

# WHITE WEDDING, OR RED?



The dark ages from which Malta was still emerging cannot be better depicted than by describing the events that unfolded in Zejtun on the 2 of June 1989. The events unfolded around a wedding ceremony that was scheduled to take

place inside Zejtun's parish church. The wedding was of Rose Abdilla, daughter of Pawlu Abdilla, president of the Sectional Committee of the Nationalist Party Club of Zejtun. The stage was set for trouble

when it was 'leaked' by the Orizzont that there would be a heavy police presence outside the church due to the fact that Dr Fenech Adami and Dr De Marco were going to be present as the witnesses of the ceremony.





THE TROUBLE started when a small group of people from Zejtun laid in wait for the betrothed to enter the square on their way to the church. The minute they entered the square, they were attacked by the crowd. The bride, in particular, was pelted with animal skins. As they rode into the square in a carriage, they were all the more vulnerable and open to attack by the vicious crowd. The wedding had received advance publicity at the hands of the *Orrizont*, which on the day before had announced the wedding and the fact that there would be a heavy police presence since the Prime Minister was going to be attending the function.

Things got really out of hand, however, when Prime Minister Dr Eddie Fenech Adami and the then Deputy Prime Minister Guido de Marco arrived on the scene. They were the witnesses of the wedding. They were violently set upon by the crowd, who besides throwing things at them even shot

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at the Prime Minister and his Deputy. The bullets shot at the two politicians found their mark in the bodies of Special Assignment Group personnel who had stepped forward to protect them. The police shot tear gas into the crowd in an effort to disperse it, but to no avail.

Several police vehicles and officers were damaged or injured during these incidents. That day at the Headquarters of the SAG only half the compliment was present. The other half were on rest leave. Those who were on leave heard the news and rushed to the SAG headquarters at Ta' Kandia to join their colleagues before they left for Zejtun.

When they arrived at Zejtun, they stopped outside the police station to get briefed as to the situation. Then, after having joined their comrades from the other detachment, they crossed the road. There were not enough bullet proof vests to go round as the SAG were simply using ex-SMU equipment. A few of the policemen had already been injured. Some of them made their way up to the roof of the oratory to get a better view of what was happening in the square below.

They found themselves standing above Labour supporters who started to shoot at the lights in the square and in the general direction that leads behind the church. Gunshots were also heard being fired by Socialist thugs from various rooftops and from other points in and around the square. The Special Assignment Group responded to the shoots by firing tear gas canisters.



In spite of the socialist assault, the wedding ceremony proceeded inside the church. After its conclusion, the couple and their guests were escorted out of the church. As Dr Fenech Adami and Dr De Marco were making their way to their cars, shots were fired in their direction. One policeman, Joe Vassallo was hit and wounded

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and was immediately taken to hospital by ambulance where he was found to be in a critical state.

Shots were fired at the police SAG from the direction of the Malta Labour Party Club. More police, among them two SAG personnel, were hit as they tried to disperse the crowds that were trying to force their way into the church.

A police Land Rover was overturned by the angry crowd. Two other cars, belonging to Nationalist people were attacked and one of them, the property of Nationalist MP Dr Joe Psaila, was set on fire. The SAG gave vent to their fury at being sitting ducks by breaking up a car that was parked near the church.



Speaking after the incident, then Deputy Prime Minister Guido De Marco said that "The people will not tolerate the excesses of those violent, criminal elements trying to stir up trouble through use of arms. All Malta stands firm in its condemnation for the violent clique which ruthlessly disrupted a marriage taking place at Zejtun and fired on members of the police corps. Dr De Marco recounted how he was met by a restless mob when he arrived at Zejtun with Dr Fenech Adami to officiate as a witnesses to the wedding which was being held there. "The people of Malta should condemn such acts especially as these policemen did their

best to ensure public order. Everyone must understand that public order must be guaranteed throughout the land and nowhere must violent cliques be allowed to congregate and use force to do as they please," De Marco said on in a televised address to the nation.

Speaking about the eleven police constables, officers and SAG that were wounded while carrying out their duties in Zejtun, De Marco said that he considered it his "duty to express solidarity and that of the people with these brave policemen who never flagged in the pursuit of their duties, especially the wounded, some of whom are being operated even now." Dr De Marco went on to say that he was "certain that the entire Maltese population opposes such shameful incidents provoked by violent elements who could not even bear a peaceful event like this marriage to pass without incident. Such actions cannot and will not be tolerated in this country and we will take measures to ensure that such incidents are not repeated."

Dr De Marco concluded by saying that the Nationalist government had given freedom to everyone, and the police, if the situation demanded it would resort to using tear gas to defend law and order. The rule of terror had ended. The then Deputy Prime Minister complimented the police on their use of restraint while under fire. He also appealed to the Labour Party to free itself of the violent element that pervaded it