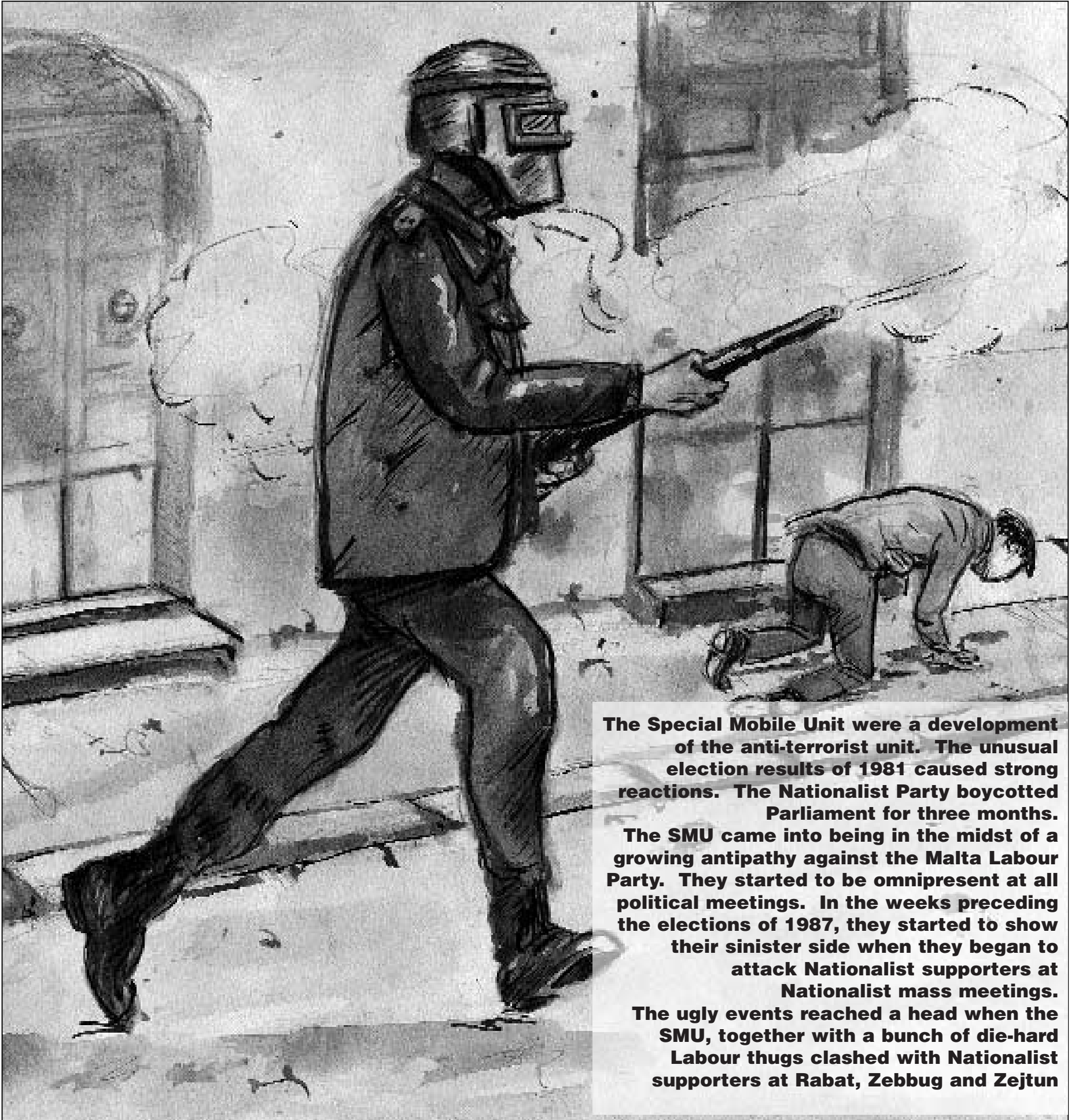




DAYS OF WOE



The Special Mobile Unit were a development of the anti-terrorist unit. The unusual election results of 1981 caused strong reactions. The Nationalist Party boycotted Parliament for three months. The SMU came into being in the midst of a growing antipathy against the Malta Labour Party. They started to be omnipresent at all political meetings. In the weeks preceding the elections of 1987, they started to show their sinister side when they began to attack Nationalist supporters at Nationalist mass meetings. The ugly events reached a head when the SMU, together with a bunch of die-hard Labour thugs clashed with Nationalist supporters at Rabat, Zebbug and Zejtun

This week's Special Report ends its look at Mario Pavia who was hit by a bullet during a political gathering in Rabat. It also briefly examines the

salient points of the trial of SMU Sergeant Joseph John Grech who was falsely accused of the attempted murder of Joseph Cassar, John Vella and

Mario Pavia. Finally the incidents at Zebbug are looked at, which happened in the morning of the same day as the Rabat incidents.

Continued from page 9



When Mario Pavia was hit by a bullet, he was injured in the chest. He sustained greivous injuries to his lungs, his diaphragm, to his liver and also to his vena cava. In spite of his injuries Psaila managed to run back towards the Nationalist Party Club, only to find the door closed. He had no option but to run on.

The false accusation against Joseph John Grech stated that he wilfully shot at Pavia when he was part of a small group of SMU members who had become separated from their detachment and who had continued to advance towards the crowds.

In fact when Pavia was hit there were about ten SMU members on the parvis from where the shot was thought to have come. Pavia later said that he recognised his would-be assassin because his face was not covered up.

Pavia fell on the steps and lay on the ground. Raymond Kelly went to Pavia's aid. "They've hit me, they've hit me ... I'm going to die" Pavia told him. It was only timely intervention of delicate surgical procedures that saved Mario Pavia's life.

Later, in court the surgeon who operated on Pavia later testified that it was probable that the shot that hit Pavia had travelled down-

been standing. Mr Gatt agreed with Mr Zammit about the entry and exit wounds, but said that they could have been sustained by Pavia when he was bending down. The investigations also revealed that Pavia had confided in a friend of his that he had lied when he had said that he had recognised Grech and that he had subsequently found out that Grech had children and wanted to drop all charges against him. He had lied in order to claim compensation money. The opinion of the ballistics experts also contradicted what Mr Zammit had said about the likelihood of Pavia being shot at from close quarters. Then Brigadier Maurice Calleja and Police Sergeant Guido Agius said that the bullet holes marked in the arch way under which Pavia had been standing indicated that he had been shot from very close quarters.

Mr Justice Patrick Vella found Police Sergeant Joseph John Vella not guilty of attempting to kill three Nationalist Party supporters. He was also cleared of slightly injuring other Nationalist Party supporters. The case took thirteen years to reach its conclusion and ended with a certain amount of acrimony between then Deputy Attorney General Dr Anthony Barbara and Defence lawyer Dr Herrera about some criticism that Dr Herrera had

The stage for trouble was set when Labour supporters from Zejtun, returning in their trucks from a political activity in Mgarr decided to pass through Zebbug."

candidates from Zebbug, in readiness for the mass meeting that was to happen later on in Rabat.

When the paths of the two factions crossed all hell broke loose with people firing at other people. The houses of two families were attacked by the Labour Party supporters. One of them was the house of Nationalist Party candidate Michael Bonnici, who, together with his family had to escape from the wrath of the Labour thugs.

Michael Bonnici said that the Labour supporters began to besiege his residence, throwing bottles and stones at it. Bonnici says that he saw people shooting in the direction of his house from a field opposite.

Rabat had come to an end, Michael Bonnici saw the police remove all traces of the incident that had happened in front of his residence. They actually swept the road and dumped what they had swept into vans. According to Bonnici, the police were assisted in this work by civilians.

A group of youths that were making their way back to Zebbug from Rabat were stopped by members of the SMU when they reached Zebbug. The SMU personnel had their faces covered with their visors and pointed their Special Purpose shot guns and told them to get out of the car. They opened the door and made the youths get out. They made one of them lie face down on the ground while

THEY'VE HIT ME, THEY'VE HIT ME... I'M GOING TO DIE

wards towards him from a height. While Mr Anthony Zammit did not rule out that the shot could have been fired from as high as one storey, in his opinion it was not possible that the shot was fired horizontally towards Pavia. The surgeon also went on to say that due to the nature of the wounds Pavia had most probably not been shot from close range. However another surgeon, Mr Dennis Gatt did not exclude the possibility that Mario Pavia might have been shot from the same plane where he had

levelled at Mr Justice Valenzia's way of doing things.

Besides what happened in Rabat, the 5 April 1987 saw other ugly the incident at Zebbug.



The stage for trouble was set when Labour supporters from Zejtun, returning in their trucks from a political activity in Mgarr decided to pass through Zebbug. It happened that at the time Nationalist supporters were gathering outside the houses of Nationalist

The thugs tried to enter Mr Bonnici's house through the front door and he had to tell his family to escape via the back garden. The house next door was ransacked by the Labour supporters.

Supporters from both sides of the great divide were injured by firearm discharges. The total of injured persons came to about 23 people. The SMU were called on the scene and fired gas canisters into one of the house belonging to Nationalist Party supporters.

Later on, after the trouble in

they searched the others. One of them had a key chain of Nationalist deputy Pierre Muscat. In a low voice he told its owner to keep it hidden. The SMU came across a copy of the *L-Orizzont* in the car and released the youths

One of the youths said that he saw a whole confusion. He saw people running with shotguns in their hands. Their car was surrounded by Labour supporters, some of whom had covered their faces while others were armed with pistols.