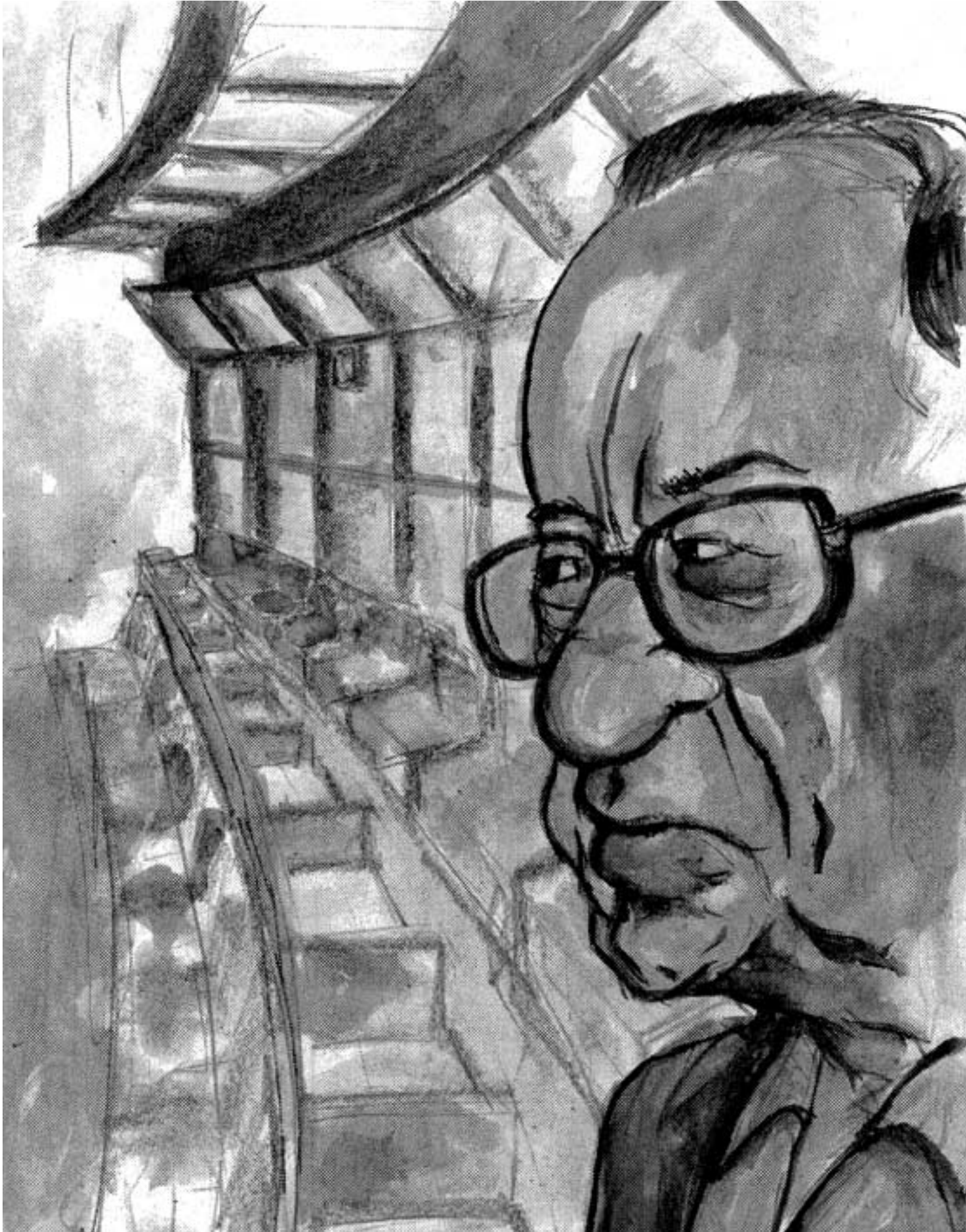


malta **today special report**

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The foreign touch

Libyans and Americans join the fray in this third episode of the chronicles that record the events that brought

down a government. We read how Mintoff exposed the subterfuge and perfidy that was going on - the very same type

he used to indulge in, in his heyday. One important factor that starts to emerge here is the misplaced trust that Mintoff put

in the people of the Three Cities, convinced as he was that they would see through Sant's false accusations.

The Americans according Dom

UNFORTUNATELY the outcome of events showed that Mintoff had placed far too much faith in his people and in their ability to see things as they were, or at any rate as he was describing them. The slogans of lost jobs and lost investments shouted from the proverbial roof tops by Sant overshot people's hearts and lodged directly into their pockets and their greed.

From being a bunch of trusted worthies, they quickly turned on their old leader, and forgetting their glorious days when they had formed the old guard that had heralded a new era of socialism, they turned and pointed their fingers at Mintoff; and with a bitter twist of irony joined Sant in calling their old leader a traitor right in the heart of his old strongholds.

But that day, not only he involved the Libyans, but before him – and this is my greatest disappointment – the Minister of Tourism. This time I think I was very exact, because these days I get so mixed up about who is in command – because as far as I'm concerned the Prime Minister is in charge of everything – that I get confused as to who is minister and who is not. What bothers me mostly is that it was he who involved the Libyans. Because as far as I know the Libyans did him nothing but good. (Interruptions) You do well to lower your head because you have no grudge against the Libyans. (Interruptions) I know that you don't have any and that is why I cannot understand why you brought them into the picture. (Interruptions) Because you said that I gave some land to the Libyans. You should not have said this. (Interruptions) I'm not saying that you said something wrong. Let us not stay

beating about the bush or mixing things which are as different from each other as chalk is from cheese. This is parliamentary, right, Madam Speaker? (Interruptions) I'm not saying that what you said was wrong, but that it was unnecessary. You did not have to say this; you caused offence by saying this. Why? Because the Libyans said: The government gave so much land to others, why did he single us out? That is why they had the right to get offended. (Interruptions) You gave so much land! And you did not give it for free, and not even we gave land to the Libyans for free! If anybody thinks that we gave anything to the Libyans for free, let him go and see what they did with what we gave them, let him see how many found work because of what we gave them, let him see the wealth that was created and then let him say whether we were right to do what we did or not. So I don't know why he involved them in this argument. I was never even criticised by the Nationalist Party because I gave



the Libyans a place where they could build a mosque. Look at how pro-European they are, but I never had this kind of criticism from them! It had to come from you! You introduced them like Pilate in the Creed! You must not have had much to say that day for you to have introduced them! But this was not enough. The Prime Minister, in an effort to find somebody else to help him in this mess, even involved the Americans!

MADAM SPEAKER: Honourable, you only have two minutes left before your forty minutes are up

DOM MINTOFF: These are threats that had I not had the courage to come here and hold out against everyone. Don't forget that all my colleagues voted in his favour and told him . . .

MADAM SPEAKER: The chair is reminding you that in a minute and a half the forty minutes at your disposal to speak will lapse. After that a motion will

have to be passed for you to go on speaking.

DOM MINTOFF: If my time lapses I'll see what I can do to find more time to speak. And if you don't mind, Madam Speaker, if you keep interrupting me, the longer we'll take. As I was saying, I have no idea how the Americans became involved and I swear that I had no idea that they were involved. That day they got my nephew to phone me at five in the afternoon. He has not spoken to me for ages – but these people use every means to get at me, if possible even my family – and I still didn't know at the time that he was the architect of the group that is going to take the contract for the quays. He told me: "How are you, uncle?" and I replied: Don't you know how I am? Sometimes I'm healthy and sometimes less so." Then he told me that he the architect of that group and I replied: "Good! Then do a favour and tell me who is this group." I also told him that I did not know that he was the architect of this

group because the architect Vella had already spoke to me about this matter and had not mentioned that another architect was involved. I told him that I swear I did not know. (Interruptions) That's what I thought. And so do you blame me? I've only been involved in this for a week. You have every right to be their architect. Here everyone has a private practice. Nobody was going to deny you this right.

MADAM SPEAKER: Excuse me, Honourable. Your time has lapsed and you need an extension to continue to be heard.

ALFRED SANT: I propose that the Honourable Mintoff continues to be heard.

MICHAEL BONNICI: I second that.

MADAM SPEAKER: There is a request for the Honourable Mintoff to continue to speak. Those in favour? (Honourable members: Aye) Those against? Agreed. The motion was passed

nem.con.

DOM MINTOFF:

So I told him that Vella had come to and I told him to the head of this group opinion no progress achieved. Meanwhile not know that I was come here and not day's grace. Why I told him: "As you have to do with them that it is not ests to subscription that half of M able to agree to a that if it was possible an agreement with body could agree that their head who runs the Meri don't even know whether he appears holder or not. My was that there were cans and that I was them! On the corner to help them because I wanted them to

Mintoff



F: I thank you. The architect to speak to me tell me who the was, as in my mess was being while I still did as going to not be given one when he asked me as their architect with other archi-ling you to tell in their inter- to an agree-Malta won't be and I told him ible, to make it h whom every- e. He told me as a German it factory. I his name and ars as a share- y least concern re some Ameri- anted to hinder ntrary I wanted ause if possible reach an agree-

ment so that the project would proceed. Why? Because I was convinced that the government had not really done its utmost to win the best terms for the people of Cottonera and proof of this arrived the following day when the minister of tourism came to me and told me that the company that had taken it on itself to manage the quays had accepted to make an amendment in the contract. But not only that, because the company did not even have the chance to meet. In fact if we look at the amendment of the contract that we have in front of us, we find they did not convene the rest of the shareholders to make a verbal minute. They just agreed by word of mouth. How legal this is, I, don't know, but that is your pigeon. (Interruptions) Why all the hurry? The reason why you are in such a hurry and want to accomplish everything on one day, when you have been dragging your feet for years is on your conscience. If we take a look at the minute in the contract which says that the company has accepted, we notice that they only consulted verbally with their colleagues and shouldered the responsibility themselves. This surely is not something that they raised themselves. Otherwise how would the company suddenly have accepted this? Therefore I ask: Had I not had the courage to come here and tell the government that I'm not going to vote in favour, what would have happened? The company would not even have accepted this amendment. Why am I saying this?

First of all I still believe - and when we come to the real motion we'll see just how sincere the other side is - that the American government has nothing to do with this. So much so that that when they went to ask the embassy, the answer was "No comment". Why? Do you think that the embassies are going to interfere or pressurise us into doing something or not? God forbid we came to this! Do the embassies decide where we place investments? Their government commands - and how! - but as long as it wants to remain a friend of Israel they are never going to open the taps here, except for a drop here and there. This is like when they lied and said that in our time we never received American aid. This is not true. This was a fascist lie because during our time I kept the army equipped with American hardware and nothing cheap. So it is not true that nothing came from America; what did come was sent directly from the government. These are unbelievable stupidities. And so how does he reach this conclusion and says in front of the people of Cottonera - naturally, he was not referring to the Nationalists as not wanting American investment, because nobody ever

accused them that they did not want American investment, but he was referring to me, he was accusing me - That I hate the Americans so much that I do not even want their money in Malta? Why doesn't Uncle Sam send over LM1 billion and we distribute it door to door! Why not! Just as long as he does not ask us to give him Malta for free. Let's clarify this once and for all. Who involved the American government in this did so because he is not capable of fighting alone and wanted someone to help him. Until now, he has always committed the party before bothering to ask it and the party never said no because it didn't want new elections. The party knows that it can continue to be in government as long as there is agreement about what has to be done from now to the next election, rather than just doing things and saying that they are the programme.

Why did all this come about? Because this prime minister is committed over several affairs. Yesterday he mentioned that he has the Grand Masters project. All I know is that when he spoke to others about this, he said that this is to be a sort of large embassy. What is the meaning of this? Who would give the whole of Fort Saint Angelo as an embassy? And he said that everything is ready! So are we going to come back here to this Parliament and say that we are going to give the Grand Masters "This, this and this" without first ... This is where my responsibility is, irrespective of his having gone there to instigate the people against me. He thought that the people were going to believe him rather than me. Now we'll soon see who they'll believe! (Interruptions) I am still in the party; give me the party equipment so that I may go and talk to them. But even in the other election, had I not insisted that we speak in the district, you would not have let me. So let us not mince words. I came here to expose falsity. If I wanted to topple the government I have the right to do so and he is not going to deny me my right. And he would be committing a breach of privilege if he goes to Birgu and calls me traitor and a lot of other things to scare me. You don't know how many people phoned me up crying at home because they believed that I wanted to topple the government. Why should they expect that the party leader is going lie against me? Who in the world would imagine this? How they cried, and they are crying to this minute because they have not heard me yet. But how could they hear me when suddenly everything was immobilised without giving me a chance do anything? So this American issue was another lie. We come now to the Libyans.

Feeling the impending defeat



When the Labour Party general conference was discussing whether to head for an early election in the summer of 1998 Dr MICHAEL FALZON stood up and expressed his opposition to such a move. The Labour Party's electoral guru had shocked delegates by his statement even though he stressed that he would abide by any decision taken by the party. Here we reproduce part of an interview Dr Falzon gave **MaltaToday** in October 2001, in which he refers to the incidents that occurred in 1998.

I hark back to the turbulent summer of 1998 when the Labour Party was facing Dom Mintoff's wrath. In the infamous MLP general conference that decided whether to go to an early election or not, Dr Falzon was one of the very few people who spoke against holding an early election.

"I was outright against an early election," he says adding that he had a very bad feeling of what was to come.

"The general feeling was not right. I knew we were going to lose. However, during the general conference I had explicitly stated that I will abide by any decision taken by the party delegates."

But what were the reasons for Labour's hammering defeat at the polls?

Dr Falzon attributes the loss to two main reasons. "Firstly, as a government we had only been in office for 18 months, which is hardly enough time to settle down and get working. Secondly, the little time we were in government was a very difficult time. We had to contend with the Mintoff and Lino Spiteri factors, the dire economic situation and other problems. People's

expectations were not fulfilled."

I ask Dr Falzon whether by 'people' he means Labourites expecting 'their' government to 'take care' of them.

"There were people of all walks of life who had high expectations of Labour and because of the way things turned out lost their hope. But there were also Labourites who had a justifiable right to something and little was done to rectify the injustice they suffered."

And Mintoff?

Dr Falzon believes that Mintoff was not the sole reason for the electoral defeat. "Mintoff might have influenced a couple of hundred of votes but the swing was determined by other factors."

I ask Dr Falzon whether the Labour Party could have found an alternative solution to the 'Mintoff' problem. Despite having opposed an early election he does not want to express his judgement on the decisions taken at the time.

"It would be unfair of me to judge the decision taken at the time because I was not in the prime minister's shoes," Dr Falzon reiterates.