198, 218; 94.81; 95.77; 98.946.
297. P. Cunliffe – Lister to N. Chamberlain, 3 Nov. 1933. AGPVM.
298. See: D.G.M. Campbell to P. Cunliffe – Lister, 14 Feb. 1933; 17 Feb. 1933; 9 Mar. 1933; 14 Mar. 1933, Secret. MSS Brit. Empire S.286, Luke 2/2. RHLO.
299. P. Cunliffe – Lister to D.G.M. Campbell, 9 Nov. 1933. AGPVM.
300. P. Boffa (Labour Party) to J.R. Clynes (Home Office), 10 May 1930, Personal Letter, AGPVM.
R. Dunbar (F.O.) to A.J. Dawe (Home Office), 2 June 1930, No.C.4459/30332. AGPVM
301. R. Graham (Rome) to A. Henderson, 5 June 1931, No.395 (86/19/31). AGPVM.
302. D.G.M. Campbell to P. Cunliffe – Lister, 24 Nov. 1932, Secret. MSS Brit. Empire, S.286, Luke 2/2. RHLO.
303. D.G.M. Campbell to P. Cunliffe – Lister, 25 Oct. 1932, Secret. MSS Brit. Empire, S.286, Luke 2/2. RHLO.

See and requested that the diocese of Malta should be created into a *substantive* archbishopric.³⁰⁴ Consequently the Church in Malta changed her attitude, and the Governor stressed:

We have the Church behind us – or at any rate – the archbishop and if you decide to withdraw the Constitution, the Church would welcome it. We have a really pro-British archbishop. But the Constitution must be withdrawn... My advice is go for the big thing and not to let Mussolini bluff the Foreign Office into giving way one inch. It is firmness and only firmness these people understand.³⁰⁵

Thus the religious question was eliminated from the political field.

This apparently religious move was primarily intended to serve the political ends of the Imperial Government. (1) The grant of a higher status to the See of Malta would remove the danger that Malta and Gozo might become suffragan bishoprics in an Italian ecclesiastical province. (2) It would place the See of Malta in a position of dignity equal to that of Rhodes, 'a circumstance desirable from the point of view of British prestige in the Mediterranean'. (3) This elevation would afford Mgr Caruana a definitely higher status above the less satisfactory Bishop of Gozo, Mgr Gonzi the other 'stumbling block'.³⁰⁶ (4) It was further suggested that the Vatican should consider two possibilities: (a) the substitution of English for Italian personnel in those Religious Orders conducting education work in Malta; (b) the transfer of the obedience of various religious orders from the jurisdiction of Italian to British provinces.³⁰⁷ Indirectly, the Imperial Government was asking the Vatican to take sides against Mussolini's Government in furthering the diffusion of English influence, and thus put an end to the spurious claims of Italy for the possession of Malta through religious and cultural affinities.

Italy's successful intervention in Maltese politics twice forced Britain to suspend the Maltese Constitution. Furthermore, by strengthening her garrisons, Italy believed she would exercise pressure on Britain whom she regarded as an intruder in the Mediterranean. However, the principal centre of British strategy merely shifted back again to Malta, which was practically in the centre of an Italian Empire.³⁰⁸ Still, the preparation of a defence scheme for the Island was under consideration long before the Anglo-Italian quarrel flared up.³⁰⁹ Not only was the Maltese regiment due to be reorganized,³¹⁰ but operations in Grand Harbour were undertaken in 1929 to meet the requirements of the Mediterranean Fleet.³¹¹ Moreover, since the liberty of action of the navy must not be limited by

304. The designation 'archbishop' was titular not substantive.

305. D.G.M. Campbell to P. Cunliffe-Lister, 14 Nov. 1933. Secret. MSS Brit. Empire, S. 286, Luke 2/2. RHLO.

306. D.G.M. Campbell to P. Cunliffe-Lister, 8 Mar. 1932. Secret. MSS Brit. Empire, S.286. RHLO.

307. P. Cunliffe-Lister to D.G.M. Campbell, 16 Apr. 1933. Secret. AGPVM. P. Cunliffe-Lister to D.G.M. Campbell, 29 June 1933. Secret. AGPVM. O. Sargent to R. Clive, 4 Apr. 1933, No.40 (C1933/7/29). AGPVM.

308. Lord Passerfield to J.P. Du Cane, 7 Aug. 1930: Questions in Parliament. AGPVM. H.C. Luke to P. Cunliffe-Lister, 2 Aug. 1933: Document from Mifsud Bonnici. AGPVM.

309. A.A. & Q.M.C. to J.P. Du Cane, 1 July 1929. Secret. AGPVM.

310. Lord Passfield to J.P. Du Cane, 19 June 1931, Malta No. 108. AGPVM.

311. F.H. Mitchell (Vice-Admiral, Malta) to J.P. Du Cane, 28 Mar. 1929, No.18/75. AGPVM.

Maltese commercial interests, the system of operation in Grand Harbour was to be dealt with by Ordinance if a fresh agreement failed to materialize.³¹² But air force strategy went along with naval preparations. Under the pretext of civil aviation development, the Air Council listed land suitable for the establishment of aerodromes and sea-plane bases.³¹³ Important sites were to be retained under Imperial control.³¹⁴ Apart from the existing aerodrome, two additional aerodromes at Ta' Qali and Hal Far were marked for development in case of emergency.³¹⁵ Moreover, as Italian aircraft frequently photographed the harbours and land defences, the Army Council believed that the whole island and the surrounding sea should be proclaimed a prohibited area.³¹⁶ In short, the very intrinsic value of Malta's strategic position in the development of aviation in the Mediterranean was meticulously investigated. Yet, as Lord Passfield vaguely put it in the House of Commons, Malta 'had to pay'.³¹⁷ Malta did pay by having its Constitution suspended and then withdrawn. Imperial defence policy towards Malta had not changed. As had often happened, emergency measures in the Mediterranean and the consequent economic revival of the Island implied the suspension of the Constitution and the establishment of a strong colonial autocracy.

Malta's security could not be jeopardized by any means. Certainly, 'Britain did not want to get involved in a war with Italy',³¹⁸ if it could be avoided; but the intensive preparations seriously put in doubt the assertions of historians that Britain virtually abandoned her principal naval base when Mussolini invaded Abyssinia in 1935.³¹⁹ Without raising the question of authority and her symbolic position in the Empire, the security of the island fortress was vital to Britain's interests in the Mediterranean. The need to sustain a favourable naval balance implied that Malta should be retained as a bulwark against Italy's fortified bases in Sicily, Lampedusa and Pantelleria. After all, the British Mediterranean Fleet had always considered Italy as 'strategically vulnerable'.³²⁰ Moreover, emphatic

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312. Lord Passfield to J.P. Du Cane, 9 Sept. 1929. Confidential. AGPVM. H.R. Cowell (C.O.) to Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty, 19 Aug. 1929, No. Mo2013/29. AGPVM. J.P. Du Cane to Lord Passfield, 5 Dec. 1929. Confidential. AGPVM.
313. J.P. Du Cane to L.S. Amery, 26 Apr. 1928. Confidential. AGPVM. J.P. Du Cane to Lord Strickland, 26 Apr. 1928. Confidential. AGPVM. L.S. Amery to J.P. Du Cane, 30 May 1928. Secret Circular. AGPVM. Lord Passfield to J.P. Du Cane, 28 Sept. 1929. AGPVM. Lord Passfield to J.P. Du Cane, 26 Aug. 1930. AGPVM.
314. A.O.C. Mediterranean to J.P. Du Cane, 4 Apr. 1928, No. H.Q. MED/02/7/Air. AGPVM.
315. L.S. Amery to J.P. Du Cane, 6 Mar. 1929. Secret. AGPVM.
316. A.E. Widdows (War Office) to Lord Passfield, 29 Apr. 1929, No.041/1741 (M.O.I.). AGPVM. Memorandum by Committee of Imperial Defence: Prohibited Areas for Civil Aircraft, July 1931, O.D.C.611 – M, Copy No.26(5707). Secret. AGPVM. D.G.M. Campbell to P. Cunliffe – Lister, 23 Dec. 1931. Secret. AGPVM. P. Cunliffe – Lister to D.G.M. Campbell, 3 Feb. 1932. Secret. AGPVM.
317. Lord Passfield to J.P. Du Cane, 7 Aug. 1930: Questions in Parliament. AGPVM.
318. W.F. Monk, *Britain in the Western Mediterranean* (London, Hutchinson's University Library, 1953), p.150.
319. E.H. Carr, *Great Britain as a Mediterranean Power* (Nottingham, University College, Cust Foundation Lecture, 1937), pp.11 – 12. C. Clark, *Crown Colonies and their History* (London, The Mitre Press, 1939), p.24.
320. M. Howard, *The Continental Commitment* (London, Temple Smith, 1972), p.102.

assurances, that Britain had no intention of abandoning Malta,³²¹ had been supported by political manoeuvres and inflexible stringencies in Malta itself. Once again, Malta proved to be the barometer of the Mediterranean.

321. *Hansard*, 1935 – 36, 313.973.