

BOOK REVIEWS

E.C.-A.A. : *Il-Qawmien tal-Haddiem Malti*, Vol. I (1920-1955), Freedom Press, Malta, 1971, 177 pp., 27 illus.

The history of the Labour movement in Malta goes back to 1885 when Ang. Caruana set up an association which became known as 'Socjeta' Operaia Cattolica' and to the early decade of the twentieth century when the controversial personality of the self-educated *Profs* Emmanuel Dimech shocked the local Establishment with its enlightened criticism and when the Worker's Union appeared in the Dockyard.

The authors, who have chosen to give only their initials, present a study, largely based on G. Bonnici's *Storja tal-Partit tal-Haddiema* (1931), of the early days of the Labour Party. Its first political programme proposed, among other things, compulsory education, encouragement to local industry and agriculture, assistance to Maltese emigrants and the introduction of Income Tax. The history of the Party's organization and its subsequent development is related with the general development of Maltese constitutional history and the Party's relations with other political parties, the British Colonial Government and the Church.

In 1924 the Party contested the general election declaring that its principles were based on the papal encyclical 'Rerum Novarum' and loyalty to the Empire. Facts and reasons are given to explain why the Labour Party joined in the Compact Government of 1927 and to describe the Party's position in the politico-religious crisis that characterised the Strickland era. Particular attention is given to the notable contribution made towards the consolidation of the Party by Prof. P.G. Frendo, Col. W. Savona, LL.D., Rev. Prof. Michael Gonzi, Mr. Censu Bugeja, Mr. Gužè Orlando, Col. M. Dundan, M.D., and Dr. (later Sir) Paul Boffa, M.D., who became Malta's first Labour premier in 1947 when the Party gained 59.9% of the votes cast and 24 out of the 40 seats of the Legislative Assembly. The Party quickly gained the support of the General Workers' Union which was set up under the leadership of Mr. Reggie Miller.

In its first sitting the Labour Government passed the Census Bill, the Income Tax Bill and amended the Ordinance on Succession and Donation Duties. The Party sought to fulfil its programme, but internal trouble developed when the setting up of a national insurance on a contributory basis was proposed. By 1948, Mr. Dom. Mintoff, M.A. (Oxon.), who had first joined the Party as assistant secretary of the Cospicua Labour Committee in 1935, had become the most popular member of the Party. When Dr. Paul Boffa failed to sign an *ultimatum* to Britain demanding direct

Marshall Aid, a split in the Party followed rapidly and on 16th October, 1949, Mr. Mintoff was elected leader of the Party.

Concluding the history up to 1955, the authors relate the Party's activities in the early 1950's when it formulated the 'Integration Plan' with the affirmation of the principle of self-determination as an alternative, which led to the second Labour Administration of 1955.

An appendix about Emmanuel Dimech is also added. It helps the reader to get a better picture of the early days of the present century. But one has to realize, as the authors state in the introduction, that "it is still too early to make an objective appreciation of many of the recent events which without doubt are among the most important". Yet it may be stated that their publication will be considered as a contribution towards the study of contemporary political history in spite of the fact that the book lacks an index and documentary references which are essential for a scientific presentation.

C. G. S.

CHARLES J. BOFFA — *The Second Great Siege, Malta 1940-1943*, Malta, St. Joseph's Home, 1970, 138 pp., illus.

Many have been anxious to reconstruct the events of 1940-1943 as they affected directly the Maltese people. Boffa has managed to do this in a rather original way by presenting an account based on information gleaned from published documents, books, diaries, logbooks, contemporary letters, newspapers and unpublished minutes of two district councils. He also gave a lot of importance to information given by people from all walks of life.

The drama of horror and courage among the people is depicted with vivid colours. As one reads through the book, one feels that on the sun drenched island of the Mediterranean there lived a people who were ready to offer "blood, toil, tears and sweat" for the sake of democracy and liberty. Once Mussolini had declared war, Malta became the target of Fascist air-raids. More intensive attacks were organized over the Maltese Islands when the Luftwaffe joined in to further the fury.

The people, especially those of the Cottonera, suffered great hardships as they saw their homes turned into shambles, their ammunition depleted, and their food stores emptied. Within such a general framework, the author succeeds in reconstructing a lively picture of brave young men and women ready for any endurance test. The attack on the "Illustrious" within the Grand Harbour, the Italian E-Boats attack of 25th July, 1941, the arrival of the Santa Marija Convoy, are presented against a background too well known and remembered by every Maltese

who lived through the period. Death and destruction as well as feats of courage and bravery are lucidly brought back to mind as descriptions of events follow each other, augmented by references to the reminiscences of various personalities including British, Italian and German officials.

The author also points out the problem of food shortages and the effect of hunger on the people, especially the homeless who flocked out of the target areas. Reference is made to the introduction of conscription and of a Ration Scheme as well as to the so called Victory Kitchens. Although Malta was awarded the George Cross "to bear witness to a heroism and devotion that will long be famous in history", the food and ammunition stores were so much depleted that the Administration — which moved its headquarters to the Birkirkara area after February 1941 — had already earmarked the early days of September 1942 as the target date for surrender. It had to be the tanker "Ohio" which saved the situation as it limped into Harbour on the feastday of Santa Marija. But as it is indicated, Malta was declared safe only after May 1943 when the Nazi armies in Tunisia had surrendered. It was only the heroic defence of the Island from within and from without that put an end to the "Operation Hercules" that had been planned for the invasion of Malta.

Further information is given to describe how various notable sites were hit and turned into rubble. Among the notable places that were destroyed by enemy action, mention is made of the Senglea Basilica, the old Clock Tower and the Dominican Church of Vittoriosa, the Opera House and other buildings in Valletta. Particular attention is paid to the medical and health aspects of the war, whilst a tribute is paid to the women of Malta by a chapter written by Melita Boffa.

However, it seems to me, that the author could have given more attention to the attitudes and activities of local Maltese politicians. The only politician mentioned is practically Dr. Paul Boffa, and this only so far as his voluntary activity to alleviate the suffering is concerned. Mention could have been made of popular views and songs about the George Cross and the Victory Kitchens. The setting up of an American aerodrome in Gozo is briefly mentioned without any reference to the attitudes of Gozitan farmers and the destruction of Gourgion Tower. Though the author states that Maltese alleged of pro-Italian sympathies were first interned at Fort Salvatur and later at the camp of St. Agatha Convent, Rabat, he leaves out all references to their plight under the British government, the internment of some in Uganda, and the people's attitude towards them. Finally no reference is made to British diplomatic relations with Italy regarding Malta's future should an agreement have become possible between the two.

It is also a pity that such a book does not have an index and scien-

tific annotations and references, though it carries a bibliography of some of the sources at the end. These omissions could of course be remedied in a re-issue.

In spite of these deficiencies, the book is faithful to the gruesome story. It concludes with a list of people who were awarded decorations and commendations in recognition of their bravery.

C. G. S.

MICHAEL GALEA — *Malta Historical Sketches*, Malta, 1970, 64 pp., introduction by Prof. J. Galea.

The first half of the 20th Century presents us with Maltese politicians gathering momentum and trying to gain a system of representative government from the British Colonial Administration. The author has selected a number of events and dealt with them specifically and briefly though not without charm. In fact to make the description more appealing, the author has added a number of illustrations to depict the events.

Some of the events described — such as the two National Assemblies of 1919 and 1945 and the inauguration of the first parliament (1921) — have become landmarks in the political history of the Maltese Islands. Others reflect the evolution of social life or rather the temperisation of national aspirations by the building of monuments. Great interest was shown by all classes in the setting up of the monument of Christ the King, at Floriana, the Great Siege Monument, and the War Memorial. The laying of the foundation stone of the Breakwater, besides being in itself an occasion of festivity is also an indication of the importance of the harbours both for commercial and strategic reasons.

The biographies of Antonio Sciortino and Sir Filippo Sceberras are interesting owing to the fact that so far no detailed research has yet been made in the Life of such important personalities. They help to fill a great gap in Maltese History writings.

One comment could perhaps be made about the footnotes that the author uses. Many of them are explanatory rather than referring to sources. Some of them could have easily formed a part of the essays themselves.

C. G. S.

MIKIEL FSADNI, O.P.: *Id-Dumnikani fil-Belt 1569-1619*, Malta, Veritas Press, 1971, pp. 152.

The presentation of this publication is indeed the result of great labour and much research work. As regards its scientific presentation, it can be stated that this monograph has all the characteristics that the historian would desire, that is, intelligent division into chapters, a bibliography which shows that the author has left no stone unturned to ensure an objective presentation and annotated information by means of footnotes as well as an analytical index which is often missing in other Maltese works. The author bases his history and his conclusions on documents which he has found both in Malta and abroad.

The monograph is limited to the first fifty years of the Dominican's stay in Valletta. It relates how the Dominican friars of Birgu realized the growing importance of Valletta and hence were among the first to establish themselves on the promontory of Sceb-er-Ras. In 1569 they set up their first house and chapel there so that they could fulfil various pastoral and social duties among the workers then employed in the massive building programme of the City. After some time the little chapel was transformed into a Church dedicated to *Santa Maria del Porto Salvo*. Its first stone was laid on 19th April, 1571. On the 2nd July of the same year, Fr. Damiano Taliana (1525-1601) gained from Pope Pius V the privilege of erecting the church into the principal parish of the whole City.

A detailed description of the various chapels of this first church as well as of the convent is given. The work and the life of the friars are also described, and those readers who are interested in the history of the various religious orders may find interesting the information given regarding the education of the friars, their religious activities and their concern with the social necessities of the faithful.

The development of a certain ecclesiastical mentality among the Maltese of those days is also noted, whilst a remarkable footnote (page 130) tells of the existence of a certain Fr. Pasquale Vassallo who had written poems in Maltese and Italian. An insight into the social and economic life of the Maltese Islands after the Great Siege is provided by means of information about local traditions connected with the Church and particularly with the Confraternities of the Blessed Sacrament (1575) and of the Holy Rosary (1576). The latter was popularly known as 'Tar-Rużarjanti' and from its inception it gained fame because of its charitable activities.

The book is recommended to those who wish to acquire information on the documented history of Malta.

C. G. S.

ANDREW P. VELLA, O.P.: *Il-Parroċċa tal-Portu Salvu u San Duminku 1571-1971*, Malta, Stamperija Nazzjonali, 1971, pp. 75, illus.

This monograph is published as a commemoration of the quatercentenary of the foundation of the Dominican Parish of Valletta. It is presented in a popular style which helps the general public to read through the various chapters and gain information of historical interest about the Parish which is also known as *Tal-Portu Salvu* and *San Duminku* as it is dedicated to Our Lady under the title of protectress of safe havens.

Detailed annotations which interest the professional historian are avoided, nevertheless in order to write this monograph, the author had to research in Maltese archives as well as other archives abroad. It is also stated that the author made use of the valuable notes left by the late Prof. Daniel Callus, O.P.

The author relates the problems the Dominicans had to face during their early stay in Valletta, and how the first church was built according to the plans designed by the architect of the Order of St John, Girolamo Cassar. This Church had to be pulled down in the Eighteenth Century. With regard to this incident, the report of the medical board of the University of Montpellier regarding the removal of graves in 1780, is very interesting since it throws light on the medical knowledge and concern of the time. The Dominican friars always sought to fulfil their pastoral duties in spite of the great difficulties they had to face, especially during the French occupation of Valletta, and during the plague epidemics notably that of 1813 which made Pope Pius VII erect the parish to the dignity of a Minor Basilica. Such details are substantiated by translations of the *Motu Proprio* for the erection of the Parish, of the confirmation of same by another Apostolic Bull and the Papal Briefs for the erection of the Basilica and the granting of the privileges of the mozetta and the rochet.

As a rule the Dominicans are expected to have a college for the training of priests. Consequently the information given about the 'College of Portu Salvu', though brief, is not out of place. In 1729, this college was considered as a 'studium generale' with the power of granting degrees in theology. In 1865, it was transferred to the Dominican Priory of Rabat, Malta.

The monograph is considered very helpful for those who may visit the Church of Portu Salvu, for the author also provides a detailed description of the present Church the first stone of which was laid on 25th November 1804. Other descriptive information is also provided about the various treasures of the Church such as the paintings and the statue of St. Dominic. The number of illustrations that are added to the book help to make it more attractive.

W. L. Zammit

DAVID MARSHALL, *History of the Maltese Language in Local Education*, Malta University Press, 1971, pp. vii, 128.

The first language of a country and the education of its citizens are largely interdependent. A country which tries to do away with its native language in the system of local education, cannot attain to great heights and wide expansion in the fields of thought and action. Culture in general, self respect, prestige, personal and national development in all kinds of fields depend considerably on the part played by the first language of a nation in the system of education.

In his monograph *History of the Maltese Language in Local Education*, Dr. David Marshall traces the parallel progress of both language and education in Malta since Vassalli's first efforts down to our times. It is true. The emphasis is on the Maltese language. "The purpose of this work," says the Author, "is to look at the history of the Maltese language not from a linguistic point of view . . . but from two other related points of view: first, its vicissitudes in the extension of its use from that of a just national language, which it has been for centuries, to that of an official language also, which it has only relatively recently become; and second, and more important, its course as a language deemed worthy of being taught and studied both in schools and at University level." (p. 1) But, as a matter of fact, the ups and downs of the Maltese language redounded to the credit or disadvantage of local education.

The author rightly remarks that "The history of Maltese scholarship may . . . be said to begin with Mikiel Anton Vassalli . . . Born in 1764, he was in some ways a man born ahead of his time . . ." (p. 2) And later on he adds: "To Vassalli therefore, is due the distinction and credit of being the first teacher to try to introduce the study of Maltese, and though he was perhaps unaware of it, his attitude was founded on sound educational principles." (p. 3) Due note is also given to John Hookham Frère, the man who sympathized with Vassalli and even helped him in his studies and in his financial difficulties.

The author traces also the most relevant sections of Reports and Papers issued from time to time by Commissioners, Committees or individuals. He examines the facts stated there, the suggestions done and the fulfilment or the laying aside of such proposals. This important study begins with the Commissioners' Reports of 1838 and ends with Mr. D. Crichton-Miller's Report on Education in Malta (1957) and the Report of the Commission of the Royal University of Malta (July, 1957).

In the last section of his monograph, the author studies the present situation at the various levels, that is, at the Primary School, the Lyceum, The Girls' Grammar Schools, the Secondary Technical Schools, the Pri-

vate Schools, the Men's Training College, the Women's Training College and the University. This section, although actually a short one, gives an overall picture of the present state of the teaching of Maltese and its share in education.

The monograph has three appendixes. Appendix 'A' gives the Sections 50 and 57 of the Constitution Letters Patent of 1921, together with the proposed amendments. Appendix 'B' gives a selection of Maltese syllabuses at different levels. Appendix 'C' gives a brief description of the actual state of Maltese in six private schools. This appendix helps to give a general impression of the teaching of Maltese in private schools.

Dr. Marshall has surely succeeded in giving a comprehensive but clear idea of the birth and growth of the Maltese language in local education. His study proves the assertion he made at the end of his monograph that "A good educational system is the basis of any civilized community; and the basis of that education must be the teaching of the native tongue." (p. 99). Maltese now is in its legitimate place in the system of education.

Edward Fenech

ALBERT M. CASSOLA, "*Novelli u Essays bil-Malti*" St Joseph Press, Hamrun, 3s/-.

Albert M. Cassola is not only one of the best short story and essay writers we have, he is also one who never disappoints. His creative temperament, his original style, his explorations of analytical psychology, his sense of humour or, according to the circumstances, his descriptions of pathetic scenes and moving episodes, according to the subjects treated, the way with which he occasionally handles human sentiments, his courage in expression of views, have earned him coveted awards and much good fame in Malta and abroad.

In fact, the four admirable stories in the present volume range from the acute and humourous, like "Il-Baruni Marasuli" and "Id-Dmir" to the pathetic and poetic touch of "Rita" and the patriotic and fantastic Great Siege episode of Toni Bajada and his fellow swimmer warriors.

The 13 essays deal with St Francis of Assisi and the Beatles of Liverpool, journalists and journalism, the telephone, barbers, art and criticism, the Maltese language, honesty, bars and cafés, trees and a number of other subjects. Cassola's essays do not simply seek to enhance the reader's enjoyment, as he invariably does; he also discusses problems and occasionally seeks to argue the reader into shifting his angle of approach.

The charm and elegance of Cassola's essays and stories, written at various times, make the reader return to them again and again because they are written with verve and skill.

A. V.