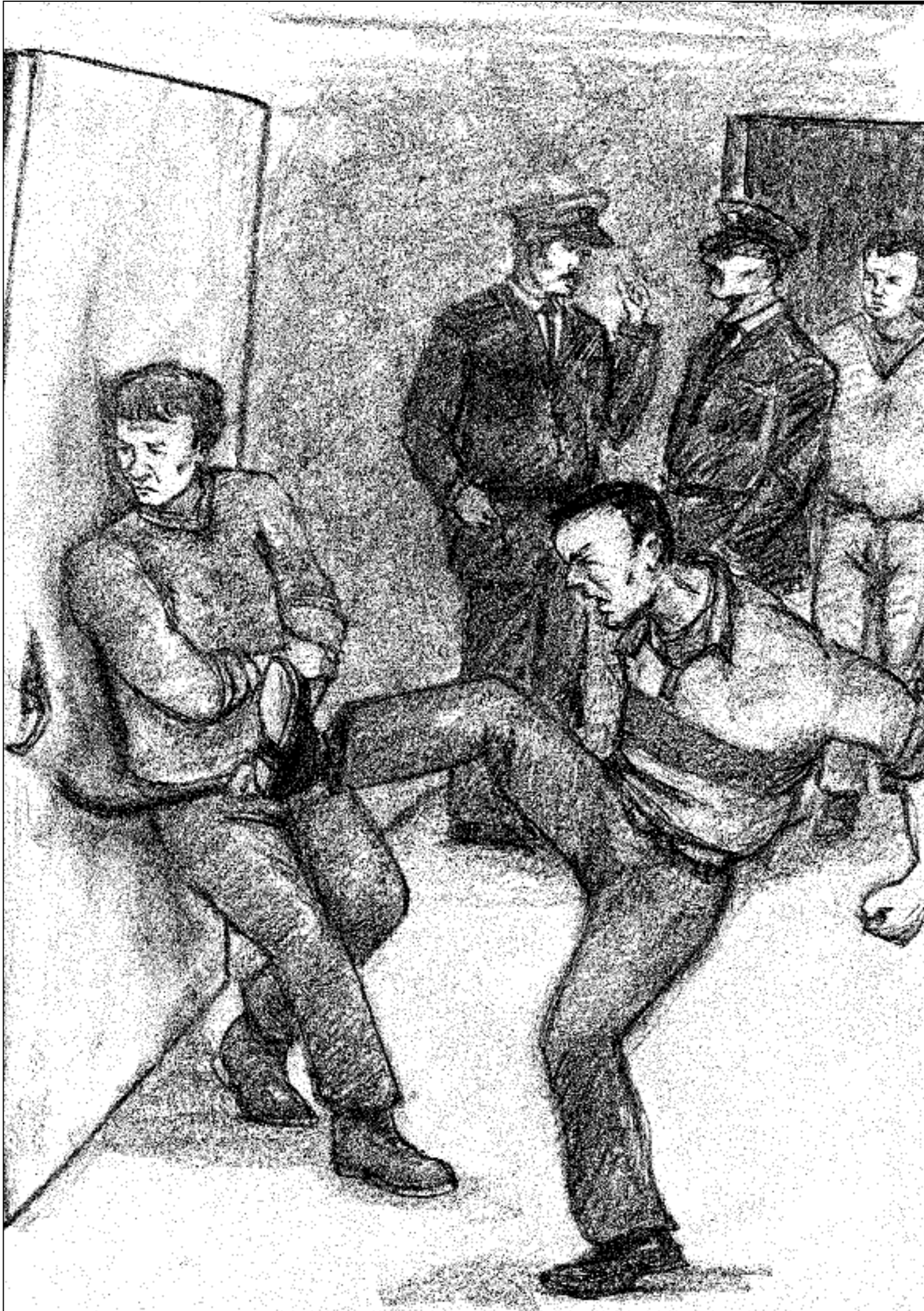


The police on rampage



It was late evening when policemen from various sections including the dreaded SMU were summoned to Police GHQ and told that they

would be sent on a special assignment. They were not told what it would be nor where it would be conducted. It was November 26, 1983.

A short time later, police cars and buses began to arrive outside the headquarters of the Nationalist Party.

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Acting on a tipoff from a disgruntled ex-employee of the Nationalist Party, the police were about to raid the inner sanctum of the only opposition party in the country. They were looking for a large cache of illegally kept arms and ammunition. Political tension was at fever pitch: bombings and arson were frequent events. The police believed their informant - it was not unreasonable to expect the PN to respond to the assault it was under.

Perhaps they half-believed their informant because they disguised their action under the pretext of a search for cordless telephones, a harmless appliance banned from circulation in hysterical fear of what? Revolution?

The Police raiding party poured out of their vehicles to find themselves outside the main offices of the Nationalist Party. The building was sealed off

Gejtu Cuschieri, Head of Security at the PN offices had been picked up from his home and taken to the scene. He told the searchers that he did not have the keys, but that

During the raid the police went beyond any acceptable limits. The bust of former Prime Minister, Dr George Borg Oivier was spat upon. Unnecessary and wanton damage was caused to the building

PN Secretary General, Louis Galea had a set. A security guard at the building let in the police on recognising Cuschieri.

The police went to work forcing their way into every room. All the offices, including Dr Eddie Fenech Adami's were broken into. The building was ransacked. From the moment that the police burst into the headquarters they started to ask for the whereabouts of the arms. They had been given the erroneous impression that they would find a large cache.

The workers that were there on shift, working on the following day's publication of *il-Mument*, were taken away to the police headquarters in Florina and held there until the following morning. This disrupted the printing of the paper, but upon their release at around 7 a.m. the following day, they went back and finished off the job. In fact a limited edition of the paper was distributed later on that day.

The police, around one hundred strong, were lead by then Superintendent Carmelo Bonello and Inspector Paul Bond. They were all dressed in plain clothes and there was nothing to prove that they were actual policeman; this could only be presumed.

Dr Guido De Marco and Dr Eddie Fenech Adami were eventually allowed to enter the building, but were not allowed to monitor the search. Eventually the police claimed that two hunting shotguns were found in an air-conditioning shaft, together with some helmets, radios and truncheons. These were lifted from the site without anybody else besides the police being there to witness the event. Some bottles of petrol and some sulphuric acid were found on the roof. All party officials denied knowing anything about them. As the shaft was sealed, some stone bricks had to be removed in order to gain access to it.

During the raid the police went beyond any acceptable limits. The bust of former Prime Minister, Dr George Borg Oivier was spat upon. Unnecessary and wanton damage was caused to the building. A lot of the damage would have been avoided, had the police used the keys that Louis Galea had on him.

In addition to the damage caused,

The court expressed its reservations about the need for men armed with submachine guns to cover a search which purportedly was for unlicensed cordless telephones

a number of items went missing including batteries, notebooks, boxes of miniature bottles of whisky, a box of electric plugs, a large bottle of whisky, gin and cognac and sundry other items.

Following this raid on the Nationalist headquarters, the police conducted several other raids. The targets of these raids included factories, warehouses and private residences. About sixty people were arrested and held in custody for up to forty-eight hours. A nine-month-old baby and a disabled person were also held in custody.

One raid, however, did yield rich pickings. The police lifted hand grenades, three rifles, two submachine guns with ammunition, cordless telephones, CB radios and transmitters from a store in Qormi.

The Nationalist Party organised a huge mass meeting to protest against the illicit raids. During this meeting Dr Fenech Adami revealed that some people had been tortured while in detention. The then Leader of the Opposition also informed the public that the Nationalist Party had come to know of a secret arms treaty that the government had formed with North Korea in which Korea undertook to provide the Labour government with about Lm1 million worth of arms and military training.

The Nationalist Party took the raid upon its premises to mark a change in Labour government policy: from merely condoning violence it had moved up a notch to actually orchestrating it and using it as an instrument of political repression.

Almost 20 years later the lawsuit filed by the PN against the principal police officers involved came to judgement. Judge Albert Magri con-

demned ex-superintendent Carmel Bonello and Inspector Paul Bond to pay the Nationalist Party the sum of Lm1,022 to make good for the damages that were caused by the police during the search of the Nationalist Party headquarters.

The court expressed its reservations about the need for men armed with submachine guns to cover a search which purportedly was for unlicensed cordless telephones.

Bonello and Bond were found guilty of having acted in a very inappropriate manner when they carried out the search on the premises without the presence of Dr Louis Galea who was the person responsible for the building. These two officers of the law were also found guilty of having allowed excesses damage to be caused without reasonable cause.

While it was true that some guns and ammunition had been found, the court said that these had been discovered incidentally to the official reason behind the search. The court took the fact that the police had not prosecuted the Nationalists for possessing these firearms, as a pointer that their presence there was not a criminal act.

Bonello was held more accountable by the court because not only had he prevented Louis Galea from entering the building, but he had also failed to control the police under his command. The court also held that as a highranking officer Bond could not plead superior orders and should have been aware of the legal limited to his police powers.

Next week's Special Report will start to look at the frame-up of Pietru Pawl Busuttli

Zen and the art of making obscene amounts of money

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