

Speech delivered by Dr John H. Mercieca D.Sc. (Hon. Causa), D.D.S., President of the Philatelic Society of Malta, on Wednesday, March 6, 1991, at the Centru Sport Edukattiv, Floriana, on the occasion of the 25th Anniversary of the foundation of the PHILATELIC SOCIETY OF MALTA in 1966.



Ladies and Gentlemen!

When one sets his mind on achieving a given goal, or any other accomplishment, and with a dogged determination strives towards the attainment of that, which he is aiming at, great is his joy and his satisfaction if, and when his efforts are finally crowned with success and the stiffer the hurdles he has had to surmount, in the process of arriving at his aspired aim, correspondingly greater is his measure of gladness and contentment.

Exactly that great is my exhilaration and my satisfaction on this auspicious day, when I realise to have succeeded in healthily and safely landing, this my Society, to reach its 25th Birthday, which we are here this evening, together celebrating.

So, twenty-five years ago to the hour, a group of about forty stamp enthusiasts and philatelists, assembled at the luxurious and spacious Mgr. Gonzi Hall of the Catholic Institute, were busily organising the setting up and the formation of a philatelic society, led by the late Mr Louis Frank, after the short-lived previous one, had been dissolved twelve years previously.

After the Statute had been formally approved and the first Committee, composed of Mr Louis Frank (President), Dr Albert Ganado (Secretary), Mr Boris Darmanin (Treasurer) and Dr Charles Cassar, Dr John H. Mercieca, Magistrate Dr J. Soler and Mr Charles Whelpdale (Members) had been elected, an atmosphere of satisfaction and happiness was manifestly prevalent in the hall, as for the third time in twenty years, philatelists once again had their own Society, where they could meet fellow stamp lovers and exchange views, embark on mutually profitable stamp exchanges and learn more about their hobby, from talks and displays, organised for them by their Society.

However, only a few years later, this initial enthusiasm and euphoria started to dampen, and the spacious Mgr Gonzi Hall became too much of a luxury for the half a dozen hard-core members, who persevered to take part at these very scantily attended Society meetings. As time went on and the situation of attendances and participation did not show any signs of improvement, the then President, Mr Louis Frank, at one of the meetings, announced his decision to the handful of members present, to call it a day, and disband the Society for complete lack of interest in its activities.

And today, twenty-one years after, I feel indeed proud that supported by the hard-core members, outstanding amongst whom, my dear friend Mr Tony Fenech, here present, I vehemently intervened and pleaded the then President Mr Frank to desist from taking such a step, but to put our heads together and seriously try to find ways and means how to inject new life in the moribund Society. Were it not for my and my friends' timely and insistent intervention, we would not have been happily celebrating the 25th anniversary of this Society this evening, a super-record on all previous performances of local philatelic societies and a veritable landmark in the history of Philately in Malta, but it would have long been dead and completely forgotten like its two predecessors.

When twenty years ago, I accepted my election to the Presidency of this Society at the then Annual General Meeting and was subsequently reconfirmed at the past twenty successive Annual General Meetings, up to the present day, while thanking you for the continued confidence you have shown in me, I would like to assure you, that such an acceptance never stemmed from any desire to satisfy my personal pride and ambition, BUT has always been motivated by a strong and fervent desire to work always harder and harder in promoting the interest in this, my Society, whose continued existence, welfare and aggrandisement, have throughout all these years been my one and only concern and ambition and also to be at the service of the Society and to you, my dear friends, whenever and wherever the occasion arose and the situation demanded it of me.

As you are surely aware, since the last few years, interest in philately has dwindled considerably and is presently at a low ebb, as modern inventions and devices, such as computers, videos and the like seem to have attracted more than stamps the likings of the modern generations, who years back would have easily been enthusiastic candidates and followers of our hobby.

Under such circumstances, it is incumbent upon us and on our Society to find ways and means how to win back the younger generation, especially the school children to the fascinations and cultural values of our great hobby and at the same time to insist with the Postal Administrations throughout the world not to issue an excessive number of expensive sets, so as not to kill the goose that lays the golden egg and so to once again rally more and more followers to the hobby. At the same time let us fight with might and main the investment scope of stamp-collecting, the failure of which during these last twenty-five years or so has no doubt been one of the deciding factors for the decreased interest in stamps.

We, therefore, have to find ways and means to organise a sustained propaganda in favour of the taking up of Philately as a hobby in schools and in other institutions frequented by children that our hobby will once again take its place in the forefront of popularity amongst hobbies which it has for well over a century enjoyed with all classes of society.

During these 25 years of the Society's life, many are the members, who, at one time or another, and in a lesser or greater measure, have validly contributed towards its continued welfare, prosperity and progress, foremost amongst whom were: Dr Alfred Bonnici, Dr Albert Ganado, Mr Anthony Fenech, Mr Cecil Diamantino, Mr Godwin Said, Mr Albert Dimech, Mr Carmel Bonavia, Mr Joseph Buttigieg, Mr Hadrian Wood and Mr Tony Camilleri, Mr Joseph Farrugia, Lt Col William Attard, Dr Edwin Aquilina, Mr Mario Dimech, and Mr Nick Cutajar and to all of them go my most grateful, sincere and heartfelt thanks for the great help they have rendered to the Society and my genuine appeal never to let the flame of interest in the affairs of the Society and its continued prosperity and advancement, to get extinguished.

I would also like to thank all our members for their continued support and ardently appeal to one and all of them, to keep it up so that this our Society will continue to pass from strength to strength.

Although they can no longer physically get our message, my thanks and appreciation go to those who during the course of these twenty-five years have supported this Society by their membership or by serving on the Committee, but who, today do not longer dwell on this planet, outstanding amongst whom the late lamented Mr Vincent Mercieca, for many years the Society's Treasurer and organiser of the "Vote a Stamp" competition which since his demise has ceased to be organised.

My thoughts also go to those members, who, because of advanced age or infirmity are debarred from being here with us on this special Jubilee commemorative evening. And here I cannot fail to mention the name of Miss Daisy Formosa, a founder member of the Society, who up to four or five years ago has braved the elements, in darkness, the risks and other dangers and walked on her own from her residence in lower Britannia (now Melita) Street, to the Catholic Institute and back, never missing one Meeting, a living and glaring example of interest and steadfastness.

Our overseas members too, are to be thanked for their continued support and for the favourable and flattering letters, regarding our Society and Magazine, received from some of them. May I assure them that we shall, at all times, be pleased to have them with us, at our meetings whenever they decide to come over to Malta and to our Society.

My and my Society's thanks go also to the Parliamentary Secretary for Transport and Communications and to the Postmaster General and the Postal Administration for accepting my proposal to issue a stamp to commemorate this milestone in the Annals of Philately in Malta. While thanking the top officials from the Postal Administration for accepting our invitation to be with us on this historic evening, as well as each and every one of you, here present, for contributing towards the successful outcome of this evening's Silver Jubilee commemoration, may I direct my fervent and strong appeal to you all to patronise the activities which my Committee has prepared for the last week of May in order that these celebrations will never go forgotten but, on the contrary, shall by far surpass in importance and lustre those already held in 1976 and 1986 to celebrate the 10th and the 20th Anniversary celebrations respectively.

And winding up this Silver Jubilee Message of mine, may I sincerely trust that all those, who from time to time will be entrusted with the administration and promotion of this Society, and in whose hands will entirely rest its destinies, to continue without fail to give their valid contribution **willingly and wholeheartedly**, in order that transient phases of suspense and half-heartedness, that could rear their ugly heads from time to time, in the years that lie ahead in the Society's lifespan and endangering its very existence, would be happily **avoided and averted**. May I also look forward to the continued prevalence of the same spirit of collaboration which has all along guided this Society throughout these past twenty-five years and may they possibly shine with yet more brightness in the Society's future years, that the Society may yet march forward, ever stronger and stronger to arrive at yet greater and more important anniversaries in the years as yet to come.

THANK YOU.

LONG LIVE THE PHILATELIC SOCIETY OF MALTA.

Membership Dues for 1991 were due on 1st January. Please send your remittance immediately to Mr Dimech, our Treasurer together with 1992 dues, due on 1 January, 1992.

Members who have not paid their Membership Dues for 1988 / 1989 / 1990 are to send their remittance immediately to Mr Dimech.

Membership Rates are:

UK - £5; USA - US\$15, Canada - Can \$ 20; Australia - Au\$25; Italy - L.It 12,000; France - FFr85; Germany - Dm 20; Switzerland - S Fcs 20; Holland - Gds 25; Malta - Lm1.50.