

# Collateral Damage

The case of Louis Bartolo and Anthony Mifsud

**When Louis Bartolo died his crusade to exculpate Anthony Mifsud remained unfinished. Bartolo had achieved fame and notoriety by ending the reign of terror of king of thugs, *Il-Fusellu*. Bartolo shot him dead in a showdown outside Bartolo's St Julians' home. *Il-Fusellu* was Labour. Bartolo was Nationalist.**

JAILED AWAITING trial, Bartolo escaped returning to Malta, trial and acquittal on grounds of self-defence years later. Anthony Mifsud was caught up in a tangle of interests and remains the only real victim. Foiled an oppressive government and a corrupt regime needed someone to blame. Blaming Mifsud was easy. Bartolo knew that Mifsud was innocent. He made it his life's work to set the record straight.

Reel back to the day when Bartolo and fellow prisoner Habib broke out of Corradino prisons where Mifsud worked as a prison warden. Mifsud was summoned in haste to his place of work. On arrival at Corradino he found his role suddenly inverted. He was made to get into a police car and driven to a lock-up. There he was moved from room to room until he was pushed into an office in which 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."

Mifsud was physically attacked. Blows rained down on his arms and chest.

"Where's Bartolo?" his police assailants screamed. They were joined by another Police Inspector who remained in the room while the others continued to pound Mifsud.

When they saw fit they moved their prisoner again, taking him into a room which had a table in it. On the table lay a shotgun and a Webley revolver. Superintendent Bonello took hold of the shotgun and pulled the trigger repeatedly. Then he put it down and picked up the pistol. They placed a chair in the middle of the room and made Mifsud sit on it.

"I felt the cold muzzle of the gun on my neck and someone counting six, five, four,

three, two, one and then the click of a trigger. Then they kicked the chair and I fell over."

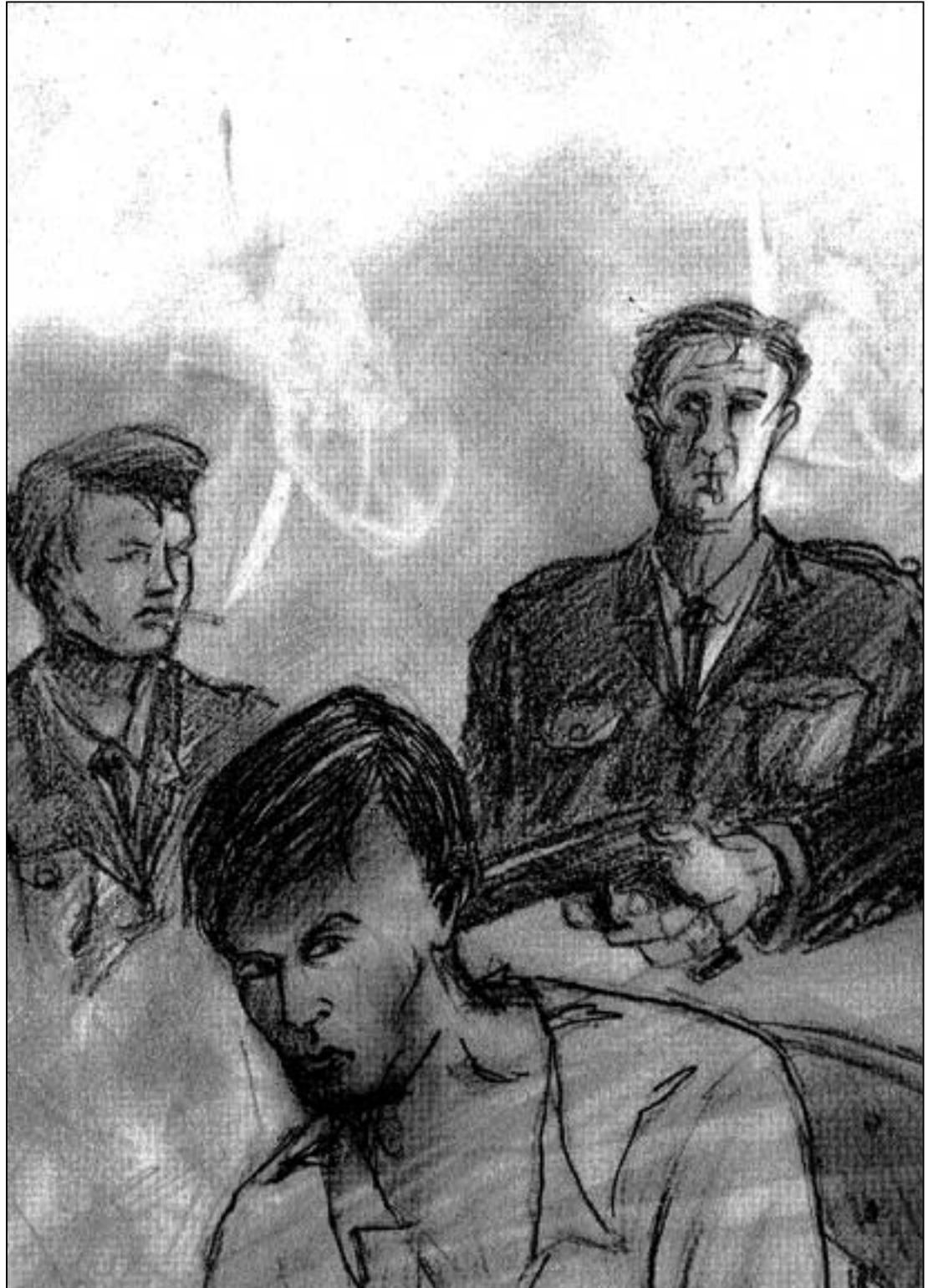
It was Superintendent Psaila's turn to go into action next. Taking up a whip he began to flog his victim, hitting him again and again. Mifsud snatched it from his hand. He was assaulted by all the officers at once and beaten into unconsciousness.

He woke in the lockup next morning vomiting blood. A policeman walked in and took his police hat, belt and whistle. His shirt had been ripped to shreds and the police ID number had been pulled off.

The police net had been spread wide. John Hughes found himself in a cell with Mifsud. Hughes' girlfriend was one of the escapees' daughter. "Look what they have done to me," Mifsud told him still in a daze from the beating. He was in great pain. He asked for a doctor. He was told to wait.

The cell door was thrown open and a guard and a plainclothes policeman took him into an office. Assistant Commissioner of Police Mifsud Tommasi was there talking on the radio and saying that the airport and customs should be closed. Mifsud explained to the AC that he had had nothing to do with the escape. Mifsud Tommasi didn't believe him; "If you are not going to talk I'll either \*\*\*\*\* or else I'll send you to \*\*\*\*\*"

Mr Mifsud was returned to his cell. The following day he was taken back to the office. He found Psaila and Bonello waiting for him. Bonello was fidgeting with a big knife, while Psaila sat at a typewriter. "Tell us how you helped him escape," Psaila told him. Bonello began to hit him on the head while stabbing the table with the knife. "I'll \*\*\*\*\* you, send you to \*\*\*\*\* or send you to prison" he threatened.



Superintendent Bonello took hold of the shotgun and pulled the trigger repeatedly

Mifsud was petrified. He was told that he had received Lm2000 for opening Bartolo's cell door. He was told to sign a statement admitting to this. "If you don't sign," Psaila said, "you'll be in trouble." Driven by fear, Anthony Mifsud signed the confession. He was taken to his flat to change his clothing. When Mifsud's Labrador met them at the door, the accompanying revolver-wielding sergeant threatened to kill him if he bit him. The bloodied clothes that he was wearing were taken away from him and never seen again.

In the afternoon Mifsud was taken to court. No lawyer defended him. He was advised by the officers who

had beaten him up to plead not guilty. After appearing in court he was taken to Kordin prison where he was met by Chief Mulvaney. Mulvaney informed Mifsud that if he said he had not done it he would be in for another beating. Ronald Theuma, the prison director told Mifsud, "I know that you were an accomplice to Louis Bartolo. I would not have asked for Lm2000, but for Lm100,000. Now you have a freshly painted cell waiting for you." He repeatedly protested his innocence with Major Savona and with Sergeant Valletta, in spite of having been told not to by the director

Mifsud spent three years in prison. He was acquitted

after a trial by jury in 1985. Mifsud has found it very difficult to pick up the threads of his life again. He was unemployed for the first two years after being released from prison. Anthony Mifsud had indeed been freed but his life had been wrecked by a false charge and three years' imprisonment. Well over a decade after the end of his prison ordeal Mifsud has not had a cent in compensation. Thanks to obscene legal nit-picking by government he has not even recovered the pay lost while he languished in prison awaiting trial on the trumped up charge.

The country has moved on leaving Mifsud a wreck, collateral damage of its political convulsions, forgetting him.

**Continues next week**