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**[p.093] Enrico Mizzi's Political Integrity:  
Fact or Fiction?**

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Dr Enrico Mizzi founded the *Partito Democratico Nazionale* in 1921. After his party's merger with *Unione Politica Maltese* in 1926, he became the co-leader of the newly formed *Partito Nazionale*.<sup>1</sup> He successfully contested every election between 1921 and 1947, and served respectively as Minister of Agriculture, Minister of Public Instruction and, just before his death, as Prime Minister.

A passionate believer in Malta's right to autonomy, as well as her Italian cultural heritage, he fought uncompromisingly for his beliefs. In 1917 he was court-martialled on spurious charges of sedition and sentenced to a year's imprisonment. The Governor subsequently commuted the sentence to a severe reprimand. Mizzi was later given a free pardon.

The pattern was, however, set. Mizzi's unflinching defence of Malta's *italianità* made him an easy target for his political adversaries who constantly tried to connect him in the public's mind with anti-British sentiments, irredentism and admiration for Italian Fascism. On the other hand, Mizzi's supporters lauded his courage and honesty. It is significant that, in a political career that spanned more than forty years, no hint or allegations of corruption is attached to his name.

But the controversy between supporter and adversary as to Mizzi's political integrity raged on. It centred mainly on the question of whether Mizzi was tainted with Fascist connections or not. This paper sets out to examine the allegations levelled at Enrico Mizzi and the available evidence in an attempt to decide whether the ex-Nationalist Party leader deserves his reputation for political integrity, a reputation that has persisted to this day.

**[p.94] Internment and Deportation**

On 30 May, 1940—eleven days prior to Italy's declaration of war—Dr Enrico Mizzi, co-leader of the *Partito Nazionale*, was arrested and later interned at Fort San Salvatore. Governor Sir William Dobbie had resorted to the powers conferred upon him by Section 18 (1C) of the Malta Defence Regulations of 1939, and ordered Mizzi's internment in order to secure

the public safety and the Defence of [the Maltese Islands] ... in view of the hostile origin or association of Dr Enrico Mizzi<sup>2</sup>

On 31 January 1942 Area Order No 40 was affixed to the notice board of the internment camp at St Agatha's, Rabat. It officially informed Mizzi and forty-eight other internees<sup>3</sup> that they were to be deported. The Governor had again resorted to his emergency

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<sup>1</sup> The other co-leader was Sir Ugo Mifsud.

<sup>2</sup> *Malta Government Gazette*, Supplement No CXIII, 4 September 1939.

<sup>3</sup> These included three foreigners: Maitland Woolf Eric, Gabel Ifar and Klein Laidlaus. Four of those included in the list, namely Salvatore Bartolo, William Borg, Albert Laferla and Albert Stilon were subsequently not deported for health reasons. The names of Lady Mercieca

powers and decreed the immediate deportation of the named internees to Uganda. Once more the order had been issued as a means of securing the public safety or defence of Malta.

No formal charges were levelled against Mizzi or any other detainee. They were interned without being formally accused, without being given the chance to defend themselves, and without resort to the normal judicial proceedings.<sup>4</sup> When the internees designated [p.95] for deportation successfully challenged the Governor's power to deport them, the Governor passed through the Council of Government Ordinance No. 1 of 1942, which not only conferred such power upon the Governor, but which also included the following clause:

The operation of any order made under this Ordinance for the removal of any person from Malta will not be affected by any proceedings instituted by any procedural act under any other law with the object of preventing or delaying the deportation of any such person.<sup>5</sup>

Eleven weeks after deportation had been carried out, the Court of Appeal declared that any deportation order made under the abovementioned Ordinance was null and without effect.<sup>6</sup> The declared illegality of the deportation was not of any practical help to the deportees. Enrico Mizzi, along with others, was repatriated on 8 March 1945.

Internment and deportation had been enthusiastically canvassed by the Constitutional Party. The Strickland family was strongly in favour, and their daily newspapers, *The Times of Malta* and *il Berqa*, did their utmost to incite the people against Enrico Mizzi in particular. The Constitutionalists' vocabulary, as well as that of the Strickland newspapers, was strewn with such words as "traitors," "Quislings," "disloyals" and "fascists."

Throughout his period of exile, Mizzi did his best to keep abreast with the political situation in Malta. He kept in touch with the two other Nationalist Elected Members of the Council of Government—Dr George Borg Olivier and Dr Giuseppe Schembri—and also addressed a stream of letters and memoranda to the Secretary of State for the Colonies and to the Governor of Malta. These communications with British officialdom mostly concerned the plight of [p.96] the internees and the political situation in the Island. Following his repatriation, Mizzi immediately returned to the political fray attending the sittings of the Council of Government and of the National Assembly.<sup>7</sup>

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and Miss Lillian Mercieca, wife and daughter respectively of Sir Arturo Mercieca, were not included in this list as they volunteered to accompany Sir Arturo. Bondin R., *Deportation 1942*, Rama Publications, Malta 1980, pp. 80-81. So far Bondin's book is the best published material on the internment and deportation of Maltese nationals.

<sup>4</sup> Professor Edith Dobie erroneously states with reference to Mizzi and fellow internees: "Charged with espionage and publishing seditious matter, they were sentenced to imprisonment and interned in East Africa for the duration of the war."—Dobie E., *Malta's Road to Independence*, Oklahoma University Press, Seattle 1967, p. 109.

<sup>5</sup> *Malta Government Gazette*, No III, 9 February 1942.

<sup>6</sup> *Appeals Sentence Book*, Vol 1, 1942. Court Archives, Malta.

<sup>7</sup> A National Assembly was convened in 1945 in order to make suggestions towards the drafting of a new Constitution restoring responsible government to Malta. For a detailed description and analysis of the National Assembly and its achievement see, Pirota J.M., "Prelude to Restoration of Responsible Government. The National Assembly 1945-1947," *Melita Historica*, Vol VII, No 4, 1979, pp. 301-325; and *Fortress Colony: The Final Act 1945-1964*, Vol. I 1945-1954, Studia Editions, Malta, 1987, pp. 63-84.

His immediate task was the re-organization of the Nationalist Party which was in total disarray, and which “hardly operated outside the Council of Government.”<sup>8</sup> It was no easy task. The Nationalist Party was tarnished by the allegation of disloyalty which the internment of Mizzi and other prominent Nationalists brought in its wake. Moreover, the party’s ideology in support of the Italian language and culture rendered it an easy prey to its political opponents. The Strickland newspapers intensified their efforts to brand Mizzi as a traitor who had been in sympathy with Fascist Italy. In this way they hoped to eliminate him from the political scene. Mizzi was fully aware of the forces opposing him, but he was determined to persevere.

### **Accusations of Fascist Subsidisation**

In 1946 the so-called Conspiracy Trials<sup>9</sup> were held. *The Times of Malta* commented that:

The outcome of the trials should certainly put Dr Enrico Mizzi’s personality and tenets in the limelight sufficient to eliminate himself forever from the political field ... that [p.97] misguided section represented by Dr Enrico Mizzi ... must never again be permitted to assume the role of people’s representatives or don the garb of elder statesman.<sup>10</sup>

With hindsight it is clear that *The Times of Malta* possessed inside information as to the contents of some documents which the prosecution intended to exhibit in Court. It is worth noting that later events showed that the Colonial Office itself was not informed of the contents of the documents until July 1947.

Mizzi had also learned what the documents contained. During the meeting of the Executive Committee of the Nationalist Party, held on 14 May 1946, the Nationalist leader gave a full account of the contents of these documents.<sup>11</sup> The first, dated 16 March 1939, bore the signature of Dr Alberto Hamilton Stilon—on behalf of the administration of the newspaper *Malta*.<sup>12</sup> It acknowledged receipt of £128 from the *Ministero della Coltura Popolare* for subscriptions to the nationalist newspaper *Malta* of Enrico Mizzi. Two other documents, both dated 2 July 1937, declared that the Treasurer of the *Ministero per la Stampa e Propaganda* had authorised payment of 46,500 Italian lire to the *Ministero degli Affari esteri Gabinetto* for the acquisition of 50 shares in the newspaper *Malta*. The money was to be withdrawn from the *Fondo Stampa Estera*. One document had a totally illegible signature,

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<sup>8</sup> Note prepared by the Malta Governor’s Office for the Secretary of State in 1943 regarding the political situation in Malta. C.O. 158 89008/24.

<sup>9</sup> In 1946 seventeen Maltese were brought under arrest from Italy and tried by jury on charges of sedition. The prosecution demanded the death penalty for nine of the accused. All were acquitted.

<sup>10</sup> *Times of Malta*, 2 May 1946.

<sup>11</sup> *Process Verbal*, Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Nationalist Party, 18 June 1946. Mizzi Archives. The *process verbal* was later published verbatim in the Press. It is significant that Mizzi’s version of the contents of the documents was never officially, or unofficially, challenged. The documents are not available at the Public Record Office, Kew, London.

<sup>12</sup> The *Malta* was founded and owned by Enrico Mizzi. It was a daily published in Italian and represented the views of the Nationalist Party. It stopped publication on Mizzi’s internment.

whilst the other's signature seemed to read Luigi Pedley. All three documents were typewritten.

The inference was clear. Enrico Mizzi's *Malta* was partly owned, from July 1937 onwards, by the Italian Fascist Government, and also partly subsidised by it. These and other accusations were [p.98] later levelled publicly at Mizzi by an ex-internee, Emmanuele Cossai, during the 1947 election campaign.

Cossai wrote two nearly identical articles, one in Maltese in *In-Nazzjon* and one in English, in *The Nation*,<sup>13</sup> published on 22 and 23 August 1947 respectively. Cossai alleged that Mizzi had sold half the *Malta* to the *Ministero per la Propaganda Estero* for £3000; that he had subsequently received from the same source a monthly salary of £20; that during the period he spent in Uganda, Mizzi had tried to procure better living conditions for himself; and that he only defended other internees with the British authorities as long as he was certain that his action would not jeopardise his own position. Mizzi promptly sued Cossai and the paper's editor, J. Olivieri Munro, for libel.<sup>14</sup>

What Mizzi did not know was that Mr (later Sir) Francis Douglas, the first Governor of post-war Malta, had in March 1947 decided to deal Mizzi's electoral chances a severe blow. Douglas was only slightly acquainted with Mizzi and had never known him in prewar days. It is therefore quite probable that his anti-Mizzi prejudice was the direct result of what he had been told about him. That the Old Constitutional Party clique still possessed considerable behind-the-scenes influence at the Palace in Valletta is not a coincidence.

On 1 March, 1947 Douglas despatched to Mr A Creech Jones, Secretary of State for the Colonies, translated copies of documents which had fallen into the hands of the Maltese Government. The first was dated 5 January, 1938 and read as follows:

A note to the Hon. the Director General of Tourism.

H.E. The Minister has received superior orders to give Enrico Mizzi every support in his activities to ensure the continued publication of the *Malta*.

It is requested therefore, unless this has been done already, that there shall be made a renewal for the current [p.99] year of the contribution by way of payment for advertisements which last year Your Excellency decided to the aforesaid newspaper out of the E.N.I.T. funds.

The contribution should be forwarded to the Honorable Enrico Mizzi through the Banco di Roma (Valletta Branch), and with a view to avoiding any misconception which might induce the British Authorities to accuse Enrico Mizzi of receiving financial aid for political ends, it should be made clear that the payment is being made, as the consideration for advertisements inserted in pursuance of an agreement between the E.N.I.T. and the newspaper.

It is to be noted that the *Malta* is the only daily newspaper published in Malta in the Italian language and it is the only surviving means of self-expression left to Maltese nationalism.

The Head of the Cabinet  
Luciano.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> These two newspapers were the mouthpiece of the Democratic Action Party led by Professor J. Hyzler.

<sup>14</sup> This was only the second time that Mizzi sued for libel during his long career in public life. The case was still *sub judice* when he died in December 1950. The defendants had done their utmost to slow down the case.

<sup>15</sup> C.O.158/89426.

The second document, dated 11 January 1938 was headed Subscription *Malta* and addressed

To H.E. the Senator  
Cav. di Gr. Cr.  
Dr Arturo Bocchini.  
Head of Police, Rome.

The Duce has granted a subsidy of £128 corresponding to 12,191 Italian lire to the Honorable Enrico Mizzi for subscription to the newspaper *Malta*.

It is therefore requested that Your Excellency may be pleased to cause the said sum to be forwarded to this Ministry in order that it may be delivered to the interested party.

The Minister (sgd)  
Alfieri.<sup>16</sup>

[p.100] In his covering letter Douglas urged Creech Jones

to consider the advisability of making the effect of these documents public, either by means of a question in the House of Commons or by some other method.<sup>17</sup>

Later Douglas advised that ‘publication, if decided on should ... be effected at an early date and not (repeat not) just prior to elections.’<sup>18</sup> The Governor also sent copies of the documents which had been exhibited in Court during the Conspiracy Trials and to which allusion has already been made.<sup>19</sup>

We must also mention that in 1946 the Ciano Diary,<sup>20</sup> period 1937-38, was published in Rome. An entry for 9 September 1939 reads: Authorise Casertano to subsidise by 150,000 Italian lire Mizzi’s party during the Maltese election.<sup>21</sup> So the Constitutional Party’s oft-repeated allegations that the Nationalist Party had been subsidised by the Italian Fascist Government seemed confirmed.

The allegations as outlined above, if proved, would leave little doubt that Mizzi’s repeated claims to political integrity were baseless. A careful examination of all the evidence available is therefore desirable and essential.

Perhaps the lesser of Cossai’s allegations—although it must be doubted whether Mizzi thought of it as such—was the assertion that in an effort to obtain preferential treatment for himself, Mizzi demonstrated a servile manner towards British officials in charge of the internment camps, and this to the detriment of his fellow internees. Here the ground is fairly simple.

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Douglas to Creech Jones, 1 March 1947. *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Douglas to Creech Jones, 17 April 1947. *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> These documents are not included in the relevant file at the Public Record Office, Kew, London.

<sup>20</sup> Count Galeazzo Ciano, Mussolini’s son-in-law, was Foreign Minister. He was executed on Mussolini’s orders in 1944.

<sup>21</sup> “9 Settembre [1938] — *Autorizzo Casertano a sovvenzionare con 150,000 lire italiane il partito di Mizzi nelle elezioni di Malta.*” — Ciano G., *Diario Ciano*, Rizzoli, Roma 1946, p. 234.

The election referred to is the 1939 Council of Government election under the Macdonald Constitution.

[p.101] The ex-internees Dr Giovanni Sammut, Chev. Vincenzo Bonello, Edgar Laferla and Dr Alessandro Stilon Depiro were summoned by Cossai in order to substantiate his allegations. Each one strongly and categorically denied all of Cossai's allegations, and, in the process, gave a highly unflattering picture of the defendant. Mizzi was declared to have refused preferential treatment when it was offered to him; constantly defended the interests of the internees—including Cossai's; often sacrificed himself for others; and attempted to keep the peace amongst the internees, especially when Cossai's group acted provocatively by singing Fascist songs or giving the Fascist salute.<sup>22</sup>

Mizzi's correspondence with the Authorities provides ample evidence of his uprightness of character and proud self-respect. The latter ensured that he would not accept, let alone request, any favours. The following example should suffice to illustrate this point. In a letter which Mizzi wrote to Governor Dobbie on 2 March 1942, he asked him to order

that those who might be eventually deported after us be treated better also on board the ship and that their lives and personal integrity be better protected by the responsible Authorities.

He added

Your Excellency is aware that no deportee has been allowed to carry with him more than £10. Every one of us has already found it necessary to spend a considerable portion of that sum to supplement the scanty rations and also to buy other necessities. It is fair that the Government should consider also these circumstances in fixing the allowance to be granted and that a way should be found to help the remittance of funds from Malta to Uganda to meet the deportees' requirements.

[p.102] I have never asked, nor intend to ask, for me and for my family, any financial help from the Government, but if my condition as a deportee will at any time compel me to accept such a help, I declare that I shall accept it with the reservation and promise to pay it back as soon as conditions will allow me to, with the highest interest allowed by the law.<sup>23</sup>

### **The Sale of the *Malta***

In his explanation to his party's Executive Committee on 14 May 1946, Mizzi stated:

the *Malta*... required development and modernisation in order to be able to sustain the opposition of the adverse Press ... I had not the necessary funds ... and therefore ... following also the advice ... [of] Sir Ugo Mifsud<sup>24</sup> whom I always consulted on [important party matters] ... I decided to sell out the newspaper to two notably rich Maltese Nationalists.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> *Cit. Numru 603C/47, Avukat Dottor Enrico Mizzi vs Emmanuele Cossai u oħrajn*, Archives of the Superior Courts, Malta.

<sup>23</sup> Mizzi to Dobbie, (from Cairo Citadel, Egypt), 2 March 1942, Mizzi Archives.

<sup>24</sup> Sir Ugo Mifsud had died on 11 February 1942, two days after suffering a heart attack during an impassioned speech delivered in the Council of Government against the Government's intention to deport a selected number of internees.

<sup>25</sup> The two persons referred to were: Dr Alberto Hamilton Stilon and Dr Antonio Muscat.

This statement, as well as further details given by him regarding the sale, are confirmed by the sworn evidence of Chev Vincenzo Bonello in the *Mizzi vs Cossai* libel suit. Bonello declared that he and other fellow Nationalists had become aware that the *Malta* was commercially sinking. They felt that the primary reason was the need of an efficient administrator. So Bonello had approached Mizzi and finally convinced him to sell the *Malta* and only retain its editorship.

[p.103] Mizzi offered the newspaper, its presses and sundry connected items for sale in 30 shares of £100 each. Two shares were bought by Dr Antonio Muscat on 18 February 1937, as evidenced by the private deed of sale drawn up.<sup>26</sup> Ten shares were bought by Dr Alberto Hamilton Stilon on 16 February 1937. Hamilton Stilon was to acquire the remaining 18 shares, at the same price and upon the same conditions, within two years.<sup>27</sup> In fact, the remaining 18 shares were bought by him on 15 December 1938.<sup>28</sup> Payment was to be made by instalments over a number of years. The deed of sale was drawn up by Notary George Borg Olivier and also makes reference to the ownership of the two shares by Dr Muscat.

There is, therefore, no doubt that Mizzi did not sell any part of the *Malta* to the Italian Government. The question arises as to whether the major buyer, Hamilton Stilon, was a front for the Italian Government and, if so, whether Mizzi was aware of this. The latter does not seem to be the case. When buying, Stilon and Muscat accepted identical conditions imposed by Mizzi. They bound themselves to ensure that

If for whatever reason [they] gave up the ownership of the newspaper [they] would ensure that the property would pass into the hands of a Maltese who could give a full assurance of being able to maintain its unadulterated nationalist character.

Moreover, they also agreed that the *Malta* would continue to represent Nationalist Party principles (with special emphasis on the language question) as represented in the Party's 1932 election manifesto; that it would continue to be published in Italian; and that they would not sell any part of their holding, unless the prospective buyer was *persona grata* to Mizzi.<sup>29</sup>

[p.104] Did Hamilton Stilon fail to keep his part of the bargain? This, too, appears unlikely since, following Mizzi's death on 20 December 1950, £428 from the £2,800 worth originally acquired by Hamilton Stilon were still unpaid. This is established by the declaration of Mizzi's assets drawn up in connection with the Succession and Donations Duties Act.<sup>30</sup> Chev Vincenzo Bonello testified in Court that he had been nominated heir to Hamilton Stilon's shares in the *Malta*, in the latter's will.<sup>31</sup> Had Hamilton Stilon sold all or part of his 95% holding he would not have been able to bequeath the property to Bonello.

Final confirmation is provided by the reply given in the Italian Senate by Foreign Minister Count Carlo Sforza to a question put by Senatore Giuseppe Bettiol during the sitting of 29 March 1949. Sforza said:

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<sup>26</sup> Private deed of sale, 18 February 1937, for two shares worth £200 in the *Stamperia Malta*. Mizzi Archives.

<sup>27</sup> Private deed of sale, 16 February 1937, for ten shares worth £1,000 in the *Stamperia Malta*. Mizzi Archives.

<sup>28</sup> Private deed of sale, 15 December 1938, for 18 shares worth £1,800 in the *Stamperia Malta*. Mizzi Archives.

<sup>29</sup> See deeds of sale cited above.

<sup>30</sup> Copy of declaration of assets for the purpose of the Succession and Donation Duties Act. Mizzi Archives.

<sup>31</sup> *Cit. Numru 603C/47, op. cit.*

With regard to the newspaper *Malta* and the conduct of one of its owners, Signor Enrico Mizzi, I confirm that the Italian Government neither acquired the said newspaper, nor subsidised or enlisted [the services] of Dr Enrico Mizzi.<sup>32</sup>

The above unshakable evidence not only answers Cossai's allegations, but also renders improbable the authenticity of the documents in the Malta Government's possession.

Sforza's assertion that Mizzi was neither subsidised by the Italian Government, nor enlisted in its services, also repudiates Cossai's allegations of a £20 monthly Italian subsidy. Sforza's declaration fits in with the deeds of sale of the *Malta*. These stipulate that the £20 monthly were to be paid to Mizzi by the new administration of the paper as a salary for his services as editor. This is not surprising [p.105] since Mizzi depended on his journalistic activities for his living. The sale conditions also guaranteed his total editorial freedom. We now turn to the question of subscription and advertisements. With regard to the latter no mystery is involved. It is quite obvious that the Italian Government was strongly in favour of the continued teaching of Italian in Malta as well as the propagation of Italian culture. The *Malta* was the mouthpiece of the political party which was dedicated to preserving Malta's Italian linguistic and cultural heritage. An examination of the financial books of the *Malta* reveals that in 1937 and 1938 *E.N.I.T.* paid £70 annually to advertise Italy's touristic attractions. There were other regular financial advertisements on behalf of Italian enterprises, notably the *Istituto Nazionale dell'Assicurazioni*, *Il Banco di Roma* and *Fiat*.<sup>33</sup> These firms were all actively engaged in local business.

Mizzi was deeply committed to ensuring the continued publication of the *Malta*. It was, therefore, natural that he would seek to enlarge the number of the paper's subscribers, and also that he would seek the help of friends in Italy for this purpose. Mizzi never tried to hide such endeavours. The person who figures prominently in this regard is Annibale Scicluna Sorge, who occupied a prominent position in the *Ministero per la Propaganda Estero*.

Dr Giovanni Sammut testified in Court that Scicluna Sorge had told him that Mizzi was always asking him to obtain advertisements or subscribers for the *Malta*. Scicluna Sorge added that he tried to help Mizzi, but that he considered the Nationalist leader as a rather strange person. This opinion was based on the fact that, when Scicluna Sorge had procured some advertisements for the *Malta* at a higher rate than normal, Mizzi refused to accept more than was due according to the newspaper's published tariff.<sup>34</sup>

This shows clearly that Mizzi was not interested in guaranteeing the *Malta's* existence through subsidization, disguised or otherwise, but in using his contacts for the legitimate purpose of obtaining advertisements and subscribers for the only Maltese daily committed to propagating the Nationalist Party's principles.

[p.106] It cannot, of course, be excluded that, in his endeavour to help, Scicluna Sorge used his influential position to pressure individuals or institutions to take out a *Malta* subscription. What can be ascertained is the fact that, in 1938, when Enrico Mizzi was merely the editor, the newspaper had seventy-two subscribers in Italy. Twelve were Dante Alighieri Societies in various towns; thirty-six were individuals and twenty-four were Fascist cultural

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<sup>32</sup> "In merito al giornale *Malta* e al comportamento di uno dei proprietari signor Enrico Mizzi, si assicura che il Governo italiano non ha mai acquistato tale giornale né ha sussidato o comunque asoldato l'avvocato Enrico Mizzi."—Il Ministro Sforza.

*Allegato alle CCIII Seduta del Senato del 29 Marzo 1949*, pp. 638-639.

<sup>33</sup> Accounts of the *Malta* for 1936-37 and 1937-38. Mizzi Archives.

<sup>34</sup> *Cit. Numru 603C/47, op. cit.*

and other groups in various localities of Italy.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, if the document attesting receipt of £128 for subscriptions is genuine, it bears a date when Mizzi was no longer the administrator, and in fact the signature is Hamilton Stilon's.

The first person in Malta to draw public attention to the *Diario di Ciano 1937-38* was Mizzi himself in an article in *Patria!* in October 1948. He categorically denied that the Nationalist Party had been subsidised by the Italian Government through its Consul in Malta, Dottore Raffaello Casertano.<sup>36</sup> Mizzi wrote to his friend Professore Fabriani in Italy, a well-known anti-Fascist who had joined the *Democrazia Cristiana*, and asked him to help trace Casertano's address.

This was rather difficult since the ex-Consul had moved to America but, by 9 January 1949, Mizzi had the required information and wrote to Casertano. He asked him to confirm the fact that he [Mizzi]

had never asked [him], nor had ever received from [him], directly or indirectly any subsidy for the election or for any other reason, and that, if *granted for the sake of argument* [Ciano had issued such authorisation] that he [Casertano] [p.107] had not followed Ciano's instruction ... as Mizzi had never carried out any services for him, especially since [Mizzi] had never asked for any subsidy either from Ciano or any other Italian authority.<sup>37</sup>

Casertano replied by means of a letter dated 28 February 1949. He declared:

The truth which stands out starkly is the following:

- 1) That Count Ciano's authorisation to subsidise the Maltese Nationalist Party during the election represents only his intention which was in no way followed up and about which he never subsequently repeated to me.
- 2) That I did not heed such authorisation since I knew quite well both your sense of pride and your line of conduct which is stamped by the most rigid moral independence.
- 3) That you never resorted either to me or to any other Italian authority to ask for subsidies; never received such from me, directly or indirectly, for electoral or any other purpose.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> The groups were: *Gruppo Universitario Fascista di Catania*, Firenze, Messina, Milano, Napoli, Palermo, Pisa, Roma, Siracusa, Torino, Trieste and Tripoli; *Istituto di Coltura Fascista di Catania*, Firenze, Milano, Roma, Torino and Tripoli; and the *Fascio di Combattimenti di Bengasi*, Catania, Milano, Roma, Siracusa and Tripoli. List of *Malta* subscribers, Mizzi Archives.

<sup>36</sup> *Patria!*, 9 October 1948.

<sup>37</sup> Mizzi to Casertano, 9 January 1949. Mizzi Archives.

<sup>38</sup> "La verità che a me risalto è la seguente:

1) *che quella autorizzazione del Conte Ciano a sovvenzionare il Partito Nazionalista maltese nelle elezioni rispondera soltanto a una sua intenzione che poi non ebbe alcun seguito e della quale Egli non mi riparlò più successivamente;*

2) *che io non mi valse di quella autorizzazione, essendone ben note la Vostra fierezza e la Vostra linea di condotta improntata alla più rigida indipendenza morale;*

3) *che Voi mai Vi rivolga a me o ad altra Autorità italiana per chiedere sovvenzione, ne mai ne riceveste da me, direttamente o indirettamente, per la elezione o per altri scopi.*"— Casertano to Mizzi, 28 February 1949. Mizzi Archives.

Casertano's declaration coupled with Sforza's categorical ruling out of any subsidisation of Mizzi is unanswerable.

### **Probable Motives**

It is of interest at this point to try and determine the motives which made Mizzi a target for Cossai, Sir Francis Douglas and the Colonial Office.

**[p.108]** In Cossai's case, the probable reason for his action may be inferred from the evidence of the witnesses he summoned in his defence. The picture that they give of Cossai is that of a Fascist sympathiser who originally was also a hot-headed and rather fanatical follower of Mizzi. Chev Bonello testified that when Archbishop Caruana ended his visit to the internees at St. Agatha's, Rabat, Cossai was one of those who sang the *Inno a Roma* to the disapproval of most of the others. At Bombo in Uganda, Cassai was also one of those who sang Fascist songs. His behaviour was said to be continually provocative. Dr Alessandro Stilon DePiro substantiated all of Chev Bonello's evidence. He spoke of Cossai shouting, "Duce! Duce!" and added: "I classify him, without any hesitation, among the irresponsible section [of the internees]."<sup>39</sup>

These witnesses also described how Cossai began to change his attitude towards Mizzi. They agreed that Cossai remained a blind follower of Mizzi until it was evident that Italy was losing the war. Dr Giovanni Sammut explained that, at Makindo, Mizzi had told him that

as soon as the war turned [against the Axis] some of the internees—among whom was Cossai—quarrelled with him and insisted that he should resign his seat in the Council of Government. They thought that this would enable them to return to Malta earlier since his resignation would salve the Authorities' feelings.<sup>40</sup>

Chev Bonello stated that Cossai belonged to a group of fellow internees who referred to those who behaved well as

servile and traitors. They used to tell us that if ever the Italians landed in Malta they would shoot us ... At Entebbe Cossai told me to my face that I was one of those marked out [for execution]. When the trend of war went against the Axis, we became the Fascists—and such other descriptions ... At Entebbe he accused me of being an Italian agent.<sup>41</sup>

**[p.109]** Edgar Laferla added that

when Italy surrendered I was buttonholed by some internees, amongst who was Cossai, who told me that I was right not to be on speaking terms with Mizzi, and then they spoke disparagingly of him.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> *Cit. Numru 603C/47. op. cit.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

It therefore appears that some of the internees, among them Cossai, felt that they were so compromised in British eyes, that once Italy was defeated they could no longer afford to be regarded as Mizzi followers. They probably hoped that the British would feel that they had “atoned” if they showed that they regretted having been misled by Mizzi. This in spite of the fact that there is no evidence that Mizzi took part in the singing of Fascist songs, or gave any Fascist salutes, or in any way encouraged such behaviour among the internees.

Sir Francis Douglas also tried hard to convince Creech Jones to discredit Mizzi. In his communication of 5 May 1947, Douglas declared that he considered it

highly desirable that [Mizzi] should be publicly exposed for what he was, and the veil of injured innocence torn from him. This is further desirable in order to demonstrate that there were in fact good reasons why he and others were interned during the war, and doubly necessary after the deplorable result of our conspiracy trials.<sup>43</sup>

The Colonial Government’s action in interning and later deporting Maltese nationals without due process of law had been resented by many in Malta. It was considered as an excellent example of British high-handedness in their relations with the Maltese, so much so that the Governor was forced to admit his inability to have a question regarding Mizzi put in the Council of Government since [p.110] there was no one who would put it even before the resignation of the Labour Members reduced [the Council’s] numbers.<sup>44</sup> Douglas had a generally poor opinion of most Maltese and quickly gained a reputation for arrogant behaviour towards them. He considered the acquittal of the defendants in the conspiracy trials as a slur on British justice, and wanted to illustrate the righteousness of the internment and deportation to which Mizzi and others had been subjected.

Another political element has also to be taken into account. Responsible government was about to be re-introduced in Malta. The Governor did not welcome the possibility of Mizzi’s brand of nationalism establishing itself firmly in Malta. The Nationalist Party leader had, on his repatriation, immediately renewed his call for dominion status for Malta. It is true that there seemed little likelihood that the Nationalist Party would win a majority in the approaching elections, but Douglas was being advised that Mr Mintoff and Dr Colombo—two prominent members of a resurgent Malta Labour Party—were extremists and that Boffa, Colombo and Mintoff [had] stated privately that if they did not get a sufficient majority in the election they would join hands with Mizzi.<sup>45</sup> The Governor wanted to avoid such a possibility by discrediting Mizzi. Douglas expressed his certainty that, if a question regarding the Nationalist leader was put in the House of Commons and answered, it would carry respect and attention in Malta, and would be of no embarrassment either to himself or to Creech Jones.<sup>46</sup>

The Colonial Office did not view Mizzi’s campaigning in favour of *italianità* favourably. They understood that this did not exist in isolation, but was part and parcel of his passionate belief in Malta’s political autonomy. Mizzi maintained that autonomy could only be claimed successfully on the basis of nationhood, which in turn depended on the identifiable elements of race, language, culture [p.111] and religion. Italian was an integral part of Malta’s

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<sup>43</sup> Douglas to Creech Jones, 5 May 1947. C.O. 158/89426.

<sup>44</sup> In the 1945 election to the Council of Government, the only party contesting was the Malta Labour Party. They won nine of the available ten seats. After their resignation on 12 September 1946 in protest against dockyard discharges, there remained Henry Jones as the only elected member. *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Douglas to Creech Jones, 12 August 1947. *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Douglas to Creech Jones, 5 May 1947. *Ibid.*

heritage and culture. Mizzi believed that it not only provided the Island with one of the requisites of national identity, but also served her in other ways. It acted as a bulwark against the Anglicization of Malta while, at the same time, establishing the European identity of the Maltese and, in the process, emphasising Malta's claim to be treated by Britain as a European nation.

The idea of an autonomous Malta or of Malta as a dominion—a long-standing Nationalist Party ideal—was not welcomed by Britain since it undermined her concept of Malta as a fortress colony of the first importance. When the Colonial Office attempted to gauge Nationalist Party chances in the approaching general election of 1947, they commented:

The brand of nationalism which will come forward will probably be very mild ... But the danger is that if a mild Nationalist Party comes in on the swing of the pendulum we may find later that it is very much a wolf in sheep's clothing.

They concluded that the best hope for British interests would undoubtedly be the return of Labour.<sup>47</sup> Discrediting Mizzi would definitely help.

Why then did the Colonial Secretary decide against such an attempt? Creech Jones gives some of his reasons. He told Douglas that

in the end [any such action] might help Mizzi by giving him considerable publicity which he [was] quite astute to turn to advantage if given time to do so. Action might also be held to constitute intervention by Government of Malta in electoral campaign ... further publicity [at that stage] might have a flavour of persecution about it ... [and] the sums of money involved [were] small and no consequential action [was] intended.<sup>48</sup>

**[p.112]** Although the advisability of discrediting Mizzi in Maltese eyes, should there be a resurgence of any Italo-Union movement, was taken into account at the Colonial Office, the overriding opinion was that it was doubtful if [Mizzi] were engaged in any subversive activities.<sup>49</sup>

It is also probable that the authenticity of the documents worried the Colonial Secretary. He had earlier told Douglas that a statement about Mizzi in the House of Commons would have to open with a statement about their authenticity and the means by which they came into the hands of the Malta Government.<sup>50</sup>

Yet a draft carefully prepared for the purpose studiously avoids both questions. It is also significant that Douglas had expected Cossai's lawyers to *subpoena* the Secretary to Government in order to have him produce the documents exhibited during the conspiracy trials. He had therefore asked for instructions.<sup>51</sup> The Secretary to Government was not *summoned*, the probability being that since the authenticity of these documents had already been seriously questioned during the conspiracy trials, they were not considered useful to Cossai's defence.

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<sup>47</sup> Sir A. Dawe to A.B. Acheson regarding the political situation in Malta. C.O. 158/9289.

<sup>48</sup> Creech Jones to Douglas, 30 April 1947 and 22 May 1947, C.O. 158/89426.

<sup>49</sup> Minute by Sir T.I.K. Lloyd, 13 March 1947. *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Creech Jones to Douglas, 22 May 1947. *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> Douglas to Creech Jones, 25 August 1947. *Ibid.*

Creech Jones's reply to Douglas's query regarding his actions in case the documents were demanded in Court, is also revealing. The Colonial Secretary answered that, after consulting the Foreign Office, the latter decided that they had

no objection to the publication of documents connecting Mizzi with Fascism, but that it would be preferable to avoid publication of those which connect him with *Italianità*.<sup>52</sup>

So much for fair play.

Twenty months before his death, during a heated debate in the Legislative Assembly, Mizzi declared:

I hope that when I pass from this life to become a memory [p.113] to posterity I hope no one will slander me ... for party reasons ... As I had been declared by the Nationalist Party some thirty years ago, I am still, thank God, before the Party, before the people, and above all else before my own conscience "senza macchia e senza paura."<sup>53</sup>

There seems every likelihood that history will concur.

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<sup>52</sup> Rees-Williams to Douglas, 15 November 1947. *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup>

53. *Legislative Assembly Debates*, Sitting No 8, 17 March 1949, p.397.