

malta**today special report**



Straying from the straight and narrow path

In the second episode of the chronicles which record how Dom Mintoff contributed to the fall of the Labour govern-

ment, we read how the personal enmity between Mintoff and Alfred Sant served as one of the main catalysts that brought

about the premature downfall of the Labour Party in government. Mintoff felt that the Labour Party had strayed from the straight and

narrow path of true socialism and had done so while trying to remain, at least in appearance, a traditional socialist party . . .

'Mintoff is a traitor he is betraying Ma

15 June, House of Representatives 1998

DOM MINTOFF: After I had told him that, he told me: "Don't you trust me?" I replied that I did not and he asked me why not. I told him: "Because you were one of those who maintained that the cabinet had not done anything to hurt the small worker – I am referring here to the water tariffs – and so I can't know what you're going to do, and from today on, I'm not going to trust anybody. I will trust only what I can see with my eyes and touch with my hands." And he took offence and said: "After all, not you, nor the Prime Minister provide me with a living; I do what is right." If I'm not reporting exactly what we said to each other, he can correct me. Then I interjected and told him: "I'm glad you're telling me this in front of the deputy leader of the party, because for me this is a confirmation that I'm not trying to bribe you." This is what I told him. Now what would somebody else do – that day I did not tell him this, but I'm telling him today – It's not my business. But I would not have expected that when I came here in the evening and asked like a beggar for the motion not to be voted on that evening but the following day so that we could discuss it, neither one side of the house or the other wanted to postpone it. And you are witness to this Madam Speaker. I am saying this because these things are not in the minutes, meaning they are not recorded. To those who were fooled into believing that I was in cahoots with the other side, I tell them that had they wanted to use their heads that day, they would have noticed that the most obvious thing that proves I was not ganging up with the other side was the fact that they did not want to support my proposal to postpone the vote, like I had asked them to. But the government side of the house were so against me and were so gullible that not only did they not give me a chance to talk, but, worse than that, they did not even tell me that there was going to be a meeting of the parliamentary group! That

day, nobody told me: Listen you! Today we're going to discuss! Not that I would have gone, but I would have sent them a letter so that they would have known what I was going to do. There is no need for them to put pressure on me to force me to go to the parliamentary group by force. And they never put pressure on me to go. But on that day, neither Joe Mizzi who is the Whip – He'll excuse me if I don't refer to him as Minister Joe Mizzi, but I'm not in the habit of complimenting my friends – and if I did call him minister its not to pester him, because I'm meant to call him Parliamentary Secretary, but we're not going to stay splitting hairs between us – and nobody even told me that there was going to be a meeting of the Parliamentary Group to discuss me. As if somebody who wants to justice somebody else and is a serious person doesn't even tell that person what he's planning to do! I am St Sebastian who gets filled with arrows! I am the victim.

MADAM SPEAKER: Honourable Mintoff, I'm still waiting for your allegations of a breach of privilege.

DOM MINTOFF: Yes, I'm going to continue. (Interruptions) Is he taking offence at what I'm telling him? He said this, not!! I repeat, Madam Speaker, nobody told me anything. But worse than this, he went there, told them that he wanted to resign and asked them if there was somebody that could take his place. As if this is the way things should happen Madam Speaker! Even I had resigned but I gave plenty of time for people to reflect and to think. Not frivolously! This is pretence, This is make believe. Naturally the Parliamentary Group told him that there was nobody to take his place and had I been there, even I would have told him the same, because I don't want him to resign, but to change the path he has chosen. And he knows that he has chosen the wrong path. That is why he is not acting according to



the rules, because he has done wrong. That is why he did not go in front of the board of discipline, because he has committed a sin. He did not come to speak to me because he has sinned. He spoke on television because he sinned. He did not postpone the debate by one day because he had sinned, because if he had, nothing would have happened. But it wasn't enough that he did this. The following morning he held a so called press conference – I don't know what kind of police we have and whether they really want to see that things are being done in the proper legal way because when you hold a conference you don't come equipped for a mass meeting and neither do you call the Super I crew....And the Prime Minister cannot say that he does not control Super One.

Then who controls it if not he? Do I control it? It has become his personal property; Nobody else commands in there. It has become his personal property and he is helped by Evarist Bartolo. Everybody knows this. You all know this and you laugh! So what right did he have to hold a meeting in Birgu, in the heart of where I'll be...And don't you think that I'm afraid of going to Birgu! I am only afraid that the party is going to break up, but if he wants to break it let him; I cannot stop him. You are the ones who can stop him; you who are there and who are telling him; Destroy, destroy, destroy.

But I was not scandalised that day because he held a meeting, I was scandalised because off his own bat, without a mandate from the parliamentary group, either

from the executive anybody else, because he is - He wasn't against anyone because he wasn't there; here – let's see if he's away from these people: Mintoff is a traitor betraying Malta's party. What reason give? That I voted against the party's programme this very same programme in this programme Prime Minister, whoever spoke up are we saying that we are going to hire out for ninety-nine years there anything that at this in the programme Are we, perhaps, in the programme party we are saying people are not going allowed to go there they have to get

Malta and the party'



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But what did he say that is more important than this? First of all they included the Libyans like Pilate in the Holy Creed. He said: "Mintoff had no right to go and to Libya and speak in the name of the Labour Party, the Nationalist Party or of anybody else." First of all he should have asked me. In the first place, he should have asked me what I went to do in Libya and not stoop to such a level where he asked the Libyans what I went there for. And if the Libyans decided not to tell him why I went there, how was he going to get satisfaction? He has not, to date, asked me why I went to Libya and yet he has condemned me! He has called me traitor of Malta, but I ask him: Who is the traitor of Malta? I, who have never

hidden anything from Malta, or he who says all these things without actually knowing anything?! Yesterday he patched things up and said that I had the duty to tell them why I went to Libya. But I say: Who did I have to inform? When I wanted to speak to George Vella about foreign affairs, he didn't turn up. So who am I to talk to? Who did I have to speak to, had I wanted to tell them? Now I did not need to speak to anyone because I did not do anything against Malta, and later on I'll show him how much I worked in Malta's interests while I was there and I'll make him blush. Because I did not go there to further my own interests, but those of Malta. And then I'll show him who betrayed Malta, whether it was him or I.

Calling Mintoff a traitor - the most abysmal statement Sant ever made



Former Foreign Minister and a Labour deputy in the 1996-1998 government, Alex Sceberras Trigona talked to MaltaToday on the 17 June 2001 and had this to say about the Mintoff-Sant Saga

"I told him that during the first two years in government, we had become 'PN2'," he says. "I'm not for that, since we would end up with a military dictatorship. I don't think that is at all useful for working people in this country. Labour is Labour and should remain so."

I am interested in why he believes the former Prime Minister's decision to opt for a premature election was unwise, since Sant himself, along with others, described it at the time as unavoidable.

"We were elected for five years and I think the party should have held fast, rather than risk abdicating early," he answers. "We shouldn't have denied Malta the three-and-half years we still had left. We didn't even deny them that when Fenech Adami was speaking of a moral majority in 1981 – 1987. We carried on, despite the taunts, because we were the Constitutional government."

Dr Sceberras Trigona also points out that the damage done from losing the 1998 election is serious, and not yet quantifiable in all areas.

"What is evident is that the situation regarding certain issues high on Labour's agenda will have worsened even further by the time it gets back into government," he says. "The public sector deficit will have worsened and cronyism will have increased, for example."

"The centre of political gravity has moved much more to the right and it will be much more difficult to pull it back, even if there is a Labour victory. These are the costs of abdicating power and the whole country is having to bear them."

But isn't it fair to say that the Labour government would have remained a figurehead, unable to govern properly and pass laws, if Dr Sant hadn't gone to the polls, I ask?

Dr Sceberras Trigona believes

there could have been an alternative.

"I was recommending a summer break, which would have cooled off heads and enabled us to establish bridges to help sort out wrangles," he explains. "This would surely have been a better alternative to taking a massive gamble and dashing to the polls."

He also believes it was unrealistic of Dr Sant to have expected the party executive to support him on some of his actions during that time of crisis.

"Calling Mintoff a traitor - the most abysmal statement Sant ever made - and then coming to the executive of the party in the evening and expecting them to ratify what he had said was asking too much," he says. "I raised my hands and said I'm not going to be a rubber stamp in this executive. You called him a traitor yourself this morning, so you bear the responsibility."

But Dr Sciberras Trigona's questioning of whether events in the summer of 1998 could have been dealt with in a better way is not limited to the Labour government; he also questions whether the President was empowered to grant the calling of the general election and suggests he might have been swayed in his decision-making.

"There are rules for a motion of no confidence," he says. "It was merely a resolution on a yacht marina, not a bill to enact a law, so I don't believe the President should even have recognised Sant's subjective characterisation of it as a motion of no confidence. His decision showed he had 'some winds blowing' and couldn't resist the opportunity."

Dr Sceberras Trigona believes that the way the European Union is overshadowing so much discussion at a parliamentary level has put politics into a transitory phase.