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## AN INSTITUTE OF MALTESE STUDIES

THE basis of a national culture is of a twofold nature, fed from two sources, partly rooted in the native soil and partly in the progressive importation of old and new ideas and culture reaching us mainly from neighbouring countries or from a country geographically farther away but historically associated with the culture of a different people such as England in the case of Malta.

This twofold process can be analysed in terms of what one might describe as Malta's national culture and history of civilization. Our national culture is fundamentally Mediterranean, largely European, but because of the geographical position of our homeland, also partly Euro-African. The threads that have woven the tapestry of Maltese history on the loom of time are as colourful as the sequence of historical events which throughout the centuries from the earliest years of our prehistory have slowly, but steadily, built up what we can describe as Maltese civilization. The creation of a Ministry of culture is an official indication of the awareness of the Government not only that there is such a thing as 'culture', but that there is also what one might specify as Maltese culture, the local product.

Culture has something to do with educated feeling not only about ourselves but also about others within the context of both national and international communal fellowship. Malta is lucky to enjoy the advantages of several cultural institutes which different countries connected with Malta have made available to us for our education and naturally also for our admiration. Britain is represented by the British Council; Italy has the *Società Dante Alighieri*; France and Germany have their language circles and America its U.S. Information Service. It is time that the University and the Minister of Education gave attention to the idea of a *National Cultural Institute* which would promote the study and knowledge of our ancestral

heritage, Maltese craftsmanship and the encouragement of the long-neglected and shamefully debased local talent; indeed all the products and by-products of the best Maltese brains. We should no longer suffer ourselves to continue living abjectly in the shadow of the cultural heritages of other peoples with the feeling that our part is to be all the time at the receiving end like our presence at other people's cocktail parties, (mental conditioning), and never trying to give anything of our own in return. The various cultural institutes or language circles run by the representatives of non-Maltese Governments (*Kulturkämpfe*) hardly ever show interest in the culture and civilization of the people amongst whom they live. It is all the time 'Come and see my shop-window'; and hardly ever 'May I have a look at your shop-window for a change? This one-way traffic has created a damaging sense of inferiority complex about ourselves and an unbalanced sense of awe about other people's lavish display of talent and wealth. For many years this attitude helped to make colonialism not only bearable but also acceptable, but we have ourselves to blame for trying to do so little for our prestige. We wish to see both the University and the Ministry of Education interested more actively in the promotion of our national education, culture and civilization.

At least two of the Departments in the Faculty of Arts in the Royal University of Malta, namely the Department of Maltese and Oriental Languages and the Department of History can provide the first raw material for the foundation of an institute of Maltese studies which would in time grow and expand wide enough to become an inter-disciplinary institute with a national basis like the British Council or the *Società Dante Alighieri* with greater emphasis on scholarship. Other countries have such institutes, why not Malta? We have a Ministry of Culture; that is the first step to an Institute of Maltese Studies which could create scope for Maltese talent and do it justice at long last!

Man does not live by bread and politics alone. Our country's future is in our own hands. Somebody with imagination must light the national torch to show the way ahead that has been too long deserted and dark.

THE EDITOR