

Anthony Mifsud: The scapegoat who was beaten and tortured

IN 1982 a man still in his early twenties was savagely dragged away from his parents' home at gunpoint by police officers and taken to the depot for interrogation.

The man, Anthony Mifsud, worked as a prison guard and was still relatively new to the job. But the escape from Corradino prisons, of a man awaiting trial for the murder of a Labour Party thug, was too sensitive an issue and the police, under immense pressure from the government of the day, had to blame someone for the escape.

Anthony Mifsud was the ideal candidate for this senseless frame up. He was young and impressionable with no particular political connections. Anthony was a nobody, who could be blamed for the escape.

Anthony Mifsud was taken to the depot where he was kept for almost five days. He was questioned, tortured, beaten and coerced into signing a statement admitting his role in the escape of Louis Bartolo and Palestinian terrorist Habib. On 15 June 1982 Anthony Mifsud was charged in front of the Magistrates' Court.

It was nothing less than a big show of force by the police. Anthony recalls: "The police made a whole scene. I was escorted to court with a security complement that would make any foreign dignitary blush. I was made out to be a major criminal."

Anthony was the scapegoat. He was subsequently imprisoned for three whole years until his trial came up. His former place of work had become his 'home'.

Eventually Anthony was acquitted of all charges brought against him. The court declared him a free man and decreed that the young former prison guard was the victim of a frame up. The Court also acknowledged that Anthony Mifsud's own admission that he had helped Bartolo and Habib escape was nothing more than an admission forced upon him by police officers.

Ironically, the very same man who caused Anthony all this trouble – Louis Bartolo – had long been campaigning about the man's innocence. From his hideout in England, Louis Bartolo could not bear to watch an innocent man being blamed for something

he did not do. Writing numerous letters to various high profile individuals, Louis Bartolo reiterated that Anthony was innocent and that the real culprit was the Prison Director Ronnie Theuma.

But with a clear intention in mind, the police would not take heed of Bartolo's remarks. They wanted a scapegoat at all costs. It was brutal, dirty and shameful.

Anthony suffered both physical and psychological violence and the traumatic experience still haunts him to this very day.

"I still see a doctor regularly because of my anxious state, which is a direct result of the experience I went through," Anthony explains.

But Anthony's ordeal did not end with the court judgement, which freed him. Till this very day, 20 years after he was savagely dragged from his home, Anthony has not received one cent in compensation for the suffering and humiliation he endured at the hands of functionaries of the State.

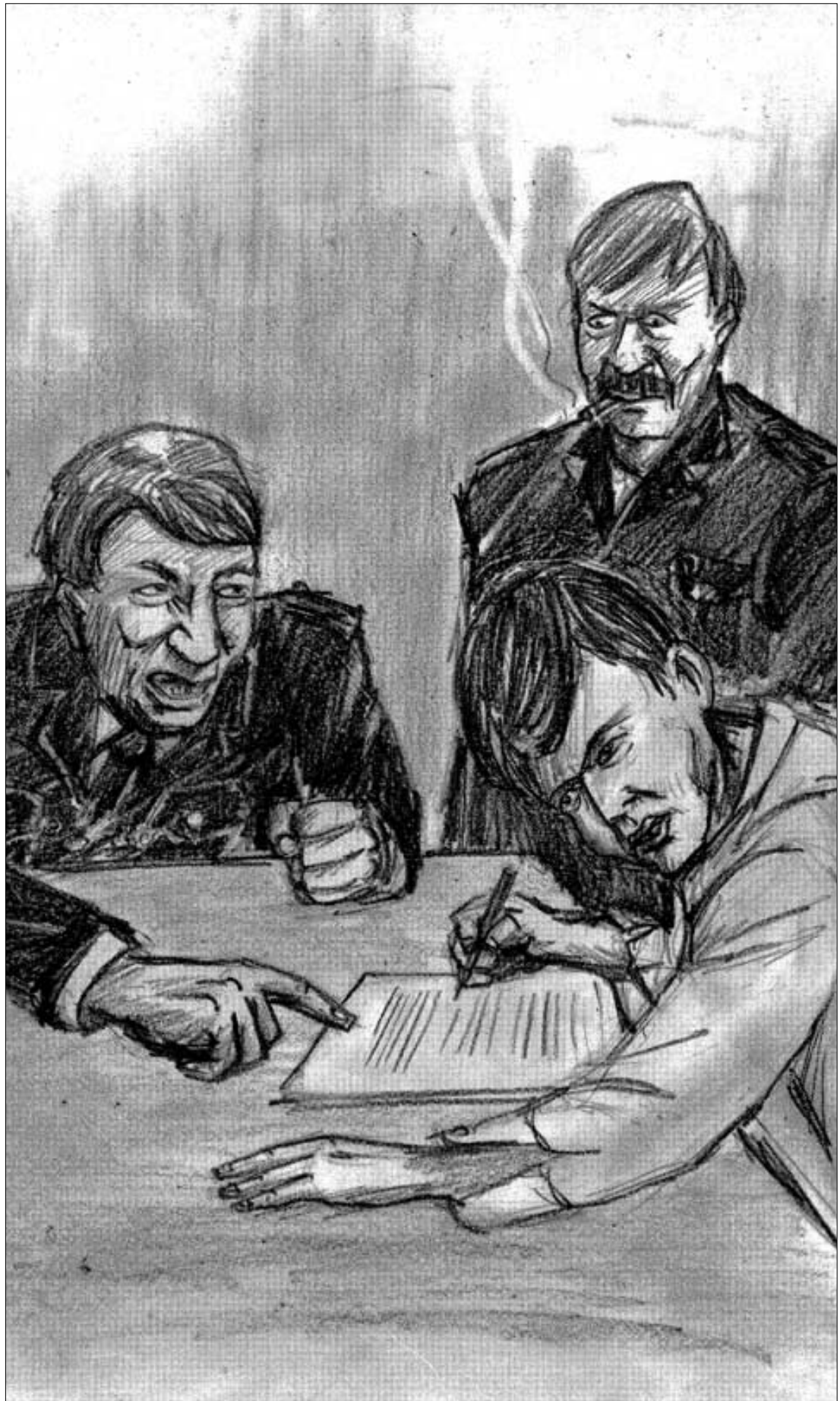
His legal battle to take what is his by right endures but Anthony cannot fail to feel bitter about the situation. "I am disappointed because justice was not done in my regard. I lost my job, I cannot work to this very day because of my mental state, I have to seek medical help constantly because of what happened and I was humiliated in front of all Malta," he argues.

Justifying his claim for compensation Anthony remarks: "None of those who tortured me at the time, today come with me to pay my doctor's bill even though I have to seek medical attention because of them."

The man is baffled with the way things developed. "For the authorities it is as if I did not exist and that my case never happened. They stripped me of my uniform and made me suffer."

Anthony argues that the Attorney General has a blatant conflict of interest when deciding on the amount of compensation due "How can a person, who formed part of the legal team that wanted to send me to prison, now approve of compensation."

The AG is Justice Minister Austin Gatt's anchor according to Anthony. "Austin Gatt had publicly promised me on television that he would see



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to it that I get every cent in compensation. But after that time nothing else happened because the Attorney General simply refused to acknowledge the damage I sustained. The AG just uses petty excuses to justify his position," Anthony adds.

He angers at the prospect that the culprits are free men enjoying the fruits of their

crimes. "I have instituted a court case against three police officers, who were responsible for the beatings I got at the depot in 1982. They are former Police Commissioner Lawrence Pullicino, former Assistant Commissioner Psaila and Inspector Bonello"

The case slowly drags on in the courts.

Meanwhile, Anthony Mifsud still waits for his compensation from government. "I want what is mine by right. The situation is unfair," he reiterated for the umpteenth time. And coming from a man who still suffers the consequences of the trauma he was subjected to 20 years ago, such a statement is not amusing at all.