

## INTRA-EUROPEAN COLONIAL NATIONALISM: THE CASE OF MALTA: 1922-1927

Henry Frendo

Colonial nationalism was not only extra-European, limited to Africa, Asia, the Caribbean or the Pacific. Apart from the continental 'balkanizing' nationalisms most prevalent in eastern and south-eastern Europe, there were other generally disregarded nationalisms in the history of overseas empire. On the fringes of continental Europe we had two such cases in the British empire: Malta and Cyprus, the former colony being, clearly, more racially and religiously homogenous than the latter. In justice to outposts of empire which nevertheless saw themselves, in varying degrees, as intimately linked to continental European culture, we propose to carve out as a special area of interest a concern for European opposition to European domination in Europe.

We do not mean simply European-inspired movements, in the sense that, for example, Indian nationalist agitation was inspired by Irish example. Nor do we vaguely mean the 'European Mediterranean', south of a horizontal dividing line: that would comprise large European settlement colonies in the southern and eastern parts of the Mediterranean littoral in countries which were not themselves European and which, with the possible exception of Turkey, never regarded themselves so to be or to aspire to become.

In looking at intra-European colonial nationalist opposition to imperial domination, our focus here is on the British 'fortress' of Malta, whose long-established Italian and Latin traditions suffered as a result of strategic considerations and feared Italian irredentist aspirations. Through a peculiar 'assimilationist' English language policy, especially after 1870, Britain supported the emergence of Maltese as a written language: a means for anglicization and de-italianization. Upholding Italian [against English], as the long-established traditional medium of town and gown, of court and cloister, inspired and mobilised a nationalist movement whose 'loyalty' was constantly put into question, particularly after the advent of Fascism in Italy.

In the literature of twentieth century European nationalism little reference is usually made to autochthonous intra-European colonial nationalist opposition to Imperial domination, the best exponents of which were *italianità* nationalism in Malta, the *enosis* movement in Cyprus and Irish quests for self-determination. In perceptions of nationalism there is also a tendency to assume a certain linearity between its liberal and integral varieties which, in these European colonial cases, is generally inapplicable.

Italian and British sensitivities - both cultural and strategic - crossed repeatedly in Malta during the past two centuries. History ensured that both political and cultural loyalties and allegiances mattered in the minds of these islanders concerned about their survival as a people, with cherished values and secret fears deriving from their own past.

When the British arrived, Malta's European identity had already been moulded by centuries of political and cultural contacts with mainland European kingdoms, and had long been exposed both to the vassal-lord reciprocity of fealty and protection, as well as to a degree of continuing, if remote, autonomy in internal matters, an appendix of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. Moreover Malta under the Knights, and especially the city of Valletta, was a microcosm of Europe, an early multi-lingual, multi-cultural entity of a kind Europeans tend to aspire to in different ways in contemporary times. This Europeanity was most evidently, most immediately manifest in the island's architecture, religious practices and codes of law.

Thus Bonaparte only expelled the Knights 'of Malta' from Malta in 1798 after a long, formative period of Europeanising, Christianizing, Latinising and indeed Italianising influences when the Pope himself 'headed' the Grand Master's Order, intertwined as that was with bishoprics and inquisitors and not least, with other Italian speaking religious orders active in the educational and social fields as well as in doctrinal and redemptory ones. French revolutionary principles found favour with [apart from several departing French knights] a coterie of intellectuals and disaffected elements but in their application in Malta, as in Naples and elsewhere, such principles served to motivate patriotic resistance rather than francophilia. When on 2 September 1798, following Nelson's victory at Abu Qir, Maltese rebelled against their revolutionary overlords, it was not before formal permission had been requested of Naples by the uprising's leaders and Naples was constrained by *force majeure* to concede it, that a British naval blockade of the French caught inside the Valletta bastions started and the first British officers stepped ashore. In 1802 Article 10 of the Treaty of Amiens envisaged that Malta would become an independent state under the aegis of various European powers, including Britain, France, Prussia and Russia; the Knights 'of Malta' directed now by a Russian Czar-Grand Master, would return subsequent to a British evacuation. In the House of Commons, however, Canning had the better of Fox; realising the strategic importance of Malta to Britain both in the Mediterranean as well as on the East-bound routes, the British rather than giving up the place resumed their wars with France. The Maltese had as much say in the eventual outcome of these as did the King of Naples: their own political aspirations for internal autonomy were ignored and they had to wait one hundred and fifty years before they could assert their independence. But in the history of Maltese colonial nationalism, and at certain periods in Italian

perceptions and pretensions in Malta in relations with Britain over Malta, the question of sovereignty rights continued to surface and to niggle.

There was another more intimate connection with the neighbouring peninsula - one that was not simply geographic [less than 60 miles away Sicily was sometimes visible on the horizon] or even religious ['more Catholic than the Pope', Maltese generally shunned any Protestant proselytizing]. Not simply a standard of refinement or an exhibition of elitism as French sometimes might have been in Russia or in Poland, the Italian language had taken root in Malta as the medium of education, official discourse, literature, the church, the courts; over the centuries, from the late Middle Ages onwards, it became the language of public affairs, mentally and spiritually linking all those familiar with it to the Italian *terra ferma* and thereby also to continental European culture. Although first used for a poem as early as the late fifteenth century, the local *patois* ['il-Malti'] had no standard orthography before the 1930's; serious literature in Maltese then was just about non-existent. The names of streets, of shops, indeed of persons were written in Italian; commerce too had been conducted in that language and via an Italian-linked Mediterranean *lingua franca*. That so small a people as the Maltese [100,000 living in Malta when the British arrived, 300,000 when they left, 350,000 today, with about as many living overseas] retained and eventually developed a written language of their own was a phenomenon *per se* - one that would have been aided by insularity perhaps no less than by the successive waves of foreign invasions and occupations.

After Italy's unification which coincided with the opening of the Suez Canal, and increasingly so during the inter-war period, anglicization accompanied de-italianization in Malta as a policy, replacing such informal cultural influences as had less conspicuously accompanied the British presence since 1800. At the same time, Maltese was promoted as a means for learning English, and in its own right. Italian was increasingly pressured out on the ground that English was the Empire's language, and that children could not be expected to learn as many as three languages. Primarily a culturally motivated political force, 'anti-riformisti' and 'nazionali' predicated their new party's existence on *italianità* as an indispensable national heritage which the British had no right to repress and still less to supplant with their own language and related interests. The pro-English party sometimes accused the 'nazionali' of irredentist ideals and tried to associate them with the *Italia Irredenta* movement, which however was interested in redeeming the northern rather than the southern parts of the neighbouring peninsula.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Henry Frendo: *Party Politics in a Fortress Colony: The Maltese Experience* (Valletta, 1979 2nd ed. 1991), ch. 1-2; 'Storja u Gharfien: il-Maltin min huna?' in T. Cortis (ed.): *L-Identità Kulturali ta' Malta* (Valletta, 1989), and the forthcoming volume, in the press, *Maltese Political Development, 1798-1964. A Documentary History*.

In 1899 a language substitution decree was announced whereby a deadline of fifteen years was set for the final replacement of Italian by English in the law courts - as 'a first bombshell', wrote Chamberlain.<sup>2</sup> It was to say the least 'remarkable', protested the Italian foreign minister Prinetti, that considering the vast populations gathered under British rule, Chamberlain should have found time, in the midst of all the pressing preoccupations of recent years, to abolish the Italian language in the only British dependency where it was in use.<sup>3</sup> It was 'worthwhile to prevent a hostile feeling to England taking consistency in the Italian popular mind', wrote Garibaldi's son Ricciotti.<sup>4</sup> Such British measures, noted the historian Pasquale Villari, President of the Società Dante Alighieri, 'wounded Italian sentiment';<sup>5</sup> a leading Crispi follower, General Luchino dal Verme, described them in *Nuova Antologia* as worse conduct towards Italy than that of Austria.<sup>6</sup> The nationalist daily *Malta*, directed by the 'Partito Nazionale' [PN] leader Dr Fortunato Mizzi, editorialized saying the Maltese felt 'like the Irish' who, as Mr Michael Davitt had declared in the British Parliament, would be 'only too glad' when the British Government would 'clear out bag and baggage, and let them alone to look after their own affairs'.<sup>7</sup> The efforts of Malta's Chief Secretary, Sir [later Lord] Gerald Strickland, which the jingoist Chamberlain admired, bowed to the feelings of 'our good allies, the Italians' and mounting agitation in the colony itself: in 1902 the language substitution deadline was withdrawn, even as a policy of so-called parents' 'free choice' of language preference in schools continued to battle with the nationalist blueprint of integrated simultaneous teaching of both the languages.<sup>8</sup> Malta's 1887 representative government constitution was revoked in 1903; no effective representation was allowed again until the post-war 'food and freedom' unrest.<sup>9</sup>

A testing time in Imperial as much as in European history, the nineteen twenties saw Malta intricately caught up in ramifications of both at the same time. A prelude to the succeeding decade of escalating tensions and reprisals ending in the outbreak of widespread hostilities when Italy and Britain were for the first time at war with

<sup>2</sup> Chamberlain min. on Grenfell/Chamberlain, 8 Feb. 1899, Colonial Office (CO) 158/328, Public Record Office, London, quoted in *ibid.*, p.112.

<sup>3</sup> J.L. Glanville: *Italy's Relations with England, 1896-1905* (Baltimore, 11934), p.88, quoted in *ibid.*, p.117.

<sup>4</sup> Garibaldi/Currie, 11 Jan. 1901, enc. CO 158/339/4518, quoted in *ibid.*, p.116.

<sup>5</sup> Currie/Landsdowne, 8. Nov, 1900, enc. CO 158/334/37329, *ibid.*, see L. Villari: "Pasquale Villari e Joseph Chamberlain sulla lingua italiana a Malta; Carteggio inedito", *Rassegna di Politica Internazionale*, Milan, Nov. 1934, pp.540-549.

<sup>6</sup> J.L. Glanville, *op.cit.*, quoted in H. Frendo, *op.cit.*, p.116.

<sup>7</sup> Malta, 18 July 1899, enc. Gwen/Chamberlain, 5 Aug. 1899, CO 158/329, *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.117-125.

<sup>9</sup> See Henry Frendo: *Malta's Quest for Independence, Reflections on the Course of Maltese History* (Valletta, 1989), ch.1, 4.

each other, Anglo-Italian relations over Malta in the twenties were a little barometer of - and a pointer to - what could ensue. Colonial nationalism sought freedoms which 'continental' nationalism strove to deny or to exploit. Essentially its discourse, as in Ireland and in India, utilised the principles of English liberalism and parliamentary government in quest of a national self-emancipation from 'Albion perfide'. This was all the more so after the grant of self-government to Malta in 1921, when the moderate nationalist party of Monsignor Panzavecchia, a local Don Sturzo, won the first elections to form a Maltese government. But other forces were on the move, linking up with past discords and aspirations just as the British and the Italian scenarios changed. On the nationalist side, the actual possibility to govern after a long struggle, and consequently to seek to implement *inter alia* their own national philosophy of *italianità*, coincided with the advent of Fascism's more culturally assertive attitude and Italian dreams of empire that potentially rivalled or threatened British interests in the Mediterranean and in Africa. Fortunato Mizzi's son, Enrico, who had also studied in Italy as well as in Malta, and who in 1911 had proposed in an Italian political journal the exchange of Eritrea for Malta so that Malta could federate as an autonomous Italian political entity while allowing full use to Britain of her harbours, was an *éminence grise* in the nationalist ranks. Court-martialled for alleged sedition in 1917, when Italy was fighting on the same side as Britain, the younger Mizzi formed a separate grouping, the *Partito Democratico Nazionalista* which initially kept its distance from mainstream 'Panzavacchian' politics just as the latter seemed more inclined to have for an ally the less 'suspicious' Labour Party.<sup>10</sup> On the imperialist side, since 1921 once again dominated by the figure of Strickland (who returned to Malta after four colonial governorships mostly in Australia) the least Italian interest in relation to Malta, however undetermined, served to resuscitate the old bogey of irredentism - hence of the disloyalty and unreliability of the nationalists, particularly the uncowed Mizzian faction who would not submit to a cultural reversal.

The roles of Britain and of Italy in Malta during the nineteen twenties were acted out and even perceived on different levels. In general Anglo-Italian relations during this period were still good even if the coming to power of Mussolini with his new type of State sometimes was of concern. In seeking to flex her muscles, Italy coveted above all the British empire, reaching right up to here 'doorstep' and, after 1911, interrupting the Siracusa - Tripoli line. There is therefore an ambivalence in Italian policy which on the one hand is reassuring and on the other hand confounding, both accepting and flouting the principles of collective security. A corresponding ambivalence featured in Maltese colonial politics as anglophiles and italophiles

<sup>10</sup> See H. Frendo: *Party Politics in a Fortress Colony, op.cit.*, pp. 1151-165. See also Austin Sammut: *The Court-Martial of Enrico Mizzi in 1917* (in the press) and the introduction by Henry Frendo 'Motherland and Empire: Nerik Mizzi on the Threshold'.

gave with one hand what they took away with the other. Britishers said they wanted the most cordial relations with neighbouring Italy and respected its cultural heritage, but Italy should keep out of Maltese affairs, language and all. Nationalists insisted they were loyal to the British Crown and wanted English to be taught in schools but not at the expense of Malta's Latin identity. That Italy aspired to be a State to be reckoned with could be seen as power to the elbow for the Maltese nationalists, who thus hoped that, as had happened before, Italian intercession would prevent anglicization from taking root and would indeed enhance Maltese *amour propre*. Equally, any talk of 'mare nostrum' was grist to the mill of Strickland and his stratagems, to which the Colonial Office were always rather more susceptible than the Foreign Office. Mussolini took due note of consular surmisings that a Maltese national awakening in 1922 reflected 'un risveglio della coscienza nazionale italiana' even if 'ancora allo stato crepuscolare'.<sup>11</sup>

While Strickland as early as 1923 spoke of Mussolini 'preparing an air force to take Malta',<sup>12</sup> the Malta government pleaded their allegiance to Britain in the same breath as they renounced their servility to it. At the local level the intensity pumped into rivalry between the so-called 'pro-Italians' and the so-called 'Britishers' assumed a somewhat grotesque character. When ruled out of order by the Speaker of the House of Commons (where he sat as a Tory M.P. since 1924, before being raised to the peerage), Strickland took to the columns of *The Daily Telegraph*. Inveighing against Mizzi's administration for trying to put the clock back by "a 'Nationalism' which is clearly understood to be Italian, although designated as 'Latin', to accommodate such as desire to close their eyes", he said the correct course for eliminating friction between Maltese and English was "to encourage a heart-felt loyalty based on education and gratitude..."<sup>13</sup> The first two Governors since Malta became self-governing, Field-Marshal Plumer and General Congreve, seemed to find Stricklandian attitudes off-putting as 'imperialist' ultras sought to use the changing situation in Italy to scotch the head of the nationalists before these could begin to raise it. Malta's first Prime Minister, Joseph Howard, had to resign in 1923 following an after-dinner speech to the Maltese community in Rome when his jocular reference to a Mussolini visiting card and a broadside in favour of Italian, were reported in Malta's pro-British press as the aftermath of a Howard-Mussolini meeting.<sup>14</sup> The sight of a jeep in Valletta's main square and a provocative comment

<sup>11</sup> Rocco/Mussolini, 8 July 1922; Mussolini/Rocco, 21 Dec. 1922, in 'Serie Affari Politici (Gran Bretagna), *Archivio Storico Diplomatico* (ASD), Farnesina, Rome.

<sup>12</sup> 'If Malta Were Part of Italy' in *The Malta Herald*, enc. ASD Mazzone/Mussolini, 2 Apr. 1923, ASD.

<sup>13</sup> 'Maltese Loyalty', *The Daily Telegraph*, 26 June 1925, enc. ASD Tonetto/Mussolini, 26 June 1925.

<sup>14</sup> i.a. ASD De Bono/Mussolini, 31 Oct. 1923, Mazzone despatches and enclosures of 16 Oct., 15 Nov., 1923, Testimony sworn at Rome's Questura Centrale, 27 Oct. 1923.

suggesting Mussolini had arrived to take Malta could cause an incident.<sup>15</sup> In 1924 there was even a slight taste of pogrom when during the election campaign a mob of five hundred people with Strickland at its head went round some of Valletta's streets at night insulting Italian residents and savaging the portals of Valletta's Umberto Primo school.<sup>16</sup> Various other minor incidents usually involved visiting Italian troops en route from Siracusa to Tripoli and back.

The fascist exuberance gripping Italy in the twenties began to manifest itself too among the small and generally 'well-behaved' resident Italian colony in Malta, many of whose 'members' were locally established craftsmen - tailors, carpenters, confectioners - with friendly Maltese clientele of long standing; moreover intermarrying between the two Catholic communities was not infrequent. Italian consular officials in Valletta were rather prone to stir the pot. One, Luigi Mazzone, recommended in outline an orchestrated 're-italianization' policy, a rear-guard action to make up for lost ground, countering inroads made by English and Englishness prior to self-government and the election to office of a party not unfavourably disposed to *italianità*.<sup>17</sup>

The assassination attempts on Mussolini in 1926 were pompously recorded in three 'Te Deum' ceremonies in Valletta chapels. Organised by the local *Casa del Fascio* in conjunction with the Italian consulate, these were addressed by a locally prominent Italian jesuit educationist (Padre Vincenzo Furci) in terms that may be mildly described as eulogising the Duce: "l'Uomo cui l'Italia e il mondo guardano quale il vendicatore e l'assertore delle migliori virtù della nostra razza".<sup>18</sup> Among the audience in one 'Te Deum' session, perhaps more by way of protocol, was the Prime Minister, Dr (later Sir) Ugo Mifsud, accompanied by two of his Ministers, Dr Enrico Mizzi (Commerce and Industry) and Mgr. Enrico Dandria (Public Instruction); the president of the Senate was also there as were the Vicar-General of the Catholic Church and the commander and officers of a visiting Italian ship (the R.N. Vespucci). But the Leader of the Opposition, Sir Gerald Strickland, a practising Roman Catholic, was not praying in this congregation.

<sup>15</sup> Encs. in ASD Mazzone/Mussolini, 6 Oct. 1923.

<sup>16</sup> ASD Mussolini/Tonetto, 5 Apr. 1924, Mussolini/d Probizer, 25 Aug. 1924, *The Times of Malta*, 8 Feb. 1924. See also H. Frendo: 'Plurality and Polarity: Early Italian Fascism in Maltese Colonial Politics', in S. Fiorini et (ed) *Malta (A Case Study in International Cross-Currents)* (Malta University Press, 1991, pp. 227-240).

<sup>17</sup> ASD Mazzone/Mussolini, 16 Oct. 1923, 1 Nov. 1923.

<sup>18</sup> enc. ASD *Te Deum Laudamus* (Fascio Italiano di Malta, Tip. Chretien & Co., Valletta, 1926) *passim*.

The nationalists were sometimes embarrassed by Italian commentators who readily mistook *italianità* for an irredentist programme and simply portrayed the Maltese in general as Italians under the British flag who yearned for annexation by Italy.

“‘Siete maltesi - ha scoperato alcuno - e non italiani’ come se quanti fra noi, piemontesi o romani, non dimenticano la piccola terra d’origine, debbano tenersi assenti dal nome piu’ augusto. Il cuore di Malta rimane italiano... Il mare che e’ immenso, intorno, non basta alle corazzate britanniche?”<sup>19</sup>

An Italian rather than a Maltese interpretation, this fuelled more overt ‘oltremare’ associations which harmed the PN,<sup>20</sup> all the more so after 1926 when it came to comprise the ‘reunited’ Panzavecchian and Mizzian wings, at the same time that the job-and-emigration conscious Labour Party in a dependent economy was increasingly lured into Strickland’s camp. Nineteen twenty-six saw a crystallization of the nationalist and the imperialist positions, in preparation for the crucial third election under self-government due in the following year; it was a year of pace-setting polarisation, comparable to the seminal year 1880, when the ‘pro-Italian’ *Anti-Riformisti* of the elder Mizzi and the ‘pro-English’ *Riformisti* identified with Sigismondo Savona, had come into being as parties.

A head-on clash came with Strickland’s premiership (1927-1930). Valletta’s sixteenth century main street Strada Reale (in Maltese ‘Strada Rjali’) and Porta Reale (‘Putirjal’) became Kingsway and Kingsgate, Strada Britannica became Britannia Street. Education policy swerved back to ‘either one language or the other’. When marble slabs inscribed in Italian started being smashed down by hammer blows to be replaced by others in English, the Italian Consul General, Fileti, was so incensed that he protested to the governor suggesting that such behaviour was unconstitutional. (Article 57 of the existing 1921 constitution provided for the acceptance of both languages as official ones in the colony.)<sup>21</sup> He was told not to interfere in internal matters.<sup>22</sup> The Italian Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Dino Grandi, later Italy’s ambassador in London, objected to Fileti’s outburst and had him recalled.<sup>23</sup> At the same time, however, Grandi instructed Italy’s Ambassador in London to show the British Government that what was

<sup>19</sup> Carlo Richelmy: ‘Il Cuore Italiano’, ASD enc. de Probizer/Mussolini, 13 May 1925.

<sup>20</sup> enc. ASD G. Botti: ‘L’agonia dell’italiano a Malta?’ in a new monthly *L’Oltremare* (ed. Roberto Cantalupo, Vol. 1, No. 1, first published in 1927).

<sup>21</sup> ASD Fileti/Mussolini (Grandi), 1 Sept. 1927.

<sup>22</sup> ASD Mifsud/Fileti, 1 Sept, 1927.

<sup>23</sup> ASD Grandi/Fileti, 8 Sept, 1927, Fileti/Mussolini, 9 Sept. 1927.

happening in Malta deeply touched Italian sensitivities and ‘does not seem to be in harmony with that spirit of full cordiality which characterizes relations between the two countries’.<sup>24</sup> The message was dutifully conveyed to Sir William Tyrell at the Foreign Office, who was of the opinion that Strickland’s rule could not last long.<sup>25</sup> At the local level, Grandi’s rebuff to Fileti, however correct in terms of protocol, would hardly have strengthened the Italian consulate’s hand. Strickland’s Australian-born daughter Mabel, noted the disgraced Consul-General, had even suggested to him that the Italian Consul-General in Malta should not fly the *tricolor* on his car. Italian was being ‘hunted down like a scabby dog’.<sup>26</sup> Only a few days earlier Fileti, in an after-breakfast conversation at Strickland’s residence, had reassured her that Fascism laid no ‘irredentist’ claim to Malta, that ‘any such gossip was unfounded’, given the traditionally good relations between their two countries. Asked about the future, he had replied that should Britain leave and were the Maltese to desire it, Malta could become ‘a second Republic of San Marino’, but Italy was not after a change of flag. When he in turn asked her about the replacement of Italian by Maltese and noted that commerce in Malta was conducted largely through Italian she had replied that ‘Italians could make themselves understood in English’.<sup>27</sup> All sections of the Italian press reported *anti-italianità* goings-on angrily, sometimes in front-page editorials.<sup>28</sup>

Sir William Tyrell’s sizing-up of the situation from the British Foreign Office’s lookout was an inspired one, even though he could not have imagined what troubles would arise in the succeeding two years of Strickland’s premiership, directly involving the Vatican in addition to the two secular powers most interested in Malta’s lot. By 1930 the self-government constitution itself was suspended by Governor du Cane. In 1931 a Royal Commission recommended that Strickland and his Cabinet, who had been kept on by General du Cane in suspended animation as ‘advisors’, be dismissed and new elections held. But the ensuing landslide Nationalist victory in 1932 merely set the seal on the more fundamental disruption to public affairs, to the colony’s constitutional status, and to the individual lives of many in Malta, both Italian and Maltese, which was to characterize this incoming decade - a general political and social deterioration starting markedly before the outbreak of the Abyssinia crisis, by which such turmoil was further exacerbated.

<sup>24</sup> ASD Grandi/Tonetto, 14 Sept. 1927.

<sup>25</sup> ASD Tonetto/Grandi, 16 Sept., 3 Oct. 1927, Grandi/Tonetto, 29 Oct. 1927

<sup>26</sup> ASD Fileti/Mussolini, 9 Sept. 1927.

<sup>27</sup> ASD Fileti/Mussolini, 30 Aug. 1927. Fileti was invited to breakfast by Strickland at the latter’s residence, then stayed on talking to the daughter after the Prime Minister left.

<sup>28</sup> e.g. ‘Appello al buon senso’, *Il Corriere della Sera*, 16 Sept. 1927, p.1.

By a continental European reading, a nationalist electoral triumph in 1932 would be ominous. But the situation in Malta, not unlike that in Cyprus, was quite untypical of the mainstream continental norm, and indeed was in certain respects its opposite. Britain was always interested in Malta as a fortress and a naval station, in her harbours and in her location and, for such reasons, in the ready availability of a controllable loyalist labour force especially in the docks; hence rearmament policy altered the always reluctant post-war Imperial mood of conceding the principles of parliamentary representation reflecting those of nationality and self-determination.

The newly-returned Nationalist government's declaration in London in 1932 that Malta should be treated as a Dominion, no longer as a Crown Colony, was as understandable as it was untimely. Revoked altogether in 1933, self-government was not restituted before another world war had been fought and won.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>29</sup> H. Frendo: *Malta's Quest for Independence*, op. cit., p.201; see H. Smith & A. Koster: *Lord Strickland Servant of the Crown* (Progress Press, Valletta, 1986), Vol. 2, *passim*.

UFFICIO STORICO E DIPLOMATICO.

TELEGRAMMA IN ARRIVO N. 7197. (PER CORRIERE)

IL R. AMBASCIATORE IN LONDRA  
AL MINISTRO DEGLI AFFARI ESTERI

Londra, 3 ottobre 1927.  
Roma, 6 ottobre 1927.  
Anno V.

Segreto

7

Europa.  
Visione: Personale.

OGGETTO: *Lingua Italiana a Malta.*

N° 915.  
Telegramma di V. E. n. 552 (?).

Durante una conversazione che ho avuta oggi con Tyrrell l'ho informato del trasferimento del R. Console Generale in Malta quale prova della disapprovazione da parte del R. Governo per l'atteggiamento da lui assunto dopo i primi provvedimenti presi da Sir. Gerald Strickland contro la lingua italiana nell'isola.

Gli ho fatto presente grave e antipatica ripercussione che politica anti-italiana del Primo Ministro a Malta potrebbe avere sui buoni rapporti italo-britannici, augurandomi che i saggi consigli del Governo metropolitano di Londra valgano a indurre Sir. G. Strickland a più miti propositi.

Ho accentuato che non intendevo con le mie parole fare un passo formale ma solo esprimere la speranza che lo spirito di sincera cordialità che anima il Governo italiano nei suoi rapporti con la Gran Bretagna sia condiviso anche in questa occasione dal Governo Britannico.

Tyrrell mi ha ripetuto che non attribuiva soverchia importanza alla politica di Strickland il cui Governo, egli ritiene, sarà di breve durata e mi ha detto che avrebbe seguito la cosa. Egli non

*G. Beckwith*

COPIA DI TELEGRAMMA IN ESPERENZA N. 376/31 I.R.

Roma, 8/9=1927 Anno V ore 4

R.Consolato = Malta

*8.9.27* Istruzioni circa comunicazioni scritte.

Europa

Gabinetto n. 376/31

Personale. Riservatissimo. Decifri Ella stessa.

Ho ricevuto i suoi rapporti del 30 agosto e del 1° settembre numeri 168 e 170.

La lettera diretta da V.S. a codesto Vice Governatore doveva naturalmente provocare la risposta che Le è stata data. Ben altra è l'azione persuasiva che con tatto e prudenza Ella dovrebbe esercitare, astenendosi da comunicazioni scritte, specialmente concepite come quelle summate. Ma poiché allo stato attuale delle cose non mi sembra che <sup>più</sup> ci sia possibilità di prego di astenersi fino a nuovo ordine dal rivolgere al Governo locale ulteriori comunicazioni sull'argomento.

Questo Ministero si riserva di giudicare circa il momento opportuno per riprendere le conversazioni con Londra.

Grandi

4225 *giugno 1927*



71216

ROMA 21 DIC. 1922

Signor Console

*Risveglio coscienza nazionale italiana*

Ho letto con molta attenzione il Suo rapporto sulla situazione nell'isola di Malta e sui sentimenti che denunciano un risveglio della coscienza nazionale italiana nel popolo maltese quale conseguenza del rinnovamento generale della nazione italiana.

Ne sono particolarmente lieto e La prego di tenermi informato di tutti gli sviluppi che questo movimento, ancora allo stato crespusco-lare, potrà avere in seguito.

Gradisca gli atti della mia distintissima considerazione.

*Caro Rosco'*  
*R. Consolato Generale*  
*Malta*

*J. 12/10*

*Monod*

Roma

Malta 14 giugno 1924.

NERALE  
ITALIA

6775/140

Signor Ministro,

Ieri sera una turba di oltre 500 persone con alla testa Sir Strikland ed il Prof. Bartolo ed inquadrata da agenti di polizia, inscenò una specie di corteo in Valletta, per far credere al pubblico, contrariamente alla realtà, che il partito Costituzionale aveva riportato una grande vittoria nelle recenti elezioni.

Giunta dinanzi al Palazzo Caraffa, in Str. Forni, ove è la sede della Scuola italiana Umberto I, la folla si lasciò andare a urla selvagge di "abbasso l'Italia, abbasso Vittorio Emanuele, fuori gli Italiani" e tentò persino di sfondare il portone del palazzo.

Il fatto è tanto più grave, in quanto ieri stesso avevo protestato presso il Signor Robertson, Governatore, per analoghe dimostrazioni, per quanto meno violente, avvenute nel corso delle elezioni, e per il mancato intervento della polizia.

Nella mia lettera di energica protesta in-

A Sua Eccellenza  
Benito Mussolini  
Ministro degli Affari Esteri  
ROMA.  
e per conoscenza  
alla R. Ambasciata d'Italia  
LONDRA.

per G. B. '53-2

Telespresso N. 36964

R. MINISTERO  
DEGLI  
AFFARI ESTERI

Indirizzato a R. CONSOLATO GENERALE D'ITALIA - MALTA  
e per conoscenza:  
R. AMBASCIATA D'ITALIA - LONDRA

Ufficio I° 2118

206932

Posizione Roma, li 25 AGO 1924

(Oggetto) INCIDENTI ANTITALIANI IN MALTA.

(Riferimento)

(Testo) In relazione al rapporto di V.S. N. 993/173 in data 30 luglio u.s. relativo ad incidenti antitaliani in Malta, mi prego comunicare che, date le dichiarazioni contenute nel paragrafo N. 4 della Nota indirizzata alla S.V. da cotesto Governatorato Generale il 26 Luglio u.s. e dato il carattere post-elettorale degli incidenti stessi, ritengo sia opportuno non promuovere ulteriori insistenze presso il Governo Britannico.

Le dichiarazioni cui sopra ho accennato esprimendo, infatti, in maniera non equivoca il rincrescimento del Governo di Malta per le frasi scortesi ed offensive proferite all'indirizzo dell'Italia e degli Italiani da individui che lo stesso Governo qualifica tali da non rappresentare in maniera assoluta i sentimenti del popolo maltese, sembrano possano considerarsi soddisfacente risultato delle proteste elevate, al riguardo, dalla S.V.