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THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN MALTA*

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THE history of the English Language in Malta is no older than the history of British rule in Malta. No one learned, or taught, the language before 1800, and for many years after many were doubtful about its value as a cultural language and were dead set against it as a language of the administration, in spite of the fact that the Maltese had welcomed the English in Malta with open arms when they wanted to throw out Napoleon's soldiers. Our ancestors for many years wanted English protection but not the English tongue. The reason was that Italian had been for several centuries the cultural and political language of the Maltese intelligentsia, and the people's native tongue was looked down upon, underrated and completely neglected for literary composition. No wonder that the English language had to fight very hard not only for its survival but also for its long-delayed official recognition. Both the people's own language and the English language had to prove their worth and fight their way up before they were accepted by the upper classes of these islands.

In order to follow the interesting story of the vicissitudes of the English language in Malta, the best thing is to assess its gains and losses ever since Malta became a British colony in 1813.

But we begin even earlier in the year 1800 when Malta came under the protection of Great Britain for the first time.

Napoleon during the brief French Rule had suppressed the University and the College of Jesus to which it was attached, replacing them by a Central school and fifteen Elementary schools. The first thing that Ball did was to appoint Canon Francesco Saverio Caruana as Rector, Chief and Director of the College of Jesus.

The subjects taught in the University at that time were: Latin, Italian,

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Arithmetic, Mathematics, Physics, Drawing, the Humanities, Rhetoric, Logic, Metaphysics, Dogmatic and Moral Theology, Civil and Canon Law. The School of Anatomy and Surgery, founded in 1679 by Grandmaster Nicholas Cotoner in the hospital of the Order, was transferred to the University.

It was Ball who made the first serious effort to further the study of English in Malta.

The first Professor of English in our University, Mr. John Denton, was appointed in April 1802 and according to the record of the University proceedings of that time a large number of young men attended his lectures. That was two years after Ball had left Malta to rejoin the Navy.

There was no such thing as primary education at that time, although it had already occurred to Napoleon that there was great need for elementary schools and Ball himself believed that 'the education of the lower classes was of the utmost consequence to the permanent security of the empire'.

For a number of years, English was destined to remain a little studied and officially unrecognized language, but the local representatives of the British Government and the British Government itself, though they were reluctant to disturb local prejudices, explored the easiest way, if such a way existed at that time, of diffusing British culture and a greater use of the English language.

In the conclusion of a lengthy despatch of the 28th July 1813, by Lord Bathurst, the Secretary of State, Sir Thomas Maitland was instructed to diffuse the English language among the inhabitants. The conclusion of the despatch reads as follows: 'The attention of His Majesty's Government is turned to the means of effecting a gradual advancement in the condition and information of the People, and of identifying their Affections and Interests with the British Connection. With this view, I recommend to your constant attention the Diffusion of the English Language among the Inhabitants; and the promotion of every method by which the English may be brought to supersede the Italian Tongue. The circumstances of Malta appear to favour this endeavour. The People at large use a corrupt Dialect of Arabic, while the upper classes speak Italian. The long residence and extensive trade of the English, however, have introduced some knowledge of our Language especially among the Commercial orders, and the population of Valletta. You will be pleased to issue all Proclamations in English as well as in Italian, and in a few years the latter may be gradually disused. I should recommend also that the proceedings of the Supreme Court of Justice should be carried on in English, in order to make it the Interest of the Maltese Advocates to acquire the Language. The Establishment of Public Schools, where the reading and

writing of English might be taught upon the simple and economical principles lately introduced in this Kingdom, would be of very beneficent effect; and I am to request you will promote such Establishments, and give them the support of Government.'

Governor Maitland (1813-24) did his best to promote the study of the English language in Malta. He made a law that no one could be admitted to act as an Advocate, Notary, or Legal Procurator unless he could read, write and speak English. He also required all petitions addressed to the Government to be written in English which was recognised as the language of Government contracts. Another incentive for learning English was that Government posts would be filled by those who knew English.

General Sir Thomas Maitland on June 7th 1824 was succeeded by Francis Rawdon, Marquis of Hastings (1824-6).

The British residents in Malta, who lived their own life with their own clubs apart and away from the Maltese, never failed to look after their own sectional interests. A few British merchants with business interests in Malta wanted the government to appoint a British Judge to preside in each of the Courts of Law and also to enforce the English language in all judicial proceedings. Governor Hastings rejected the suggestion of the British merchant community because 'The conduct of the Maltese judges', he told them 'has merited the confidence of the Government'.

In 1836, that is, during the governorship of Sir Henry Frederick Bouverie, (1836-43), a Royal Commission was set up to report on various aspects of Maltese life. This commission consisted of John Austin, a famous jurist who had occupied the Chair of Jurisprudence on the establishment of the University of London in 1826, and was the personal friend of Jeremy Bentham, James Mill and Carlyle; and of George Cornwall Lewis, still a young man in his thirties, who had already sat as a commissioner in Ireland in inquiries about education and who later became Chancellor of the Exchequer, Home Secretary, and Secretary of State for War. With them was also Sarah, the brilliant wife of John Austin, broad-minded, highly educated and genuinely interested in the educational advancement of the people. The commissioners, who were given a warm welcome and lived in the Auberge d'Aragon for more than a year and a half, to take evidence and report thereon, drew up an excellent report which throws light on the situation of Malta at that time.

There was then what one might describe as a Language Question, the last lingering echoes of which began to fade away as late as the post-Fascist period.

Anybody who tried to solve the language problem of that time and for a long time after had to overcome serious difficulties. The English language

was still not accorded its rightful place in our educational life. The commissioners expressed the opinion that for admission to a primary school, a child was to be taught to read Maltese first and then Italian. English was to be learned only if time permitted.

Before the commissioners arrived in Malta, new Legal Codes had been prepared and promulgated. The commissioners, however, recommended that its application be suspended. In their opinion, the codes, as originally prepared by the Malta Commission under the chairmanship of Sir Ignatius Gavinus Bonavita (President of the Court of Appeal) and Judges G. F. Falzon and F. Chapelle required a very careful revision. When the Maltese Commission completed their work the Governor in the despatch to the Secretary of State (Lord Stanley) commenting on the Codes, said 'This Code is a transcript of the Neapolitan Code with some few alterations necessary in order to adapt it for Trial by Jury . . . Steam communication has decreased the distance between England and Malta so materially that it becomes daily more important that this Colony should be English not Italian, and that the spirit, at least, of English law should be introduced and every encouragement given to the dissemination of the English language. Nothing would conduce so much to this desirable end as making English the authoritative text instead of Italian.'

The Governor knowing how deep-rooted was the Italian language in Malta did not advise its immediate replacement by English, but expressed the hope that the Secretary of State's direction contained in the despatch of the 22nd July 1833 whereby the Italian language was to be considered as the authoritative text of Maltese Law would be abandoned in favour of a free choice of authoritative texts. He thought that this new policy would encourage the study of the English Language. In the same despatch he wrote that 'The prosperity of this island depends entirely upon England, while with Italy there is but little communication. Excepting with Sicily from whence a great proportion of the daily supplies for the markets is derived, the trade of Malta is with the Levant, the Black Sea and the Coast of Barbary. In the ports of Italy a Maltese ship is scarcely known, and there can be no reason, therefore, why, for the sake of commerce, the Italian more than the English should be the established language, whilst for every other reason English, as the language of the Mother Country and a very large and influential portion of the inhabitants of Malta, would be far more beneficial to the Maltese than Italian and it is, owing to this feeling, that several schools have of late been set up, even by Priests, for the purpose of teaching English through the medium of Maltese and in some of these schools Italian is not taught. I have no hesitation in saying that there is a very great and rapidly increasing desire to learn English

and a feeling of the unimportance, as compared with English, of the Italian language. This feeling would be encouraged by leaving the authoritative text undecided and would be destroyed by its being declared to be Italian, nor is it to be expected that, with a Neapolitan code and the Italian as their Language, anything of English feeling can be generated or encouraged amongst the Maltese.'

In 1849, during the Governorship of O'Ferrall (1847-51), Canon Paolo Pullicino, the then Director of Education, was sent to Dublin to study the system of Education. On his return he was appointed Professor of Primary Instruction in the University. His first object as Director of Education was the organization of elementary Education on which in 1850 he drew up a report entitled *Rapporto della Educazione Primaria nelle Isole di Malta e Gozo*.

Education was then in a mess. There were only two schools in Gozo and twelve in Malta with a male and female section, one at Rabat and another at Nadur, besides night classes in Zabbar and an orphan's industrial school in Floriana. The teachers just could not be worse off. All the teaching consisted in imparting a little knowledge of Italian and very little, if any, English, the elements of Arithmetic, a little writing and Catechism.

Canon Pullicino could not do much, In 1865, Governor Storcks (1864-7) appointed a commission consisting of two Englishmen and a Maltese to inquire into the state of public instruction as imparted in the Lyceum and Primary schools of Malta and Gozo.

The commission just ignored the Director of Education and drew up a rather hasty report accusing Canon Pullicino of publishing reports and programmes which had raised expectations that could not be realized. They recommended the use of Italian, which they described as 'the written language of the country' as the basis of instruction; Maltese as the medium of oral communication in the junior classes with English to be studied after the second year's course. Their contention was that English had to be studied later than Italian 'as the contemporaneous study of two languages so widely differing from the native dialect must prove embarrassing and considerably retard progress'.

They also recommended the recruitment of young teachers to be appointed only after having gone through a course of method and English under an Englishman from a Training School in England. In the opinion of the commissioners, the cause of the low standards was the very easy admission to the Lyceum for which all that was necessary was a simple dictation and the working of a sum in division by two figures. The Lyceum was then, as it remained for some years after, fundamentally Italian. In their

recommendation for reforms in the Lyceum they suggested that English should be the medium of instruction in Geography and History in the third and fourth year.

According to a notice that appeared in the Government Gazette of 17 April 1807, the Lyceum admission examination was to consist of English and Italian parsing and easy translation in both languages besides Arithmetic and the outlines of Geography.

In 1866 Dr. Sciortino, a member of the Government Council, gave notice of a resolution dealing with several Educational matters, one of which referred to the teaching of languages in the Primary Schools. Dr. Sciortino wished the Council to legislate against any attempt to teach Italian or English before the pupils were able to read and write Maltese. Dr. Sciortino's proposal fell through because it was supported by one member only.

General Sir Charles T. Van Staubenzee (1867-72) who was appointed in 1872 in succession to General Sir Patrick Grant (1867-72) raised the standard of English in examinations for the Public Service and ordered that all letters addressed to Her Majesty, or the Secretary of State, were to be written in English, and when not written in this language to be accompanied with its translation in English except in the case of poverty.

In 1877 he granted a licence to the Revd. J. Jones, the Provincial of the Society of Jesus, to open a boarding school in Malta entirely under the management of English Jesuits and in connection with the College of Stoneyhurst. Arrangements to bring the Jesuits to Malta had been made by Mr. C.M. Muscat and Dr. Pasquale Mifsud, two members of the Council of Government. The Italian Jesuits had their college in Gozo.

Staubenzee informed the Secretary of State that 'he had never any complaint against them'. That was the origin of St. Ignatius College, which after thirty years of good work was closed down. Its existence is still recorded by a Street in St. Julians known as Old College Street. The first serious attempt to introduce British Linguistic and Religious influence in Malta was stopped too soon for that purpose.

Sir General Arthur Borton (1878-84) was appointed Governor of Malta in 1878. Not long after the date of his appointment he was informed that Her Majesty's Government had decided to send out Sir Penrose Julyan, one of the Crown agents for the colonies, and Patrick Keenan, resident Commissioner of National Education in Ireland, the former to inquire into the Civil establishment, the latter to inquire into the Educational System of Malta. Though the primary object of Sir Penrose's enquiry was the organisation of Civil establishments in Malta, the Secretary of State, however, directed him to find out what could be done to promote the English

language as the official language in Malta of the Council of Government, of the Courts of Justice or Government proceedings and correspondence.

Sir Penrose Julyan was one of those men who had no patience with slow people. In his opinion the matter should have been settled in a more direct manner by giving the English language in Malta the official status to which he considered it entitled. He wrote: 'With the great aptitude for acquiring languages which the Maltese appear to possess, there can be no reason why the educated classes should not continue to be as familiar with Italian, in addition to their native tongue, as they are now, but the English Government owes it to them, as well as to itself, to promote among the people, by all fair means, a knowledge of the only language that can really help them in their laudable rivalry with the inhabitants of other countries and all other British possessions. The most direct action towards this end which it appears to be incumbent on the Government to take is to insist on all its employees being thoroughly acquainted with English and using it constantly, to the exclusion, as far as possible, of all other languages, in their official relations with the public'.

In August 1880, a report upon the educational system in Malta dated June 1879, by Patrick Joseph Keenan C.B.; was presented to both houses of Parliament by Command of Her Majesty. From his report we know that very few, if any, teachers in the Primary schools knew any English because the principal language taught was Italian, while Maltese, the people's own language was completely ignored.

Keenan condemned the whole educational system of the time. 'Lethargy' concluded he in his report 'possesses the Lyceum as completely as it does the Faculty of Arts in the University. Duller, more spiritless or less ambitious an educational organisation could not possibly be imagined. It is an institution which appears to feel no want. It cherishes no aspirations. It looks to no centre of learning for sympathy or support; whilst, with the University, which is under its own roof, it has no fixed relations.'

According to Keenan, Canon Pullicino, the director of Education of that time simply hated the Maltese language and though he showed interest in the study of English, yet he considered Italian as the basic language of the education in Malta.

However, though the study of English was not encouraged in primary schools some of the upper class Maltese were in favour of the study of English and one could point out to certain evidence of progress and advance.

This is what Sir Adrian Dingli said in his letter of the 12 December 1878 published as Appendix D (p. 144) in Keenan's report: 'All or nearly all the youth of the higher classes, including many females, are now more or less conversant with English and a few of them, who are acquainted

with it, are, from shame, reluctant to confess it. There are amongst the youngest, especially females, a considerable number who can speak English and Italian. And in the lower classes, a great many, of both sexes, employed in shops of all descriptions, besides servants and other persons, whose occupations bring them into contact with the officers and men of the Army and Navy, can speak English intelligently, with great fluency, and hardly a word of Italian.'

While Sir Adrian Dingli was personally pleased with the progress achieved in the study of English, he was against any compulsory measures to enforce its study. In his opinion such compulsory measure would have immediate disastrous effects. Keenan did not agree with the Maltese Jurist. The opinion he formed while in Malta was that the Maltese were anxious to learn English partly owing to social reasons but mainly owing to commercial reasons. Keenan complained that English received scant favour in the primary schools, was barred from the admission examination to the Lyceum and was absolutely interdicted in thirteen out of the fourteen classes of the Lyceum, in seventeen out of eighteen classes of the University and was excluded from the Law Courts, the Church, etc.

Keenan, who condemned the system which imposed two foreign languages in the Primary schools, trusted that this system would be set aside as 'an act of mercy toward the children, if not as a stern necessity of philosophy.' He proposed that education in the Primary schools should be based on the principle of teaching the children first how to read Maltese as correctly as English children of the junior classes were taught to read English. English and English alone, taught through the medium of Maltese he insisted, should be the language of the schools, but children on reaching the third and fourth classes pupils would be free to take Italian as an extra subject before or after ordinary school hours. All pupils in the Lyceum were to be taught throughout the medium of English, but they could choose it as an additional subject if they wanted to. In the University, English was to be the language of instruction in every Faculty except that of Theology, in which the choice of language was kept open. Since 1939, incidentally, this position has prevailed.

His Grace, Mgr. Conte Carmelo Scicluna, Archbishop of Rhodes and Bishop of Malta, in a letter addressed to Keenan in which he expressed his willingness to promote social and educational progress in Malta, expressed also his personal agreement that the English language should be studied more extensively. Here are some of his own words quoted from a letter:

Nessun desiderio reputiamo più legittimo di questo; nessuna misura consideriamo più atta a vie più rannodare i legami che fortemente strin-

gono queste Isole all'Impero.... Nessuna proposta guidichino più benefica della ampia estensione dell'insegnamento della Lingua Inglese, che rendendone generale quanto possibile l'uso conduce ad attaccarci più permanentemente alla Invitta nazione della quale siamo orgogliosi di essere governati accomunandone la lingue» Noi stessi tra altri regolamenti conducenti al conseguimento di tale scop, proponiamo di coartare in avvenire alla attendenza dell'insegnamento della lingua Inglese tutti coloro che aspirano alla carriera Ecclesiastica ed esigerne l'esame dai promovendi agli ordini, e di provvedere il Nostro Seminario di un efficiente Professore di Lingua Inglese, dedicando a tale oggetto una porzione della rendita della chiesa.

By notice published in the *Government Gazette* of 5th June 1880, the office of Director of Primary Schools was abolished and that of Director of Education was created instead. Canon Pullicino was pensioned off and on 7th June 1880 Sigismondo Savona, who had taken an active part in public life and advocated the study of English, was appointed Director of Education.

His appointment displeased the professional classes whose policy or rather whose attitude towards the English language was that stated on their behalf by Sir Adrian Dingli who, you will remember, opposed the compulsory teaching of English, while Savona was in favour of its compulsory teaching in the interest of the people themselves.

One of the strongest opponents of Savona's educational policy of that time was Dr. Fortunato Mizzi who was returned as an elected member by Gozo in October 1880, a few days before Sir Adrian Dingli was appointed Chief Appeal Judge in succession to Sir Ant. Micallef.

Savona acted on Keenan's report, but instead of doing away with Italian in the Primary Schools as Keenan had recommended, he retained it practically on an equal footing with English, the study of which he made obligatory from the second class of the Primary Schools, retaining Italian in the third and fourth classes. English and Italian were included in the compulsory subjects in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, and were both required for admission into the Lyceum and the University, where Italian remained the medium of instruction until 1939.

The Educational reforms recommended by the three commissioners Rowse, Julyan and Keenan, were opposed by a considerable section of local upper class opinion. An *Anti-Reformist* party which published as its organ a paper called *Diritto di Malta* was formed precisely to oppose and combat the reforms recommended by the two commissioners.

On the 29th September 1883, Dr. Fortunato Mizzi in an appeal to the electors of Malta and Gozo stated that he was not opposed to the diffu-

sion of a knowledge of the English Language, but would oppose 'its compulsory substitution for Italian.'

Mr. Savona aroused the suspicion and fury of the Anti-reformists when he directed the Professor of International Law to lecture in English.

General Sir Arthur Borton who was appointed Governor of Malta in 1878, wrote to the Secretary of State on the 29th November 1883, that 'No local question has arisen here of late years which has so profoundly exercised the minds of those who take an interest in elections as this question of English *Versus* Italian. There will certainly be a deadlock in public business.'

Savona resigned when His Excellency appointed a Committee with the Lieutenant Governor as Chairman to advise upon the System of the Examination in the Faculty of Arts and of Matriculation examinations in the University, to revise, if necessary, the regulations connected herewith and to consider their syllabi, the appointment of examiners and the framing of examination papers; and to make such recommendations as seemed advisable.

The recommendation of the commission made fundamental changes in the statute. The committee submitted model syllabi on the assumption that in Malta every student had to know both English and Italian.

In their report they said, *inter alia*, 'If on comparison with the Calendars of London University and of other institutions, it be found that, in some subjects of the proposed curriculum, the standard does not come up to the standard of those Universities, it will be understood that in those Universities it is not expected that students should learn two foreign languages as a basis of instruction. As to the proposed Matriculation we have to point out that it is higher in standard than the average of matriculation requirements of either Oxford, Cambridge or Dublin Universities!

General Sir John Lintorn Arabin Simmons, who was appointed Governor of Malta in 1884 also showed interest in the education of the priests, which he described as deplorable, agreeing in this with what Mr. Savona had written on the subject in his report on Education. The matter was brought to the attention of Cardinal Rampolla. Simmons, while assuring the Ecclesiastical authorities that the Government did not in a way wish to interfere with the education of the clergy, insisted with Cardinal Rampolla that any plan for the improvement of education for the priesthood should include also a provision for the teaching and learning of the English Language.

The matter was brought also to the attention of His Holiness the Pope Leo XIII, whose decision was communicated to the Government by Cardinal Rampolla. The communication stated: 'The Holy Father finds it more-

over reasonable that such education should be imparted to the Clergy as is suitable to the special conditions of the island, that is to say, such as will place them in a position to exercise their functions with prestige and advantage, not only among the lower orders of the people but also among the higher classes of society, and to keep up proper relations with the Government authorities and with the adventitious element of English origin. The improvement should be gradual, as the disposable funds permit. The Holy Father, however, being desirous from this moment of giving a proof of deference to the English Government, is prepared to cause the knowledge of the English language to spread among the clergy and, with a view to attaining this end, to cause the English language to be used in the teaching of geography, history and arithmetic. He will likewise endeavour that the Rector of the Seminary of Malta shall be of Maltese origin and, at any rate, a Maltese subject. Should the local government supply the necessary funds for the maintenance of some English Fathers and masters, effect might easily be given to this further measure forthwith.'

The first serious attempt to give an official status to the English language in our Law courts was the proposed amendment to article 369 of the Criminal Laws introduced in 1895 (Government Gazette February, 1895) The Governor of Malta at that time was General Sir Arthur J. Lyon Fremantle (1894-8). It ran as follows: 'Whenever the accused or the principal witness be a British subject, not being a native or a naturalised Maltese, all the proceedings in the Courts of Judicial Police may, if the Court of Magistrates shall deem it expedient, be written in the English language, and, in such case, any *procès-verbal* or disposition of a witness in that language, may be inserted in the acts of instruction, as if it were written in Italian.'

When this amendment was discussed by the Council it was generally agreed that it was not fair for an Englishman to be tried in a language he did not understand. But, while this principle was accepted, they took exception to the writing of the proceedings in the Italian language. As a compromise the new article incorporated in Ordinance III in 1896 was made to apply to oral proceedings only. And it ran as follows: whenever the only person accused or all the persons accused be British subjects, not being native or naturalized Maltese, the Court may, on application from anyone of the persons accused, *permit* that the *oral proceedings* in the cause be conducted in the English language.'

But the chamber of Advocates protested against both amendments.

On the 25th February 1898, Colonel J. L. Hewson of the Army Pay Department, a witness at a magisterial enquiry connected with a charge of embezzlement, refused to sign the transcription of his evidence which

was taken down in Italian. He stated that he could not sign a statement he could not understand. The witness was condemned to three days detention but, a few hours before his arrest, the Governor set him free and the politicians accused the Governor of favouritism.

The matter was brought before the House of Commons, and Mr. Chamberlain informed the House that he had decided to instruct the Governor to include an amendment which would make it illegal 'in a British Colony for a British officer to be imprisoned for declining respectfully to sign a document, which he did not understand, in a language which was neither his own nor that of the majority of the inhabitants of the Colony.' He directed Governor Fremantle to submit to the Council of Government an amendment which would ensure that evidence given in English was taken down in English and that the deponent sign a translation of it in Italian.

In the house of Commons, Mr. Chamberlain stated, 'I have also arrived at the conclusion that, having regard to the position of English-speaking persons who are residents in the Colony and may be effected by legal proceedings, and to the fact that Italian is not the vernacular of the country and has only been made the authorised language of the courts from considerations of convenience, the use of the English language should be made optional in all the courts, so that a judge, a magistrate, an advocate or a witness could employ it at will, and further that all summonses, warrants, orders and judgements served on an English-speaking person should be written in English as well as in Italian.'

The draft ordinance introduced by the Government in December, 1898, went further than the instructions of the Secretary of State. The draft ordinance laid down that 'Whenever the only person accused or all the persons accused be British subjects, not being native or naturalised Maltese, the Court *shall*, on application from any of the persons accused, *order* that the proceedings in the case be conducted in the English language and any decision or decree shall be delivered in any such case in English and it shall be registered together with an Italian translation.' It also laid down that 'when two or more prisoners, indicted together, are not all British subjects and any one of them is a native or naturalised Maltese, should any of the accused object to the request that the proceedings be held in the English language, the proceedings shall be held in English or in Italian at the discretion of the Court, but, in any such case, any sentence or decree that shall be delivered by the Court shall be registered both in Italian and in English.' 'In the Civil, as distinct from the Criminal Court, the proposed amendment only went so far as to *allow* a judge, magistrate, advocate or legal Procurator to *speak* English if he wished to do so, in any cause to which a British subject, not being a native or

naturalized Maltese, was a party. A sentence or decree could be delivered in English but, when registered, it had to be accompanied by an Italian translation.'

'If any of the parties, unable to understand English, made a request for the translation of any speech or remark made in that language, the Court was to comply in the manner it thought fit.'

'Both these draft Ordinances – civil and criminal – were unanimously rejected by the Elected Members and Her Majesty's Government eventually had recourse to an Order in Council'.

Mr. Chamberlain authorised the amendments in the Criminal Laws by Order in Council, and directed the Governor to make known by a proclamation dated 7th March 1899 and published in the Government Gazette a fortnight later that it was the intention of Her Majesty's Government to replace Italian by English in all Legal proceedings after a period of fifteen years.

The elected members protested to Governor Grenfel on the 1st April 1899.

Dr. Fortunato Mizzi, appointed delegate of the Chamber of Advocacy, proceeded to England to take up the matter with the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Parliament and the English press.

The delegation, consisting of Dr. Fortunato Mizzi and Mr. Salvatore Cachia Zammit, was informed that the decision to allow the use of English in the Courts where an Englishman was considered was final, but that the decision to replace Italian by English in fifteen years time was not absolutely final but probable.

On the 19th June 1900, Chamberlain replied to the two-man delegation on the many points raised by them. As to the English language he confirmed what he had said at the interview, mainly that under a free choice system the great majority of parents of Maltese children in Malta and Gozo had selected English in preference to Italian. Naturally, he added, because the Maltese found that a knowledge of English was more useful for commercial purposes. He had reason to believe that as time passed an increasing number of the population would understand the English language.

Governor Fremantle abolished the office of Director of Education and transferred such of his duties as regarded the University, the Lyceum and other Secondary Schools to the new post of Rector of the University. The Primary Schools, renamed Elementary schools, came under a new department with its own head.

The Maltese scholar and philologist, Mr. Napoleon Tagliaferro, was appointed Rector by the Government on 23rd June 1898, but continued to

be styled 'Director of Education'.

Judge Debono was asked to draw up a report on the Primary schools and to make proposals for the education of the masses. In this report, which was adopted, he recommended that during the first two years of school only the child's home language, Maltese, was to be taught beyond the second year that is in the third and fourth year, schoolchildren were to be taught one language only, either English or Italian. The choice was to be left to the father of the child or to the person responsible for it. But in the fifth and sixth standards both English and Italian were to be included in the syllabus.

In 1901 the Government Gazette laid down that in the case of candidates for the Malta Matriculation Examination or for admission to the Lyceum who chose to be examined in both English and Italian 'marks would be reckoned on the total, only for the language in which the higher number was rewarded.'

The same compromise was subsequently extended to the quarterly and annual examinations in the Faculty of Literature and Science of the University. That was the compromise devised by Mr. Edward Marsh Merewether, who had succeeded Sir Gerald Strickland, who had been appointed Governor and Commander-in-chief of the Leeward Islands as Lieutenant and Chief Secretary to Government. Four days after, it was laid down that the fifth and sixth and seventh standards of the Elementary schools where both languages were taught, a pass in one of the two languages was enough and that it was up to the parents to state whether they wished their children to be examined in both languages or in one only.

Merewether laid down that while the system of free choice was to be continued, in the case of candidates examined in both languages a pass mark was counted on the aggregate, both languages being obligatory, and both having the same number of marks in the syllabus of the Civil Service examination. Dr. Fortunato Mizzi dissatisfied with this compromise, expressed himself absolutely apposed to free choice.

On the 24th April, 1903, the elected members rejected the Education Votes because the Government refused to abandon the principle of free choice of language in the first four standards of the Elementary schools, before a pupil was obliged to learn both Italian and English in the fifth and sixth standards.

The Language squabble continued, Major John Clauson, Lieutenant Governor and Chief Secretary (1911-12-13), in order to pacify the critics of the Government reassured them with regards to the ultimate intention of the Government concerning the fate of Italian in Malta, describing English and Italian in the Lyceum as Siamese Twins. In October 1914, all previous

Government notices referring to the choice of language were set aside.

In 1919 Lord Milner, the Secretary of State, called at Malta in connection with the forthcoming constitution of 1921. Lord Milner pointed out some outstanding questions about which it was not easy to obtain general approval in Malta. These were the place of Religion in the constitution, which does not concern us here, and the language question about which he wrote thus: 'The question of language required and has received the most careful consideration so as to do justice both to the position of Malta as a member of the British Empire Commonwealth and to the tradition of its history and culture.' There was to be no change in the official status of English and Italian as two languages of culture on an equal footing with facilities for the use of Maltese in the lower classes of the Elementary Schools. Italian was to remain also the official language of the Law courts with the right of being tried in English granted by the Order in Council of 1899, to those British subjects, not of Maltese descent, who, though born in Malta, had no knowledge of any other language than English. The languages of the Legislation were to be both English and Italian, both to be recorded in debates and discussions and the text of all laws, the exception being that the journals and proceedings were to be kept in English. While Maltese could be used in debate, the record of Maltese speeches was to be in English or Italian.

The National Assembly disagreed. The use of Maltese in debates should not be allowed unless the Maltese member concerned declared that he was unable to express himself in English or Italian; the laws of the country were to be published in Italian, which was to be considered the official language of the courts, with an English translation, while all journals and proceedings of legislation were to be kept not in English only, but in both English and Italian. These two languages were to remain the official languages of the administration and to be taught from the lowest classes of all Government schools.

On the 30th April, 1921, the Letters Patent of the new constitution were promulgated by Lord Plumer. The language question in section 57 of the constitution was settled as follows: 'The English language, as the language of the British Empire, and the Italian language, as the established language of record of our Courts of Malta, shall be the official languages of Malta. The English language shall be the official language of administration without prejudice, however, to the use of Italian as a second official language of administration accompanying the English texts in all official records, public documents and all notices of general public importance of interest issued by the Maltese Government. Nothing shall be done by way either of legislation or of administration which shall diminish

or detract from the position of the English language or tend to restrict its use in education or in the public service. The Maltese language, as the language of popular intercourse, shall enjoy all such facilities as are necessary to satisfy the reasonable needs of those who are not sufficiently conversant with the English or Italian language.' Section 57 laid down that 'the English and Italian Languages shall be recognised as equal languages of culture in Malta, at the University, in Secondary Schools and in the higher classes of the Elementary Schools as subjects of study. Where both languages cannot conveniently be taken simultaneously regard shall be had in settling the order of priority in which the languages shall be taught to the wishes of the parents in the case of schools, and of students in the case of the University, and to the utility of the teaching for the purposes of the pupil's future occupation.'

The 1921 Constitution, like other previous and later constitutions, ran aground, till in 1930 it was suspended to make possible certain amendments mainly of a linguistic nature. With the suspension of the Constitution of 1921, came to an end for the time being, also the language provisions, but not the so-called Language Question, which continued to exercise the minds on the one hand, of those who favoured the official recognition of the English language instead of Italian, and, on the other hand, of those who insisted on *pari passu*.

On the 12th July, 1932, the Malta Constitution Act was passed by the United Kingdom Parliament. The new Constitution contained some amendments relating to the official status of English and Italian. The Constitution was again very short-lived. It was dissolved by Proclamation No. XIV of the 2nd November 1933. This new Constitution made Maltese the official language of the Courts, but English and Italian remained also official languages.

On the 12th of August 1936, the 1921 Constitution was revoked and an executive Council consisting of five *ex-officio* members was set up.

The English language as the language of the British Empire, and Maltese as the language of the people, were recognised as the two official languages of Malta; the English language was made the official language of the Administration, and Maltese the official language of the Courts, The official texts of the Laws were to be both English and Maltese, but in the case of conflict of interpretation the English text was to prevail.

By Letters Patent of the 14th February 1939, a Council of Government consisting of 20 members was set up. This is the so-called Macdonald Constitution. There were no new language provision under this new constitution.

Italian Fascists insisted that Malta was Italian not only geographically

but also linguistically. Very revealing of this mentality is a lengthy article on Malta published in the Italian Encyclopaedia Treccani, and a number of books against the official use of the Maltese language published in Italy during the Fascists' war.

In 1947 Malta was granted another Constitution known as the MacMichael constitution.

In this constitution the English Language and the Maltese Language became the only official languages; all debates in the Assembly were to be conducted either in English or Maltese, with English retaining its decisive importance once more in the case of a conflict of interpretation. Section 32 of the Letters Patent required every speech made in the Assembly and, indeed, every notice of motion of any question in the Assembly and every reply thereto to be published not only in the language used, but in both English and Maltese. This proved to be a very cumbersome and expensive procedure.

An amendment to this section by Letters Patent 1953 required that these be officially reported and put down in the language used only.

By order in Council of 1959, the 1947 Constitution was revoked. What has been happening since is common knowledge. Everything is in the melting pot. History is, however, being made. The final shape will take some time. At this stage we are only spectators. As events move one after the other we can only wait and see, but, in spite of new changes and orientations the English language in Malta continues to enjoy its official status and to be also the language of a considerable section of the Maltese press.

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I must now write a postscriptum. Four eventful years have passed since I gave this talk in the British Institute. On February 17th a General Election was held – Self-Government has at last been restored to us under a new controversial Constitution which, like the previous one, had made English and Maltese the two official languages of Malta. For the University of Malta for a reason that many consider strange and anomalous only English has been recognised as official, the people's own language (*mirabile dictu!*) once more has been denied its rightful status though the Students' Representative Council has always treated it as its official language. How much longer shall we suffer this humiliation and anomaly? How is it that what has been considered good enough for the Country, for the Law Courts and the Government and the Legislative Assembly has not been considered good enough for the University? One day someone proud

of his home-land and his native language will rectify this anomaly. Is it a case of old-fashioned prejudiced counsellors out of touch with the times, giving advice? We don't know the answer, all we know is that the degradation of the people's language is an imposition completely out of order and out of tune with the Constitution of the Country.

In 1964 Malta will be independent. No people can be truly a nation without a Flag and Language of their own.