

# MINTOFF - IN THE EYES OF AMERICA (PART 2)

COMPILED BY MATTHEW VELLA

## Mario Felice – the PN's 'anti-communist' MP



Mario Felice, a Nationalist MP, is portrayed in the US embassy telegrams as a friendly source who meets up with the US ambassador and officials, communicates goings-on in politics and internal PN news. Felice (born 1930) was a frontbench member of the PN up until 1981 as a shadow finance minister, but was also close to Labour prime minister Dom Mintoff – here it emerges he met with him regularly.

He was a fervent supporter of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation; as the president of the Malta branch of the Atlantic Treaty Association, he visited the White House in 1969 as a member of an ATA delegation, and in 1974 he was honoured by Dr Luns, secretary-general of NATO, for his work to further

public understanding of the Alliance. In 1989, Felice was appointed chairman of the Malta International Business Authority (later renamed MFSA).

### 18 MAY 1973 – EMBASSY VALLETTA

Summary: in conversation with ambassador before his departure for US, Nationalist MP Mario Felice covered following subjects: Mintoff's intentions on amending Constitution; prospective anti-American campaign by Labour; finance of newspaper 'Mediterranean News'; leadership crisis in Nationalist party.

Felice on eve of trip to Norfolk for ATA (Atlantic Treaty Association) and visit to Washington, called on ambassador May 16.

Felice claimed that Malta in fairly near-term future may be faced with constitutional crisis. He says Crown advocate-general at PM's instruction has drafted amendments to Constitution which require two-thirds majority for passage. Amendments would provide for single-member districts for election of MPs, which Felice says would then be gerrymandered to provide sure Labour victory) and would change Malta into republic with puppet president...

Felice claimed governor-general is totally submissive to PM and will go along with this extra-constitutional procedure. When asked why he would cap his career with such abysmal and illegal surrender, Felice said Mintoff would probably consider establishing governor-general as president...

Felice added Nationalist executive authorized Borg Olivier to reply negatively on general terms for support in effecting amendments... but Borg Olivier is still carrying this reply in his pocket.

Felice then embarked on rather unhappy account situation within PN, basically dilemma is that both party leader Borg Olivier and deputy leader Censu Tabone are completely ineffective, but younger party members feel that it would be public disaster to remove them. Borg Olivier's problem is that he simply is inactive and provides no leadership. Tabone, on other hand, is not

very intelligent and is constantly getting in trouble by making public statements which leave him open to devastating replies by Prime minister.

Felice also raised subject of "Mediterranean News", English-language newspaper published in Malta which has taken unequivocally pro-Arab and correspondingly anti-US slant. Felice says Mediterranean News receives \$90,000 subsidy per year from Qadhafi and that vigorously anti-American columnist Robert Del Prete is pseudonym for Malta Labour Party journalist...

COMMENT: While much of Felice's attitude must be taken in context of coming from prominent young member of Opposition, his concern for constitutional issues is substantiated by Mintoff's public reference to anomaly of Constitutions which was approved only by simple majority, embodying amendment procedures which require two-thirds majority in parliament and in some cases additional popular referendum. While much of the public debate has centred around voting age and Constitutional Court vice-presidency questions, Felice's assertions with regard to electoral system are more plausible as real target for Mintoff's aims. It would seem more likely that if he wishes to open crisis on this subject, he would not do it on relatively less important aspects. Felice believes Mintoff will not move on these questions until about six months from now.

Felice is unusual in PN in that he has a personal relationship to Mintoff and sees him quite regularly. He gives credit to Mintoff's initiative and desire to improve economic situation on Malta, but naturally reflects PN

view on specific issues. We suspect he is somewhat flattered by attention Mintoff gives him. GETZ

### 8 JUNE 1973 – EMBASSY VALLETTA

At luncheon June 8, Nationalist MP Mario Felice told us that attempt to bribe Gozitan MP Anglu Camilleri (il-Bedeq, Labour MP from Nadur) was very nearly successful, and he claimed that only Labour MP from Gozo – Cauchi – was also on verge of defecting under same circumstances. Felice claims that police actually uncovered plot, and that two Gozitans tried to stop Mintoff from making case public, but Mintoff insisted. Felice says that businessman Roger Camilleri is long-time Labour supporter who gave £10,000 or £12,000 to MLP for last political campaign.

Felice says he has done his best to ascertain whether any Nationalist MP might be involved but has so far come up with nothing. He is apparently still slightly nervous on this score, saying he 'hoped' that nothing would turn up. Asked whether other businessmen might be involved, Felice said he simply did not know but thought it not out of question that Ronald Said and Roger Camilleri might have had that much cash between them.

COMMENT: Felice's story may, of course, be coloured by his political affiliation. GETZ

### 15 JANUARY 1974 – EMBASSY, VALLETTA

Chargé had opportunity to talk with PM Mintoff's private secretary, Joe Camilleri, at a reception hosted by Ambassador Attard Kingswell January 12. Because of Mintoff's habit of working late hours, Camilleri is rarely seen at social functions.

Camilleri volunteered info that Nationalists in process of replacing Borg Olivier as party leader and said Edward Fenech Adami, Guido Demarco, and Mario Felice are among the frontrunners. He said this would happen sometime soon.

COMMENT: This sort of speculation from Camilleri gives somewhat greater credence at recent reception by Guido Demarco for Nationalist MPs. There was much talk about GBO's lack of drive and need to replace him (principally George Bonello Dupuis and Mario Felice), but when given argument that Nationalists need his votes (GBO regularly wins two seats), they backed off considerably. It is clear however, that there is substantial agreement among Opposition MPs that their party badly needs rejuvenation. While we know many Nationalist MPs hold Fenech Adami in high regard, this is first time he has been included in list of possible replacements for GBO.

Camilleri led to future of MLP leadership. Camilleri said he believes that if and when Mintoff gives up MLP leadership, he would be replaced by Lorry Sant. Camilleri pointed to Sant's excellent preference as pub-



Gorg Borg Olivier and Guido Demarco



Lorry Sant and Dom Mintoff



Eugene Rostow

**"He sees Mintoff quite regularly for long discussions, and we have no reason to doubt this"**

lic works minister and well-known backing of GWU.

COMMENT: It is true that Sant has gained considerable stature as minister, but he still is very much under Mintoff's shadow; and although an MLP strongman, he lacks appeal among Labour intellectuals and non-worker MLP supporters generally. TUCKER

### 5 MARCH 1974 – EMBASSY VALLETTA

Although most recent information indicates Mintoff is indeed recovering from his accident, concern about his health was background for interesting conversation at lunch, March 3, with Mario Felice, young Nationalist MP and shadow finance minister.

Felice began by saying he was unable to get any satisfactory explanation of Mintoff's conditions, and he was so concerned that he planned to face parliamentary secretary Wistin Abela (one of Mintoff's inner circle) with demand for facts in order that the country could be prepared for extended absence or disappearance of Mintoff from political scene. If this should happen, Felice predicted that MLP "extremists" led by Lorry Sant and Anton Buttigieg, would take over (when we commented on Buttigieg's extremely moderate speech to Socialist Youth League a few days before, Felice asserted this was only a well-known tactic of leftists feinting to right before he moved sharply to the left).

Felice thought however, that Sant and Buttigieg were not capable of exercising effective leadership and that there would be a serious fractionalisation of Labour. Mintoff was able to dominate MLP, but Cabinet minister would not accept attempt at authoritarian party rule by any other of the potential leaders. In brief, Felice thought that in current circumstances, Mintoff's absence would be a disaster. He quite seriously proposed as the best solution a coalition government to deal with what he would consider a national crisis.

In further discussion of Mintoff and his goals, Felice believed that Mintoff

is attached to the idea of Constitutional reform. He claimed Mintoff has two specific goals: first is to do away with proportional representation, and second to remove any mention of the Church in the Constitution. Felice agreed that neither the Constitutional Court question nor the voting age were of sufficient importance to lead Mintoff to amend the Constitution illegally. On the other hand, Felice said he agreed with Mintoff that it was wrong to "impose" on Malta a Constitution requiring two-thirds majority in parliament for amendment.

As last point of interest, with regard to attempts by Dr Colombo to create a new political party, Felice claimed that Buttigieg is furious in light of exchange of correspondence he had with Colombo about two years ago. Buttigieg told Felice that Colombo had written to him taking Labour to task for not undertaking a broad programme of nationalization of private enterprise and confiscation of property. When Buttigieg wrote back to ask what Colombo advocated with regard to Church property (at that time Colombo was in a religious order), Colombo replied that the Church property should be the first to be confiscated. Felice implied that Buttigieg intended to make this correspondence public at some point.

COMMENT: Although Felice appears to be a good Nationalist MP, and is trusted enough with shadow finance portfolio, there is no question he has considerable admiration for Mintoff as leader and a doer. He has claimed for months that he sees Mintoff quite regularly for long discussions, and we have no reason to doubt this. On the other hand, he is privately quite contemptuous of Borg Olivier, and it would be logical to include Felice as a possibility if there is any truth in Baldacchino's [Alfred, Nationalist MP who cross over to Labour] assertion that two more Nationalist deputies might follow Baldacchino across the aisle to Labour. GETZ

### 10 JUNE 1974 – EMBASSY VALLETTA

During call on Ambassador June 7, Nationalist MP Mario Felice referred to recent exchange in parliament on Sixth Fleet. Felice said press reporting of exchange was not complete.

When Felice stated in parliament that he opposed Mintoff's policy of excluding Sixth Fleet from visits to Malta, he said Mintoff replied that

Labour's foreign policy was "flexible". Although he then went to reiterate policy of exclusion.

In brief personal exchange as they were leaving parliament, Felice said Mintoff jokingly asked him if he would cross the floor and join Labour party ranks if Mintoff agreed to allow Sixth Fleet visit to Malta. Felice said he replied that Sixth Fleet issue was not the only quarrel he had with Labour government.

In recounting foregoing to Ambassador, Felice said he believes that Mintoff is deliberately trying to keep his options open as a result of cooling relations with Qadhafi and Libya. Esiting issues (British bases on Malta, presence of Israeli embassy on Malta, FIR and Median Line) have presumably sharpened by recent oil exploration agreement between GOM and Texaco.

Felice said he felt it would be counterproductive for US, or even Nationalist party, to try to push Mintoff at this point. Mintoff tends to react vigorously to what he interprets as pressure. Ambassador agreed. Mintoff's own policies on oil exploration rights appear to be shaping events in a manner potentially favourable to US. GETZ

### 28 JUNE 1974 – EMBASSY VALLETTA

During brief interrupted conversation at social function, Nationalist MP Mario Felice told us that secret talks between Labour and Opposition parliamentary groups on changes in Constitution are going well from Opposition viewpoint, and that Church and Commonwealth membership issues were "no problem", implying that neither the basic position of the Church nor of the Queen as head of state was in question. According to Felice, major point at issue now is Labour proposal for an article that would permit suspension of elections under conditions of civil strife.

COMMENT: Question of suspension of elections under disruptive local conditions from time to time by GOM spokesman, and diehard Nationalist supporters regularly speculate that Mintoff will find that kind of excuse to remain in office being his term of office. At any rate, his appears to be the first constitutional issue on which the two political parties have serious disagreement. GETZ



Sir Anthony Mamo

### 9 JULY 1975 – EMBASSY VALLETTA

Former deputy under-secretary Eugene Rostow also visited Malta June 6-10 as a guest of the Malta Atlantic Association. Unlike his stopover in Reykjavik however, Rostow's stay in Malta receive little public attention and did not produce any fireworks.

Rostow's visit here was treated as a private, almost proprietary one by Nationalist MP Mario Felice, chairman of the Malta ATA society. Although embassy official EMT was at small private dinner given by Felice, the absence of the ambassador (who was in Washington on consultations), meant Rostow did not visit the embassy or accept our offer of embassy assistance or briefing...

Rostow's gratuitous comments about comments in Malta almost certainly resulted from his exposure to Felice and other strongly anti-Mintoffian members of the Malta Atlantic Association. The Maltese Nationalist party does tend to see communists under Mintoff's bed from time to time, while the Labour party, with increasing frequency, accused the Nationalists of being fascists. All of this has more to do with the forthcoming Maltese elections and is a far cry from events in Portugal or Iceland... SMITH

### 27 JUNE 1974 – EMBASSY VALLETTA

Government has introduced new Bill in parliament aimed at limiting or prohibiting purchase of immovable property on Malta by alien non-residents. Nationalist MP Felice, who has very good connections, said this was triggered by substantial (but legal) purchase of land in scenic area by Libyan group, presumably for building holiday accommodations. Wife of Maltese lawyer who handled transaction confirmed it to us. Felice said that when Mintoff heard of sale he said he did not want any "Libyan villages" on Malta, and draft bill resulted. GETZ



Censu Tabone