

# The escape and the frame up

The case of Louis Bartolo and Anthony Mifsud

**After being physically and psychologically abused by functionaries of the state, this hapless man was kept in jail for three years for a crime he did not commit. When he was eventually declared innocent by the court and freed, he was thwarted from receiving even one cent in compensation for the atrocities he had to endure**

The story of Anthony Mifsud starts with the misfortunes of another, equally well-known character; Louis Bartolo. The misfortunes of the late Bartolo, a Nationalist activist, started to unfold when one day, a member of the brood of thugs that hung about the socialist party, harassed Bartolo's wife and threatened to kill him. Bartolo acted in self defence and shot John Bondin, also known as il-Fusellu dead. He was arrested and incarcerated pending a trial. However, Louis Bartolo managed to escape from prison. He accomplished this feat because of the large amount of money that was allegedly handed to the director of prisons, Ronnie Theuma, by the Abu Nidal group. This group was primarily interested in seeing one of their assassins escape from prison after he had botched up an assignment by killing the wrong Arab in Gzira.

Bartolo mocked up the necessary keys and escaped from prison along with Habib, using his keys to get out, together with a little help from Theuma, in the shape of his cell door being left unlocked one night. Separating after their escape, Bartolo continued to correspond with Habib until he eventually lost contact.

Mr Bartolo held that a letter exists, proving that the director of the prisons was expected to help in their escape for a given sum of money. About Lm17,000 was passed on to the director, according to Bartolo; Lm12000 for costs and another Lm5000 for passing parcels to Bartolo in prison. For the escape to be successful, Theuma was constrained to involve two other senior wardens.

Meanwhile back in Malta the powers that be had to find a scapegoat on which to blame the whole affair.

Anthony Mifsud had joined the Dejma and was working at the prison. After fourteen months he was due to become a policeman. He couldn't wait for this dream to become reality. Meanwhile, his duty at the prison was to open up the cell doors and then return the keys to the maggur.

One morning he was told to drop everything and go to the prison because there had been an escape. "I was planning to go to the tailor that morning." When he arrived, he was put into a car and taken to a lock-up. He was moved from room to room until he was put in an office where there were four police officers. Mr Mifsud recognised three of them. "There were Superintendents Joseph Psaila and Carmel Bonello, a CID sergeant and an inspector whose name I did not know." The officers started to physically attack Mr Mifsud, raining blows on his arms and chest. "Where is Bartolo?" they screamed at him.

When Bartolo got to know about what had happened to Mifsud, he wrote to his mother, confirming that her son had nothing to do with his escape. He also wrote to all the authorities telling them that Anthony Mifsud was completely innocent. Bartolo meandered around for a while and eventually wound up in Britain, where he found employment working with a security firm. He worked there for five years under the assumed name of Dennis.

When the Nationalists were returned to power in 1987, Bartolo gave himself up, hoping to get a fair trial. Back in Malta, he was called to attend an on-site inquiry at the prisons. During the inquiry, he wanted to show where he had hidden the hand-made saw in his cell but Theuma, the director of the prisons took the



Anthony Mifsud had to endure torture and humiliation at the Police Depot

group into another room. This made Bartolo furious and he began to shout at Theuma. When they did get to his old cell, they retrieved the saw, together with a diary that the prisoner had kept. When Bartolo got to know about how Theuma had framed Mifsud, he used to phone him every day. When Theuma changed his number, Bartolo discovered the new unlisted one and continued to phone him. His wife used to worry that the authorities would trace him down, but Bartolo was careful and used to mail his letters to other countries,

from where they would then be posted again. To make it seem that he actually was in the countries from where the letters were sent, he used to leave fingerprints and strands of his hair in the envelopes. Mr Bartolo always maintained that he could not understand why Mr Theuma was allowed to get away with his crime. He continued to protest while he remained alive and even went so far as to chain himself to Castille and to the outside of Theuma's residence.

Mr Bartolo once observed that there were two kinds of

justice; one for the mighty and one for the ordinary man. Right up to his demise, Bartolo remained concerned and worried about what Mifsud had had to go through on account of him. "Why can't his lawyer take his case up to the European Court of Justice?" he once asked. "Is it a question of money? Is justice only possible if you have money?"

The questions go unanswered and till this very day Anthony Mifsud has only a court sentence in his favour and nothing else to contend with.

**Continues next week**