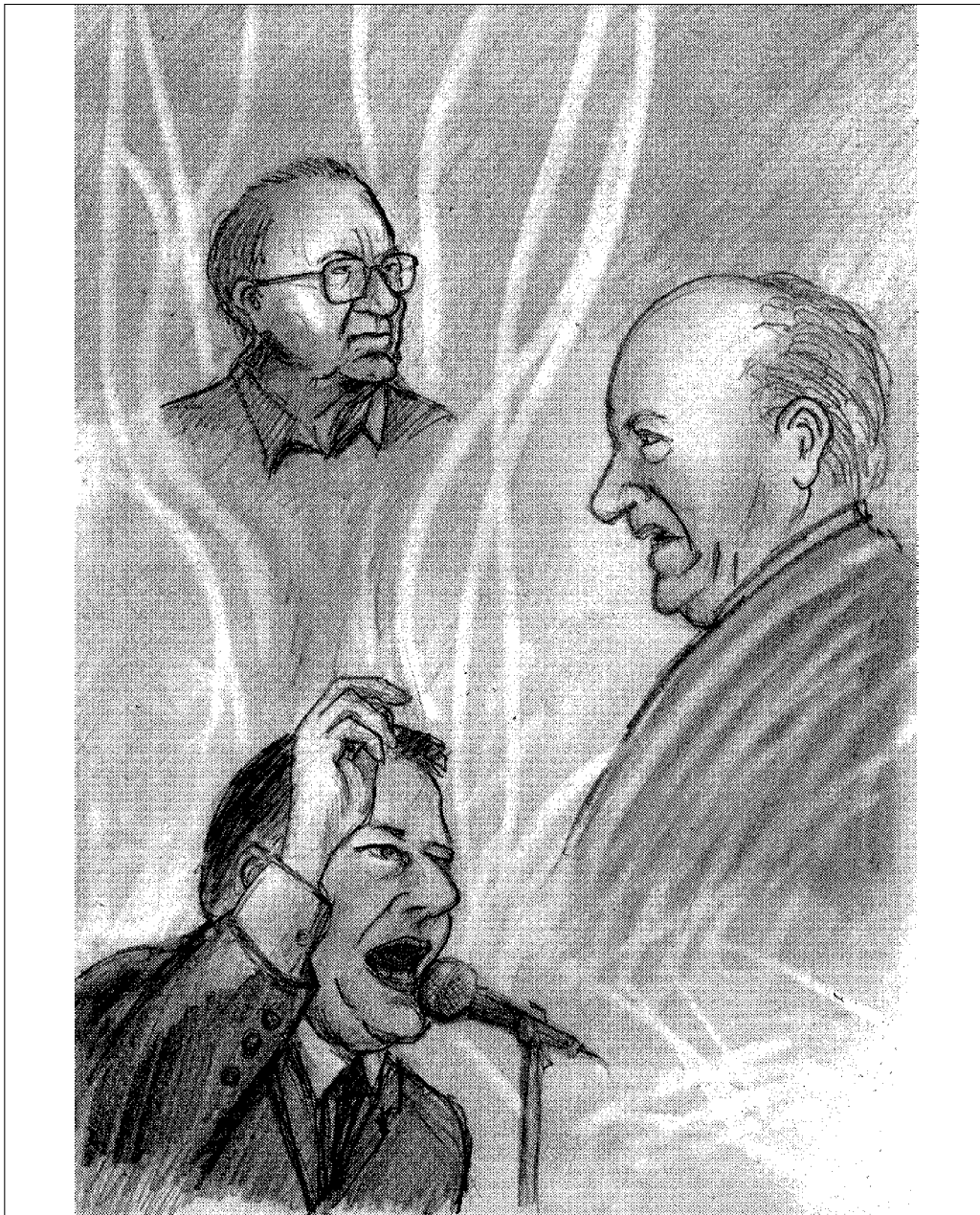


In the defence of Dom Mintoff



This excerpt breaks from the previous one and moves forward to a later part of the same speech. Professor de Marco is defending Malta against the tide of politically irrational behaviour and decisions taken on the crest of high emotion. He makes it clear that nobody has the right to call his old political foe a traitor, for that, according to him, is one thing that he definitely is not.

DE MARCO: "I can have no part in the internal political battles of the Labour Party and I do not have the right to be a part of them; those are the problems of the Labour Party, as every other party occasionally has. However, I have found myself being called a traitor of Malta and that I am in cahoots with Mintoff and that I am causing damage; that I have been running Malta since November of last year and that I collaborated with Mintoff and that we went to Libya together. I never went to Libya. In other words without wanting to I have found myself included in this great polemic. Now I am not a person who likes polemics. I am a person who believes in my principles - principles which I have shared openly - and a person who is flexible in the application of those principles, because if you are not flexible in the application of principles you will cause great harm. Now, it is good to observe and follow principles but one cannot be so obstinate that one is not flexible in their application. You cannot be so obstinate that because you have one point of view you therefore believe that anyone who does not agree with you is a traitor to the country. Why should we have reached such a state of affairs on a simple contract like this? We should never have reached a stage where the government is called into question.

As I have already said Mr President, I am not from Cottonera, but I am sure that the Honourable Mintoff identifies with its history and is part of Cottonera. So how can we say that he is a traitor? One could say that one does not agree with him and one might tell him that he should not vote against simply because he does not agree with a particular contract. I understand this kind of criticism but I do not think that it was reasonable to say Malta first and before everything because the Honourable Mintoff betrayed this call that attracted such a great following. Neither do I believe that simply because one does not agree with something therefore one should resign. Why are we making such a mountain out of a molehill? We certainly have the right to be angry and God know show many times I was angry because I felt that that I was not given my dues; maybe they were right and maybe I was right but this is not a question of who is right and who is wrong. This is a question of how we would like to develop. This is what I am trying to say, Mr President. As I have already said, we

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have been debating this for too long.

To start with we had the first part of the debate, so to speak, and the vote was rejected. The following day the Prime Minister went to Birgu and this, in my opinion, was a big mistake. I have a great respect for the Prime Minister and he knows this and I also respect his artificial calm. I use the word artificial because I think the Honourable Alfred Sant is only superficially calm, but effectively has an internal volcano. I admire his capacity for self-control in the face of suffering - because when you govern, you often suffer - and in the face of affairs which he considers to be hostile towards him. However, I ask the Prime Minister, does he really think that the best way of attracting investment to one's country is by holding a belligerent press conference in Birgu, full of coarse shouting that is very much not in keeping with his character? Does anyone think that this is the way to attract foreign investment to Malta? I should think that this is the best way of putting off investors.

Mr President, I listen to all the radio stations but these last few days I have paid particular attention to Super One. Why all these triumphant anthems as though we are going into battle, in the spirit of La Marseillaise? Why incite the women, and everybody for that matter to leave their homes and converge on the spot, supposedly to talk about whether Italy will defeat The Cameroon or vice versa but in reality to criticise Mintoff? What kind of integrity is this? (Hon. members: Hear, hear) There were telephone calls upon telephone calls saying that the Honourable Mintoff has lost his mind and others implying the contrary.

Now Mr President, I am perhaps among those who have most criticised the Honourable Mintoff and

my criticism has been harsh. But then in other things I have certain close ties with him. However, can anybody think - and these are journalists who certainly sympathise with the Labour Party and who have great loyalty to Prime Minister Sant - however, in spite of all the sympathy and loyalty in the world, one can never exceed the limits of what is good. The Honourable Tonio Borg is reminding me that there is something called 'excess of legitimate defence' and I think that that war-cry to converge on Birgu day after day with the excuse of discussing the victories and defeats of football teams is indeed a case of excess of legitimate defence. This does not show integrity. Our country deserves much more than this.

As I was saying, I know many of these journalists personally, and I know that they are clever and they bring integrity to their work. However, God forbid that they lose their head as Prime Minister Sant has done. This has been most unfortunate as it was unfortunate that he continued in this vein even in the Bormla meeting. Did he do any good? We can say that it did good to the Nationalist Party, because without wanting to, a split in one party always strengthens the other party. This is a logical conclusion, however even though the Nationalist Party gained, did the country gain? Did democracy in our country gain? This is what I am trying to say.

Mr President we have a great responsibility in this country. Everyone has his point of view, everyone has his style and everyone has his method, but in certain things one may not cross the demarcation line. For example, how can one first get the opposition to agree with one and use it as a negotiating tool while simultaneously depict it the opposition as a traitor to Cottonera? Why should this give rise also to public lynching? I repeat, I admired the Honourable Mintoff; I admired his stamina and his resistance. Perhaps another of a lesser political level and a lesser political stamina would not have been capable of resisting the pressure that was put upon him hour after hour, day after day and speech after speech. Now I am not a Labourite. I am a Nationalist, but even I who have had so many political altercations with the Honourable Mintoff, have never had a personal altercation. On the contrary, our personal relationship has always been of the

best. I say that one may not treat a person who has been a Representative of this country for more than fifty years and who was for so many years a prime minister of Malta in this way. One can say many things to a crowd, but to tell the crowd that the Honourable Mintoff is a traitor is unacceptable. (Hon. members: Hear, hear) In a certain sense, this claim hurt us too. (inter-rptions) Allow me to continue. I am not making an apologia for anyone. The Honourable Mintoff does not need Guido de Marco to defend him. The Honourable Mintoff spoke for seven hours and we all heard him. There were those who agreed with him, and those who did not; there were those who agreed with his method and those who did not. However he does not need me to defend him, and I am not defending him. The Honourable Mintoff can defend himself in his own able manner. In other words, my aim is not to defend him but to defend Common Sense as a quality in this country and as a quality in the institution of Parliament. Therefore, Mr President, what am I saying?

We came to this Parliament to debate a question which unfortunately has become a question of national crisis. The Prime Minister has said that if the Honourable Mintoff does not resign, or if he or anybody else votes against or abstains, he will consider this a vote of no confidence in him. Now we, as the opposition, must perforce vote against, because we certainly have no faith in this government. Even if he obtains the best contract imaginable, if he presents it as a vote of confidence in the government, as is the budget, we must perforce vote against. Was this wise? Is this the way we want democracy in Malta to progress?

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A selected transcript of the 1998 summer sitting will continue next week