

An aerial photograph of Malta, showing the island's coastline, a large harbor, and a dense urban area. A prominent white building complex is visible on a peninsula in the lower-left. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter. The text is printed in a bold, red, sans-serif font.

**The  
Malta  
Year Book  
1975**

Edited by  
B. Hilary A. Clews F.S.C.

23rd Year of Publication

**THE  
MALTA  
YEAR BOOK - 1975**

**Editor: B. HILARY A. CLEWS F.S.C.**

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## PREFACE

*The publication of the MALTA YEAR BOOK 1975, now in its 23rd year, comes shortly after the proclamation of Malta as a Republic. This is yet another important milestone in the long history of these Islands and the MALTA YEAR BOOK, which has recorded so many events in the past, is pleased to acclaim this one and to wish well to our country and to those who guide its destinies.*

*When one sees on a shelf the imposing array of past editions of the MALTA YEAR BOOK — first published in 1953 — one can feel justified in experiencing a sense of modest pride and of satisfaction at what has been achieved over a period of more than two decades. One can feel satisfied, moreover, that future historians will have at their disposal some, at least, of the raw material they require to do justice to the momentous times we have lived through and are, in fact, still living through.*

*As is my wont I would like to express my gratitude to my friends and collaborators who continue to assist me in so many ways to make this edition possible. My special thanks go to Mr L. BARON, Principal Government Statistician and Chief Electoral Officer, and to Mr T. PELLEGRINI, Director of Information; also to Mr J. POLLACCO, Chairman of the Malta Government Tourist Board, and to Mr J. MUSCAT DRAGO and Mr J. LANZON, also of the Tourist Board. Their help — always so willingly and so charmingly given — is deeply appreciated. My gratitude goes also to Major S.J.A. CLEWS who, once again, helped with that most demanding and tedious of tasks, proof-reading, and to Mr A.H. DE DOMENICO, Managing Director of GIOV. MUSCAT & CO. LTD., printers of the MALTA YEAR BOOK since the very first number in 1953 and who during 1974 celebrated the first Centenary of their foundation.*

*It is my pleasure, too, to thank my loyal colleagues, the De La Salle Brothers — in particular Brother Dominic ROSSO, Brother Emmanuel SCIBERRAS and Brother Felix AGIUS who have assisted me more closely in this production.*

*May 1975 — Holy Year in the Catholic Church — be for us all in Malta not only a Year of Renewal but also a year of increased prosperity in every field of human enterprise and endeavour.*

HILARY A. CLEWS F.S.C.  
*The Benild School, Church Street,  
Sliema, Malta.*

*24th December 1974.*

THE MALTA YEAR BOOK 1975  
IS DEDICATED  
WITH HUMBLE RESPECT  
TO THE  
**WOMEN OF MALTA**  
WHO  
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MALTA

HILARY A. CLEWS.

## SPECIAL ARTICLES

# THE ROLE OF THE PROFESSIONAL WOMAN IN MALTA

by *Beryl Muscat*

If Malta can still be described as a matriarchal society, it very quickly becomes a man's world when a woman steps away from the family hearth to find herself a job. For many reasons, Malta is not socially structured to accommodate the independent working woman, except in certain areas of employment; and if things are changing slowly, she still has today very little chance of fair job competition. A comparatively "poor" country, Malta inevitably suffers unemployment at some level. It is therefore understandable that job priority must go to the breadwinners of the family.

At a glance, it becomes clear that the woman least likely to be found in employment is the married woman with a family. As this is a complete reversal of the situation found abroad, where married women in many countries form the largest percentage of all working women, it may be significant to examine the reasons for this first of all.

From the local marriage point of view, the husband is constantly concerned with status. For his wife to work reflects ill on his ability to support her. In the case of the middle-class wife, a similar attitude prevails. Where to earn a salary would be considered beneath her status — yet she may put in many hours of work for charity. Again, the husband may not care to see his wife mixing independently with male colleagues, though he would put his case rather differently by persuading her that the financial inducement is negligible; the recent legislation on equal pay may in time put an end to this argument. But it is interesting to see how, on emigrating to another country, all these reservations disappear. It is automatically accepted by both partners that the woman will take up some form of full or part-time employment from the start of their new life.

However, it is of no less importance that the Church in Malta has greatly influenced the pattern of the married woman's life, laying more stress on the responsibilities of home and family than

might be the case abroad. And the State has not been slow to exploit this view. For if the married woman does not go out to work, it surely comes to her. She carries many burdens that are shouldered at national level abroad, from a wide variety of welfare aid for the aged, school meals, pre-school creches and home help for the sick and disabled.

A young woman marrying in Malta may well find herself confronted not only with the multiple demands of her own growing family, but by duties arising from her husband's work, the needs of her own and her husband's parents, and indeed any other closely-affiliated dependant acknowledged on either side of the partnership. She is committed to these various responsibilities from her wedding day.

It might be considered, then, surprising to find any married women working outside the home at all. Yet there are a few who, by a combination of good luck and good sense, do go off to a day's work — often coming back to tackle the family ironing till two in the morning!

The type of professional work taken up by married women in Malta is directly related to the numbers of women found in certain kinds of jobs. Thus, whilst there are very few practising women doctors, there are many chemists; and the few women lawyers are offset by the enormous proportion of teachers. If women dentists are just beginning to show their heads, the banks have established a keen interest in women employees for a long time. These ratios have developed, not only by supply-and-demand, but also by their accessibility to the married woman. And it is not difficult to see why. To practise medicine for example, even with trustworthy domestic help, demands long and irregular hours and is obviously difficult. The simple alternative for a woman graduating with a *B.Pharm.* along with her *M.D.* is to turn to dispensing, where she can work regular hours in a chemist's shop and plan her home life accordingly.

Teaching is popular for the same reason. It comprises regular hours with long holiday recessions — though at the more financially remunerative university level the number of married women employed decreases significantly. Law still seems to be an all-male enclave. If there is nothing to prevent the qualified woman from setting herself up in legal practice, the reality of her decision finds her with a very thin living. Her simple alternative is to enter into

partnership with a male colleague. And if this does not appeal, she may deflect her training into registrar work at the courts. A handful of women do in fact make a livelihood out of this practice in Malta.

On the other hand, local banks appear to give the married woman blood-royal treatment, perhaps because of the high cost of computer-training an employee, and perhaps because women of the required educational standard fill a labour gap in this particular case. Upon marriage, a woman is not only encouraged to continue her career, but with the onset of pregnancy is often guaranteed her position if she wishes to return to work after her confinement.

However, if the general rule for the trained married woman wishing to work is to take what she can get, there are exceptions where her specialised skills cannot easily be replaced. A woman doctor working for seven years as a child specialist before marriage, found herself recalled time and again after marriage to 'fill in' for male colleagues. Yet she recounts that with two young children under her feet, she was never once offered help with her home duties, much as the Department of Health pressed for her services!

Strange as it may seem, it is an unacknowledged rule that married women are still held responsible for organising their domestic affairs whatever the need for their skills. A similar attitude occurs in the freely acknowledged need for physiotherapists in government employment at the present time, mainly because this training can only be acquired abroad and is therefore accessible to very few women. A qualified physiotherapist with three young children and a husband working abroad — and wishing to use her skills — is currently hindered from practising because she is unable to find responsible domestic help.

Wasted energies like these will only be harnessed to the national good when facilities are provided to enable the married woman to walk out of her home each day, secure in the knowledge that domestically all is well.

To turn to the wider categories of employed women in Malta, it becomes apparent that the woman who does succeed in shaping a professional career for herself is, for various reasons, considered outside the social norm. The unmarried woman, the childless mar-

ried woman, the widow — these are frequently to be found in many kinds of jobs; though again significantly the top rungs of the ladder, whether in commerce, industry or the professions, seem to elude her. If male competition is cutthroat at the top, there is even less toleration of the female (the one lady architect to have graduated to my knowledge from the local university is now working full-time abroad).

Yet these women can lay just claim to making a full and active contribution to Maltese life during their working years. Those who, for whatever reason, have chosen to establish a career for themselves not only do well, but surprisingly enough are well-respected and well-treated by their male colleagues. Which is another reversal of the situation found in England where the professional man at least is not quite so generous. A recent meeting in Malta of the Women's Gynaecological Society of Great Britain established the fact that theirs was an all-women's club simply because the men's clubs would not have women members.

To examine the range of jobs attracting working women is to cover a wide field. If facilities have improved over the years, attitudes have also changed. Nursing, once considered a low-prestige career except by the religious, has taken on a new life with the opening of the School of Nursing attached to St. Luke's Hospital, with resident sister tutors and midwives, and recognition abroad of the Maltese S.R.N. Tourist guiding is popular, though it demands a high fluency rate in at least two foreign languages. Secretarial opportunities in all types of work abound. The national networks in radio and television have also encouraged women to join their ranks.

More depressing is the attitude of Maltese employers. If they may indeed plead that they are following in the footsteps of the foreign entrepreneur, notoriously attracted to the Island in the past as much by cheap labour rates as by governmental tax concessions, it still seems an anachronism to find women heaving soft-drinks crates about or sweating it out in the rubber industry at the lower end of the employment scale; and at the higher end, women with a clutch of 'O' levels, combined with secretarial and translating skills, grinding their way through a ten-hour day for diminutive returns. This is the reality that every woman working in Malta must face. Such a woman, for example, seeking to change her job

for one with a higher salary, is often confronted with a new offer from her employer who immediately becomes anxious to outbid the rival (if she is a good employee) for her services. Yet he will make no financial overtures to her so long as she is "happy" in her work.

If the proportion of working women in Malta is still pitifully small, the number of women working long hours for no financial remuneration, or for charity, is enormous. The conclusions to be drawn from this shed light on a number of Maltese social factors.

If no woman is forced to take up charitable work, she may find herself doing so for a number of reasons. She may feel morally bound to give some of her time to a deserving cause; she may also take it up because she has time on her hands; or she may simply like the tea-and-cakes aspect of the work. Charitable work is closely allied to the social life of Malta, so that a woman is as likely to meet her friends and exchange news in this way as she would if she were to join a women's club in Britain. And it would be futile to deny that in their great numbers local women have made a massive contribution in all fields of charitable work. Indeed, in middle age many women may claim to have "found themselves" in this way. For again, there is no State provision for women to retain on past skills in middle life (a period of stress for many married women) who might, if they were employed, make a considerable contribution to the economic life of the country.

Large numbers of women are also to be found working around the perimeter of the Arts. Though as there is no commercial structure to bolster the performing arts in Malta, it is not surprising to find no faculty for music, drama, dancing etc. at the University. Even the professional male artist must supplement his income by a secondary living (often teaching), and all specialization must be acquired abroad. Yet there are a few qualified women in these fields, and one can only conclude, in the face of such bleak employment prospects, that they have troubled to specialize simply from love of the work. It is interesting, however, that few women enter the Carnival competitions where one might expect their artistic skills to provide them with some financial returns. Archaeology also finds the local woman indifferent, again perhaps because of the absence of a faculty, though it is very much a woman's profession abroad. On the other hand, the Ideal Woman

competitions attract much interest, and the local woman compares well with her European counterpart.

However, it cannot be denied that these activities are merely picking at the threads of women's potentialities. But they do underline the need felt by women to engage in a fuller realization of the self outside the home. If insistence on the sacrificial element of marriage is losing ground, this is rightly so as more and more women are beginning to speak of their right to a fuller life.

It would be heartening to conclude by hoping, as every married woman must, that if the prospects for her self-fulfilment through employment are bleak, they may be better for her daughter. However, today's Maltese mother must inevitably question the wisdom of encouraging her daughters into a long and costly process of career specialization, when the prospects of enjoying the fruits of her labours lie so thin on the ground.

There is still substance in the bitter truth that it is easier to wash the floors with no schooling at all than with a B.A. getting caught in the bucket!

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## MALTESE WOMEN THROUGH FOREIGN EYES

by Paul Xuereb, LL.D., B.A., Dip. Lib. (Lond.)

'*Myself as others see me*' is a favourite subject for school compositions, one which provides an endless source of fascination, greater indeed than that of the mirror. Whilst it is rarely easy to find out what others think of you personally, it is less difficult to find out what foreigners think of your country and your people. The testimony of travellers, past and present, especially if available in abundance, makes it possible to discover the nature and characteristics of the national image.

A study of this evidence accumulated over a number of centuries should reveal what has changed and what has remained stable. Thus a study of what foreign visitors to Malta have said about Maltese women clearly shows that in some respects, such as in their fondness for scanty clothing, Maltese women of today are no worse than those of the 17th and 18th centuries.

Many travellers, even those visiting Malta for a few days, have commented on the physical characteristics and manners of our women. A comprehensive collection of all they have written would be of considerable length, and would also be repetitious. I have chosen to select a number of extracts from travellers' accounts, some of them well-known, others much less, and have grouped them under three broad headings: physical characteristics; costume; character and manners. Within each group, the extracts will be placed in chronological order.

### Physical characteristics.

With few exceptions, such as George Cockburn (1) who wrote that he had never seen "any spot in which there was less female attraction", travellers have been struck by the great physical attractiveness of Maltese women, many of them waxing lyrical over these charms. One of the earliest writers on Malta, Jean Quintin (2), described them as "non ignobili forma." Special features chosen for praise are lively black eyes, fair complexions, shapely limbs and fine figures, whilst a recent writer is captivated by their noses. Some writers comment on our women's tendency to lose their figure with the years; Eric Shephard guessed rightly

## WOMEN & THE LAW

by Cecilia Xuereb

The position of women under Maltese law was established under the influence of Canon Law which based itself on the opinions of St Paul who declared: "Let women keep silence in the churches for it is not permitted them to speak, but to be subject, so also the law saith. But if they would learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is a shame for a woman to speak in Church." (1 Cor., XIV 34). Women were consequently barred from holding office within the Church and even from forming "part of the choir or of the musical Chapel" (Pope Pius X in his *motu proprio* on church music dated 22nd November 1903).

It has been argued that this incapacity was not based on any ideological inferiority of the female sex, but on what was considered to be in keeping with the modesty of the woman. This concept of "modesty" for the woman is a very arbitrary one, and one which has undergone considerable modification, even within the church itself, with the passage of time.

Added to this view of women in Canon Law is the historical attitude towards the woman in Roman Law, on which so much of our Civil Code was originally based. Under Roman Law a female, in common with all the other members of the family, was subject to the "*patria potestas*" of the head of the family and had no rights whatsoever. Moreover while a son could be emancipated by the head of the family, no similar emancipation was possible for a daughter. This system was later changed in Roman Law when the perpetual tutelage of women fell into disuse along with so many other features of the "*patria potestas*". But as late as the first century B.C. the Roman jurist Ulpian wrote:

"Women are ineligible to all civil and public offices and therefore they cannot be judges, nor hold a magistracy, nor act as lawyers, judicial intercessors or procurators." (Dig., I, 16, 195).

This idea of female incapacity, was incorporated not only in Canon Law but also in our Civil Code, which, when it was first enacted, discriminated against females. The law, it appears, considered women incapable of acting judiciously and sought to protect them and, what it considered to be more important, society from the harmful consequences of feminine mental levity. Thus until

fairly recently women in general were excluded from holding such public offices as those of jurors and notaries public, while it allowed only *unmarried* women to administer their own property. All women, irrespective of status, were barred from making donations of over £50 without the consent of the husband if married, or "without the consent of their fathers or without the authority of the Court of Voluntary jurisdiction if the fathers are dead, absent, insane or interdicted, or without just cause refuses his consent" (section 1836 of the Civil Code before the amendments of 1973). Neither could a woman be appointed tutor of a minor either by the father or by the court (unless she was the mother — sec. 198) or curator of an absentee or interdicted person unless she was a near relative of the person requiring such assistance (sec. 198). These incapacities women shared with insane people, interdicted persons and minors and, in some cases, even with persons of a notoriously bad character.

Historically such a situation was easy to understand, within the context of Maltese society. Until fairly recently women in all spheres of life led a very sheltered existence, never bothering about the management of their own affairs, but perfectly content to leave them in the hands of the male members of their families. For the same reason too it was much later before the Maltese woman attained the same standard of education as the man. This is now, however, part of our history and the Government of Malta first recognised this fact in 1967 when it decreed that henceforth female government employees were to receive the same rate of pay as male employees doing the same kind of work. At about the same time too, it opened the office of notaries public to women holding the specified qualifications and in 1972 voluntary jury service for women was introduced. Finally Act no XLVI of 1973 removed all discrimination against women in the field of Civil Law as regards donations, tutorship and curatorship.

However while the discrimination against the *unmarried* woman has disappeared that against the *married* woman survives. Under Roman Law when a woman got married all rights over her were transferred from the head of her family to the head of her husband's family, who need not have been the husband himself. Under our law a woman who gets married loses most of her rights and is *obliged* to surrender them to her husband. This state of affairs is very old-fashioned and dates back to the time when

marriage, instead of being considered a *partnership freely entered into* by the two spouses, was regarded as another business transaction between the two heads of the respective families and, later, between the head of the bride's family on one side and the bridegroom on the other. (That this idea was at the back of the legislator's mind is held out by the definition which the law gives of dowry as "the property brought to the husband to support the burdens of marriage" (sec. 1292), a definition which, anyhow, has little meaning nowadays as more and more wives are making valid contributions to the family income). Very rarely did the bride have a say in the matter of her marriage. Thus it did not matter if upon marriage a woman simply surrendered her rights to her husband.

On the other hand the law safeguarded her against any unscrupulousness on the part of her husband by granting her redress, whenever she felt wronged upon the filing of an application to the Court of Voluntary Jurisdiction. In point of fact this protection was inadequate. First of all the procedures involved in seeking the protection of the Court were often long and expensive. Secondly, the Maltese woman, fearful of any social stigma which might be attached to appearing in Court, refrained from seeking the protection of the Court. Moreover it is often not easy to prove maladministration or unreasonable behaviour on the part of the injuring party.

Thus upon marriage a woman retains that property which belonged to her prior to her marriage (paraphernal property). Ownership of the dowry also remains hers and she becomes owner in partnership of any fruits which accrue out of such property (paraphernal or dotal) as well as of all that is acquired either by her or by her husband in the course of the marriage (community of acquests). However all administration rests solely in the husband. When one looks at marriage as a partnership freely entered into by both parties it is only right that anything which belongs to one partner should also belong to the same extent to the other. But in view of the fact that women are no longer considered to be intellectually inferior to men and in view of the fact that in today's society the woman's contribution to such property is notable why should she not be responsible for the administration of the property along with her husband? After all she was considered capable enough before marriage and she is considered by the law

to be an owner of the property to the same extent as her husband. Why should the husband possess the power to alienate the conjugal property without the wife's consent and the wife does not. The husband's consent should be taken for granted and formalities should only be required in the absence of such consent, the husband's and wife's powers to restrict each other's rights being equivalent.

The idea that this goes against the notion of the husband as the head of the family is no longer tenable as this idea is not one which should be imposed by the law, but one which should be decided upon by the contracting parties. In fact the law not only imposes it but in sec. 1282 lays down that "future spouses cannot enter into any agreement in derogation of any of the rights deriving from paternal authority or deriving from the husband as head of the family".

Just as untenable is the idea that by simply requesting the authority of the husband matters are made less complex. It should be just as simple for the husband to get the authorisation of the wife as for the wife to get the authorisation of the husband. Neither is it still true, as it may have been in the past, that the husband is usually the one who carries out transactions, connected with the administration of the conjugal property. In effect what often happens is that while the husband is working at his profession the wife looks after the business affairs of the family, affairs, which go far beyond those which are stated in the law as having the implicit authorisation and consent of the husband, that is, "in regards to agreements entered by the wife in respect of ordinary everyday household necessities" (sec. 1015). All that the husband does at the end is affix his signature to the deed. So why should not the law recognise something which has in fact become quite a common practice? In most conjugal matters the mutual authorisation of the parties should require proof to the same extent or it should be considered implicit both for the husband and for the wife. It is, in today's society, ridiculous to lay down that the wife's consent is implicit while that of the husband has to be proved.

On this basis our legislators have thought fit in the latest amendments to the civil code on the matter to repeal section 888 and section 7. The former laid down that a married woman cannot accept an "inheritance without the consent of the husband, or if this is impossible to obtain, without the authority of the Court".

while the latter stated that a married woman could not sue or be sued in civil matters without the assistance of the husband, a provision which was detrimental not only to the interests of the woman herself but also to those of society.

Another field in which the law discriminates against married women is in cases of legal separation. Here the law distinguishes between two kinds of separation — that by mutual consent which is carried out by public deed, in which case the parties agree upon the conditions which should regulate their future affairs, and contentious separation which is granted by the Court at the request of either of the parties. In this case the law makes detailed provisions regulating the affairs of the contestants both while the case is pending and after such separation has been declared by the Court. While the case is pending, the husband as head of the community of acquests may, and sometimes does, dispose of the property of the community with the result that when the time comes for the separation of property at the conclusion of the lawsuit, there may be no property left to divide, and this to the detriment not only of the wife but also of the children. In the first place this problem would be solved if the consent of both spouses is required before either of them can dispose of any assets which fall under the community of acquest. In default of this, bearing in mind the length of time that usually elapses between the inception and conclusion of a lawsuit concerning the separation of spouses, it should be possible, at the commencement of such cases, for a court order to be made debarring the husband from disposing of any property of the community, without the authorisation of the Court.

As to the effects of contentious separation the law distinguishes between cases where it is the wife who "gives cause to separation" and cases where it is the husband who gives "cause" to such separation. It states in section 57(1) that "where it is the wife who gives cause to the separation on any of the grounds mentioned in sections 45 and 48 (adultery or desertion by the wife) "it shall be lawful for the husband to retain, during the wife's lifetime, the usufruct of the dowry". Also "where the husband retains the usufruct as aforesaid, he shall be bound to supply maintenance to the wife, if she is indigent". Once after separation the marriage of the two spouses comes to an end in all its legal aspects, the law should not concern itself with who is to blame for the legal ending of the marriage and the wife should get back all her rights,

irrespective of fault, especially if there are no children to the marriage. Neither should she be allowed to become indigent in order to demand maintenance from her husband. It is always preferable that she should be allowed to maintain herself, in the first instance, out of her own property. (It should be remembered here that the wife remains the owner at law of her dotal property). In like manner the liquidation of the community of acquests with the subsequent return to the wife of the administration of what belongs to her, should not be dependent on a request to that effect, but should take place automatically on the declaration of such separation.

Another field in which a woman does not get a fair deal is in that of employment. All female government employees have it specifically laid down in their contract of work that upon marriage they have to resign their post. This same condition is also laid down in the contracts of work of several other female employees with private enterprises. Lately the Arbitration Tribunal has ruled against the plea that such a provision is invalid because it goes against the fundamental human rights of an individual which states that all men are equal irrespective of sex, a provision which is also included in our Constitution. The Court has not yet been called upon to decide whether marriage is considered to be a "just cause" for dismissal of a female employee, although there is no question of its being a "just cause" for the dismissal of a male employee under the employment Act. The unfairness of such a provision becomes very obvious when upon marriage a female employee is made to resign her post but because her services are considered indispensable, she is re-employed by the same employers under different conditions so that what happens in practice is that she gives the same amount of work but gets a lower salary for it. Similarly upon the decision of the Wages Council in 1972 whereby the wages of full time teachers in private schools was raised, a number of these schools terminated the employment of most of their full time staff and re-employed them as part-timers. It is true that in this case the number of teaching hours was reduced, but this was out of proportion with the effectual reduction in their salaries.

Thus it can be seen that although Act no. 46 of 1973, which amended some provisions of the Civil Code which deal with the status of women at law, can only be considered to be the first step in the right direction, there still exists in the law a certain

phraseology which is derogatory to the role of woman in society and there are still provisions, especially as regards the married woman, which need to be brought up to date in view of the changing role of women in Maltese society.

A new law enacted in November 1974 has laid down that when a post, which used to be filled by a man is vacated, it cannot be filled by a woman. The discrimination in this case is obvious. When discussed in the House of Representatives the bill was defended on the grounds that Malta was at the moment passing through an unemployment crisis. I do not agree that any greater hardship is involved when a man is unemployed than when a woman is. All things (qualifications etc.) being equal one might see the point of taking into consideration the particular circumstances of the case when choosing between a man and a woman to fill a post. Such may be the number of dependents the applicant has to support. But to legislate against the employment of women is not only discriminatory, but marks a step backwards in the road of full legal emancipation, which the present Government seems to have been following.

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## GIVING A FAIR CHANCE TO THE MALTESE WOMAN

by *Lucia Burgess*

To write about the status of women in our country is not an easy task. In the first place being a woman I might tend to be subjective, and although any article can never be entirely objective I would not like to be accused of being one sided in my arguments. Secondly, it is difficult to give a general view of our women today when there is a chasm between the "select" and the "ordinary" woman. By this I mean that generally speaking our women are still at an early stage of progress as compared with what other women in other countries have succeeded in achieving for themselves. We speak of having acquired a certain amount of independence, but is it independence we should fight for, when many other things, by far more important for us, are still lacking?

Of all things, *Education* should be our first priority. We women maintain that we should be treated on a par with men. We are proud of having been granted the right to vote thus sending members of our own choice to Parliament. But is having been given the vote such a positive landmark? It would have been if *all* women could use this right, knowing, because they understood, exactly, what they were doing; that is, if all women had the fundamental education to realise exactly what voting implies. Before we demand and expect others to respect us, we must respect ourselves. We must achieve self-confidence, clarity of thought, firmness of purpose to acquire and keep what we want. This means that we must have the necessary education to show that we are on the same level of maturity with women living in other countries and with the opposite sex. Today the majority of our young women have a secondary education and with school leaving age being extended to sixteen years still many more girls will be leaving school with a certain amount of preparation for life. The trouble is that only a small percentage of girls takes up higher education whereas men do so more often. This results in a chasm between the education of males and females. Many of us now know that a sound education gives greater maturity, more self-assurance and since one knows exactly where one is heading, naturally one would have more and more determination.

Earlier on I said that we have been given the right to send our representatives to Parliament. We use this right and we ought to be proud of it. Such pride would be justified only if we used our right well and we would be using such a right well if we voted knowing exactly what voting implied, if we thought that what counted was not what we would get if we voted for A and not for B, but what our nation obtained or proposed to attain if A and not B were in power. A good education would help a woman to think in terms of the general wellbeing not in terms of egoistic gains. Let us say for argument's sake that we had arrived at such an idealistic stage when voting and look at the other side of the coin, the candidates themselves, and here we must admit that we are a complete failure. Very few women come forward to contest an election with the result that among our representatives we have only two females and these belong only to *one* party. Do we attribute such an attitude to *lack of civic education*, to *lack of personal education*, to *apathy on our part* or to *intolerance from those surrounding us*? I would venture to say that we suffer from all these drawbacks. Many of us are brought up to feel that Parliament is an institution for the chosen few or that a political career is unsafe, unwise, unrewarding. Let us look at our second problem and be thoroughly sincere about it. What kind of help can an unlearned woman give to her constituents? What benefits can the country hope for if parliamentary representation is weak? We are here concerned with women. In this decade we have seen three famous women Prime Ministers, Mrs. Golda Meir of Israel, Mrs. Indira Gandhi of India and Mrs. Bandarnayke of Ceylon. Why cannot we look up to them and remember that in order to face up squarely to our male representatives in parliament we should be prepared by at least an education on a par with theirs? Naturally lack of enthusiasm and incentive lead to apathy and definitely as things are, few women dare face a public meeting or even consider asking for nomination as prospective candidates to contest an election. I believe that the sense of intolerance is the most difficult hurdle we have to overcome. This intolerance comes from **other** women and in particular from men. By now we are supposed to believe in the maxim 'United we stand, divided we fall.' but it appears that we have not stopped to consider its implications. It is very easy for us women to criticise other women either because we do not possess the will power to achieve what others have

achieved or because of our suspicions regarding these achievements. It is at this stage that a well educated woman stops to ponder over the reliability of her criticism and then fires away if what she stands up for, is, what is in her honest opinion *just and true*. The antagonism from the opposite sex owes itself to something altogether different from lack of intelligence, education or otherwise. It is a fact that for centuries, politics were wholly man's monopoly not only in our country but throughout the world (unless we think of *Cretan* civilization where a matriarchal system was in practice). Justifiably then, any problem that arose calling for responsibility and brain work was considered a man's job. We, in our insularity, are very slow to accept any radical changes and so our society finds it difficult to come to terms with the idea that a woman can do with the same amount of efficiency what a man has been doing for ages. I would not even hint at the possibility of a woman rising to greater heights than man. I would rather keep at equality. Until we can instil in our young boys and girls a fair sense of equal rights in every field we cannot hope for the situation to get any better. If a woman is still looked upon as an upstart if she drives a car, if she has a job, if she has a higher education, if she aspires to a seat in parliament, by people who should know better, then women should not look back but should show that they are worthy of any amount of responsibility entrusted to them. It is then and only then that they gain the confidence of others, even of those who look askance at any attempt by women to better their social status.

Let us now have a look at those women who don't aspire to a post in public life or at leadership: that is let us consider the ordinary woman who *must*, in spite of everything, have an education. It is a fact, that gradually we are moving towards a time when most women married or single, will have to take a job. It is then imperative, that working women in industry, in tourism, in schools, in all walks of life, should have the same protection as men do, and if they are doing the same kind of work and are working the same working hours they should command the *same* salary as men. This is social justice and no amount of prejudice should rule otherwise.

In various countries on the continent most women work because they have to, because they live alone and have to fend for themselves or because they have a family and the husband's wage

is not enough to tide over family expenses. Others work to assert themselves to develop their personality in various fields not necessarily rewarding economically but looking for professions which fulfil their sense of values — like social workers, doctors, nurses, councillors in different fields, police-women, judges and teachers. Women in Malta are often hampered by a multitude of factors when taking up a career. If a woman is employed by Government, she forfeits her job when she gets married, a practice which was followed by private concerns up to some time ago. To be fair we cannot altogether blame the authorities concerned for following such a policy when we consider the very limited amount of outlets and jobs on the island. It would appear unfair for both man and wife to have a job whereas a breadwinner might be out of work living on the dole. But we must also consider that this state of affairs is very frustrating to a woman and there is also the question of wastage of skill, experience and energy of the female who must necessarily choose between a job and marriage. In certain cases, that is in private enterprise, such a situation has been remedied but there is still much to be done. Up to last January for example we were still faced with the ridiculous situation of girls being allowed to read law at the University but then these same girls on graduating in jurisprudence were barred from exercising their profession as lawyers.

I must mention one particular type of woman — the full time mother and housewife. She is giving the State what basically constitutes the state — its citizens — and she does this not only by teaching sound principles to her children but also by passing on to them what she knows and what she has learnt because it is a universal truth that no one can give what he does not possess. So when the state is contributing towards the education and refinement of a woman, and when she in her turn is well turned out culturally and morally she can give her most valid contribution to the State. In fact the wisest State would be the one which sees to the wellbeing of *all* its citizens, because women are very much a part of the State and their education is a wise investment by any government. No wonder the great Napoleon said that the hand that rocks the cradle governs the world.

President J.F. Kennedy in one of his famous speeches once called on American citizens to ask themselves what they could do for their country rather than what their country could do for

them. I think that such an attitude on the part of citizens would be extremely praiseworthy. J.F. Kennedy was addressing an audience of both men and women, that is this applied to both sexes. If we consider the status United States women enjoy we understand that the State has contributed toward the wellbeing and education of the fair sex and so it is right in expecting women as well as men to contribute ungrudgingly and unselfishly so that the state can flourish. What about our status and our contribution to the State? I firmly believe that in spite of grave difficulties our women have loyally done their best for their country. Even when a great percentage of our female population was illiterate, still, good, honest and hardworking citizens were never lacking. When the island goes through periods of hard times the ingenuity of the Maltese woman knows no bounds and here I take the opportunity to mention what is called "black labour" which is still carried out not only here but also in other European countries. Many women, in order to help towards family expenses, perform manual work which is very poorly paid. In Sicily it takes the form of cutting bunches of grapes in the harvest time, gathering olives or sewing or braiding shoes. Here in Malta definitely lace making, an industry which should be protected, knitting and many kinds of handicrafts are very poorly paid. Besides killing incentives this is unjust. What is deplorable is that there would be little else to do if this work were not accepted, and other women are always ready to take on this work rather than to do nothing and thus gain nothing.

This is what I mean when I say that the State is right in asking for our contribution but then it would be failing miserably if it did not straighten up so many injustices and irregularities. Up to some time ago, that is before the 1st January 1974, women especially married women were looked upon by the state as irresponsible minors. Some of the laws which were out-dated and literally inhuman were amended or abolished but there is still much more to be done. Certain people with a very conservative outlook argue that if women are given rights of possession, equal rights of parenthood, rights of guardianship over their children, then they would abuse these rights. I would answer very briefly and to the point on such a matter. A woman who has taken on the married status is a mature person or should be, otherwise she should never have contracted marriage. If the State considers her mature enough to get married then she is

equally capable of shouldering the responsibilities of marriage. Until she is proved deficient she should be considered efficient in the same way as a man is considered capable until he is proved otherwise. And why was a man given red-carpet treatment, and very often he still is, unconditionally, while the woman simply because she is a woman has always to prove herself, which brings us back to the superiority complex enjoyed by the majority of our males and to the local prejudice against females? In a way, in a very limited form, such a situation is being remedied by a series of reforms. What is very important is that reforms passed by Government should operate effectively everywhere, for example in the Law Courts as well as in Banks. Then it is up to the woman herself to get to know her rights and then to use these rights wisely. Abusing one's rights or neglecting them shows a lack of responsibility and debases a woman's intelligence and dignity. To say that to give a woman her rights would be detrimental to marriage as an institution is again unfounded. Has giving man his rights as a dignified human being impaired marriage as an institution? It is again the abuse of man's rights that impairs a marriage not viceversa. So the same would apply to women. I feel that a man who respects and loves a woman as an equal gets so much more satisfaction out of his relationship with her than a man who looks upon his partner as inferior to himself.

Surely when it comes to inferiority and superiority we must accept our own limitations in physical strength but then we are superior in our spiritual aspirations and as such we are more conscious of a sense of duty than men. Such qualities in women, together with virtue, dignity, honour and sacrifice have made some men put certain women on a pedestal. No wonder Provencal poets called their lady *Domina* while Dante and Petrarch attained their highest peaks when praising their lady's virtues.

I would like to pause here to make a special reference to women's programmes on television and radio. These aim at enlightening women on various subjects like housekeeping, needlework and cookery. These programmes call for people who are dedicated to such a job. Surely the people sponsoring such programmes try to educate the average woman, especially the housewife by improving her tastes, by making her take interest in things

other than the daily humdrum life and by encouraging good grooming. It would be greatly beneficial if during such programmes women were coaxed into taking up hobbies as these would come in very useful later on in life. By this I mean hobbies other than those usually enjoyed by women, like a course in flower arranging, in some sport like tennis, horseriding or swimming or a course in lifesaving or first aid. It would be a change giving a relief and relaxation from daily tensions and at the same time it would open wider horizons for women and would give them a chance of mixing with people, of learning poise, or developing a kind of charm, their values of fairness of usefulness of creativity. Competitions, exhibitions would be some of the incentives which would surely attract many women as time goes on. A woman who has things other than housework to occupy her has no time for gossip and her hobbies make her feel important. She remains fresh and young because of her keen and genuine interest in what goes on around her. Hard, artificial, too-sophisticated women usually lose their feminine appeal and they are not exactly appealing.

Another way of educating our women would be to teach them the value of sport. Our women should never feel that sport is a waste of time. Besides the change one gets from the daily routine, sport provide stimulation of the mind, a kind of calculated risk, a feeling of comradeship, the opportunity of learning how to be a good loser and of how to yield with good grace. With all this in its favour therefore, our women must accept sport as a part of their daily life. It takes time to accept what only a short time before was "taboo" or dubbed a waste of time, but with the right approach, with the introduction of recreational centres, this should not prove excessively difficult.

If we had to compare our woman now to the Maltese woman of three or four decades ago we would notice that she has progressed immensely. Let us hope that she will keep on progressing however still retaining certain characteristics which are hers and those of most Mediterranean women. In cultivating new spheres she must remain a home lover, a good wife and a loving mother.

## WOMEN AND MALTESE POLITICS

*Lillian Sciberras*

There exists a commonly held assumption that men are superior to women in most areas of activity except child rearing and household management. This view has been mysteriously implanted in a good number of women. No doubt they theorise under the spell of the other 'superior' half.

In the areas of activity where women have become accepted — industry, offices, teaching posts, the civil service — they are confined in most cases, to the lower or middle levels of responsibility and decision making. In the Civil Service, the female citizen automatically loses the right to her employment if she decides to marry.

In this state of affairs women are the listeners — the audience, some even rising to the status of backstage assistants, watching a drama group composed of men.

Sometimes the audience is given a chance to speak, but it is not really listened to: it is merely part of the dramatic experience. The actors continue with their performance unmoved. They are the select half of the species. They are physically stronger and don't doubt they are intellectually superior, but above all they are men. The assumption is made fact!

From this unfavourable position in society women are expected to contribute to the political life of these islands — to experience the joys of ballot box democracy, to become members of the parties, possibly of their committees, and by sheer luck to sit with the men in the House of Representatives.

It is in the perspective of this unfortunate position that I shall attempt to observe their role in Malta's political life at the national level. Unfortunately this is an area which has been scantily or elusively documented, and what follows is necessarily a brief treatment of the subject without any claims at being comprehensively researched.

In Malta women form 51.6% of the population, and 53.3% of the electorate, their electoral suffrage having been granted in 1947.

Have individual women played any significant role in the

country's historical or political development? Let us look briefly at two national reference books. In Mifsud Bonnici's *Dizzjunarju bijo-biblijografiku nazzjonali* (published in 1960) 42 women are listed out of a total of 1600 entries. The vast majority of them appear presumably because they belonged to the nobility, were prominent nuns, or, as in most cases they are recorded as having financially contributed to the Church or charitable institutions. A few are noted for their artistic talents; two as having been politicians.

The most recent issue of *Malta Who's Who* (published in 1970) also lists 1600 people. Sixty of these are Maltese women, the largest group this time being pharmacists. Two are presently members of parliament; one was a member of parliament three times and is still politically active. None of the others claim to have had any interest in politics.

The Maltese political situation, as it has developed, is the natural consequence of an inherited feudal and colonial past and is not, in itself one that would provide a desired number of politically mature people capable of shouldering the responsibilities for national decisions. The number of men who can honestly be described as having been of the desired calibre has historically been small. In a society where men rule, the number of women must unfortunately be much smaller.

In Malta ordinary women citizens know only vaguely of the new female awareness in the developed and the more progressive developing countries. Knowledge of the extent of the demand for self-determination is almost alien to the Maltese woman, hence proportionate participation is a long way off. Her juridical incapacities were removed as recently as 1973, but her fair share in the government of the country will not be given to her unless she is willing to take up the task. Even what has been achieved so far is hardly due to militant liberation but to a benevolent paternalism.

The idea of women being allowed into the machinery of electing a government was a lengthy business, and was shelved for many years.

The Royal Commission on Maltese Affairs, 1931 (Chairman: Lord Askwith) provides what is probably the earliest official document in which the question of women's franchise is treated at some length.

Giving evidence for the Labour Party, Dr P. Boffa, condemning the then existing method of Plural voting, stated:

The Malta Labour Party expects that this injustice will be remedied by the abolition of Plural voting and the extension of franchise to each and every person. 1

What follows are extracts from the evidence given by Miss Mabel Strickland and from questions put to her by the Chairman of the Commission, both in her capacity as Asst. Secretary of the Constitutional Party, as well as representations of a personal nature. Her representations, however well-meaning, favoured only those women owning property, although she advocated the suffrage of all men on the Island.

*Miss Strickland:*..... I also beg leave to submit that men should enjoy universal suffrage in Malta. The property qualification in their case should be abolished... Women owning property in their own right should be given a vote as a first step towards the political emancipation of the women in Malta..... (Referring to the then existing hostility of the Church towards the supporters of the Constitutional and Labour Parties, she states): There is a further point as to what is happening in Malta to-day, and that is the persecution to which the women have been subjected. To my mind this in itself has earned them the right to have a limited franchise by which they can protest .....I am now back to the point of women's franchise on other lines. There are in Malta several ladies who are actively engaged in commerce and in looking after their own property..... There are others who have been V. A. D.'s in the war, and there are also women in the Civil Service — school teachers. There are also, I understand, 24 women on the district committees of the Labour Party; and although the Labour Party have not put forward this, I understand that it has their support to a very large extent. As regards our own party it has also not been put forward, but it has a fairly good support in a section of our executive committee.....

*Chairman:* There are other questions, I suppose, in which the interests of women are involved such as infantile mortality? *Miss Strickland:* Certainly, and emigration.

*Chairman:* Are you in favour of complete sex equality? I will put it in this way. In Great Britain the precedent was to allow a gradual expansion of the female electorate?  
*Miss Strickland:* That is certainly my view at the moment — gradual expansion. <sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, a petition supporting Miss Strickland's proposals, signed by 428 women in favour of the recognition of the political rights of women in Malta and Gozo was placed before the Royal Commissioners. The petition, dated 12 June 1931, included the following clauses which are particularly noteworthy:

2. We feel that the time has undoubtedly come for the recognition of the right of women in Malta to take part in the deliberations of the Parliament of the Island, in view of their already active interest in public life, and we petition that their claims as citizens should receive full attention in the event of the Constitution being amended or placed on a permanent and improved basis.

5. We sincerely believe that women's influence and increased participation in the public life of Malta will be conducive to the better government of these Islands and will strengthen the sentiments of heartfelt loyalty to Our Gracious Sovereign and the bonds that unite Malta to His Majesty's other Dominions. <sup>3</sup>

Clause 3, sections a and b, however, again deliberately suggests that franchise for women should be tied to the property qualification, the ability to read and write, and the age of 25 years, even if franchise were to be extended to all men over 21 years, as had been suggested.

Despite these petitions and suggestions the Imperial Government was not moved. In the Royal Commission's report, published a year later, it was coldly suggested that the matter be temporarily shelved:

The question of votes for women was referred to but did not appear to have support from any political party... A petition, signed by women, asking for the recognition of votes for women, was sent to us, but the suggestion was not pressed and we had no other evidence that the extension would be acceptable. It has nothing to do with

the present situation in the Island... In view of the conditions prevailing in Malta we are unable at the present time to propose that women should be admitted to the franchise. If any desire is evinced in that direction, the movement should come from Malta itself and an alteration should not be imposed from outside. 4

This last paragraph appears particularly curious since the petition referred to earlier was, in any case, the work of Maltese women.

Sixteen years and a World War later a Colonial Office document briefly mentions again the question of women's suffrage, this time recommending it. Clause 11 states:

It will be noted with interest that the National Assembly have recommended the extension of the suffrage to women. The Constitution will leave the question of suffrage to be dealt with by law of the Maltese Legislature, but His Majesty's Government take this opportunity of expressing their approval of this recommendation. 5

So the 1947 Constitution was the first in Malta to include universal suffrage. Without even once mentioning them, women were granted the vote, together with a large part of the rest of the population, hitherto deprived of it. Without much fuss Clause 13 reads:

Subject to the provisions of section 14 of these Letters Patent, any person, who is a British subject of the age of twenty-one years or upwards and who is ordinarily resident in Malta and has been so resident for a period of not less than twelve months immediately preceding his registration, shall be entitled to be registered as a voter at the election of Members of the Assembly... 6

With suffrage finally secured, women proceeded in large numbers to cast their votes, and in exceptionally small numbers to stand for parliamentary elections. A few convincing females managed to get elected, and since 1947 female representation has remained uninterrupted, even if, at times, through only one representative.

*Contd. on p. 380*

## Parliamentary Elections 1947-1971

Year	Women contesting	Elected	Percentage given to female candidates out of total first preference votes
1947	Agatha Barbara (MLP) Helene (Lily) Buhagiar (DAP)	Agatha Barbara	3.205
1950	Fanny Attard Bezzina (MLP) Agatha Barbara (MLP) Genoveffa Boffa (BLG) Carmelina Borg Dingli (B.L.G.) Cecilia DeTrafford Strickland (CP) Marie Louise Muscat Manduca (NP) Maria Pisani (D.A.P.) Mabel Strickland (CP) Therese Vassallo Mallia (CP)	Agatha Barbara    Cecilia DeTrafford Strickland   Mabel Strickland	5.409

Year	Women contesting	Elected	Percentage
1951	Fanny Attard Bezzina (MLP)	Fanny Attard Bezzina	6.072
	Agatha Barbara (MLP)	Agatha Barbara	
	Mary Bartolo (MWP)		
	Carmelina Borg Dingli (MWP)		
	Cecilia DeTrafford Strickland (CP)	Cecilia DeTrafford Strickland	
1953	Marie Louise Muscat Manduca (NP)		5.453
	Mabel Strickland (CP)	Mabel Strickland	
	Emmanuela Aquilina (MLP)		
	Agatha Barbara (MLP)	Agatha Barbara	
	Cecilia DeTrafford Strickland (CP)		
1955	Mary Anne Ganado (MLP)		5.544
	Marie Louise Muscat Manduca (NP)		
	Mabel Strickland (PCP)		
	Carmela Grech (NP)		
	Mary Anne Ganado (MLP)		
	Cecilia DeTrafford Strickland (MLP)	Agatha Barbara	

Year	Women contesting	Elected	Percentage
1962	Agatha Barbara (MLP)	Agatha Barbara	4.575
	Evelyn Bonaci (MLP)		
	Mary Cachia (CDP)		
	Maria Carmela Ciancio (CWP)		
	Carmela Grech (NP)		
	Paola Muscat (DNP)		
	Marie Louise Muscat Manduca (CWP)		
	Mabel Strickland (PCP)	Mabel Strickland	
1966	Agatha Barbara (MLP)	Agatha Barbara	3.710
	Evelyn Bonaci (MLP)	Evelyn Bonaci	
	Carmen Farrugia (DNP)		
	Marie Joan Morana (CWP)		
	Mabel Strickland (PCP)		
1971	Agatha Barbara (MLP)	Agatha Barbara	3.065
	Evelyn Bonaci (MLP)	Evelyn Bonaci	
	Mabel Strickland (PCP)		
	Tania Xerri (PCP)		

*Abbreviations used:* BLG Boffa Labour Group; CP Constitutional Party; CDP Christian Democratic Party; CWP Christian Workers Party; DAP Democratic Action Party; DNP Democratic Nationalist Party; MLP Malta Labour Party; M.W.P. Malta Workers Party; NP Nationalist Party; PCP Progressive Constitutional Party.

*Sources:* Malta Government Gazette, 1947, 1950, 1951, 1953, 1955, 1962, 1966, 1971; Joseph A. Xerri. *Storja fil-qosor tal-elezzjonijiet f'Malta*. (Valletta: Union Press) 1971; Times of Malta.

*Contd. from p. 376.*

Since, as we have seen, women do constitute a majority in both the Maltese population and the electorate, why has female representation remained so proportionately low? Apart from the fact that economically they, as yet, represent only just over 24% of the total work force, it is probable that women still believe that what takes place in the political arena, like football, is really a man's sport. The female today, despite her pretensions of a modern, daring outlook, doesn't yet feel secure enough in her new awareness to pass on parliamentary business to members of her own sex, and the men are voted in irrespectively. It is a fact that the prevailing mentality is conditioned by the supposed superiority, and *de facto* authority of the male: this is reflected in many areas of activity in Maltese society, the reasons for this being varied, and the conditioning deep rooted.

Female participation in Maltese political life has already been touched upon by Jeremy Boissevain who has made valid and original observations.

Out of the two major parties now dominating the political life of Malta, the preference of female candidates for the Labour Party has been noted, and a possible reason put forward by him for the Nationalist Party's dearth of female candidates is explained here:

It may be argued that this is because the Nationalists are more conservative, and therefore opposed women leaving the domestic for the political arena. This may be so. 7

This is more than likely correct. I might add as another possible reason that the Maltese working class or lower middle class woman (constituting the majority of Labour support) is by breeding and disposition more equipped for the inevitably rough times encountered in election campaigns than the middle and upper middle class woman who forms the bulk of female support for the Nationalists. Economic and social necessities, moreover, are felt more directly by the working class woman, who through her experiences on the shop floor is frequently driven to decisions of a political nature, even if solely within the area of trade union activity.

Another observation by Boissevain that is of particular significance is his division of the roles of the sexes in political work: ...men provide the formal leadership and formulate policy; women are the most outspoken defenders of that policy and convert word to action. 8

Emotional involvement on the part of women may here be evident, not necessarily ruling out emotion in the policy and leadership provided by men. It is on realising this that it becomes necessary for women to become conscious of their traditional role. Without losing their ability for action it will become increasingly necessary for them to examine with greater care what they are advocating, and eventually use their creative resources in formulating policies aimed towards a position of natural equality, a position which will hopefully (perhaps optimistically) be arrived at with time, education, and a proper realisation of their hitherto frustrated potential.

From the few women who have actively played their part in the parliamentary or electoral sphere, two names require a special mention, Miss Agatha Barbara & Miss Mabel Strickland.

Agatha Barbara, born in Zabbar in 1924 of a working class background, has a number of 'firsts' to her credit. She was the first woman to be elected to the Maltese Parliament, and has retained her hold on a parliamentary seat at each general election since 1947. She is so far the only woman to enter the cabinet. She served as Minister of Education from 1955 to 1958, and again since 1971, and has been responsible for several important reforms in her ministry. She has represented Parliament, the Maltese Government and the Malta Labour Party at several international meetings besides her work in the party executive as well as other committees, which has been noteworthy. In the 1958 struggle with the colonial authorities she was the only woman to have been arrested and imprisoned, thus also acquiring the status of political prisoner.

Completely different in background and political beliefs, Mabel Strickland, O.B.E., now in her mid-seventies, continues, outside parliament with her journalistic and political endeavours, having been an active journalist and publisher for over forty years. Born in Malta in 1899 into the aristocratic family of the

Stricklands, she spent a number of her early years in Australia where her father was Governor of various states. It is inevitable to mention Lord Strickland's importance in Maltese affairs (he was Prime Minister from 1921 to 1930) when discussing his daughter's political career. She held the post of Assistant Secretary to the Constitutional Party from 1921 to 1945, and was the first to raise the question of women's suffrage. She reconstituted the Constitutional Party after its dissolution and founded the Progressive Constitutional Party which she has led since 1953. She was elected to Parliament three times but has remained unsuccessful in securing representation since 1966.

It is important not to overlook the representation of women at the local, district, and national levels of the machinery of the political parties. These exercise a direct influence on the electors and the party in government or opposition. In this respect, participation by females has, on the whole not been encouraging enough, and it is essential that many more feel the consciousness for contributing to this type of activity. From the documentation available it is difficult to assess the historical contribution that individual women have given to political advancement in the past. Liza Fenech, for instance, is acknowledged as having been the first woman to actively assist the Labour Party even before franchise. Like her, other unnamed women have undoubtedly given their share as pioneers in local politics.

Although the parties' present statutes don't make any specific sexual distinction, and avenues are in principle open to everybody at all levels of participation, it has become common practice to encourage women to form separate sections and movements rather than the more desirable form of full and equal participation necessary for a proper exchange of views and ideas. Ultimate emancipation will come by working as partners with men, not separately from them.

At organised political meetings, rallies, and conferences, on the other hand, female attendance varies from poor to fair to encouraging. Activities organised by the party youth movements seem to be especially attractive to younger women. Perhaps a definite sign at last!

Finally it is of vital importance to consider the enormous changes that the Maltese economy has undergone since the end

of World War II, and just as vital to note the changes in Maltese society, and its values, produced by this economic movement. It would be reasonable to assume that the first moves towards the liberation of woman in Malta started with her entry into the industrial sector of the economy and its related services as an essential supply of labour. Although her talents and energy were subject to exploitation nevertheless (she was in most cases paid for her labour considerably less than her male colleague), she has learnt by observation that she is important to the community in ways not hitherto dreamed of. Her future contribution to the economy will undoubtedly be greater as industrial expansion gains momentum.

The lesson to be learnt now is more important still: her present economic contribution, as soon as realised in its full implications, is bound to result in a greater awareness of her potential to associate at all levels in every sector to which she has become important, not least among these will be the political sector.

#### References

1 Gt. Britain. Malta Royal Commission, 1931. *Minutes of Evidence*. (Malta: Government Printing Office, 1931) p. 60.

2 Royal Commission on Maltese Affairs. *Minutes of Evidence of the Hon. Mabel Strickland*. (Valletta: Progress Press, 1931) pp. 24-26.

3 *Ibid.* pp. 35-36.

4 Gt. Britain. Malta Royal Commission, 1931. *Report*. (London: HMSO, 1932) p. 90.

5 Gt. Britain. Colonial Office. *Malta Statement of Policy on Constitutional Reform*. (London: HMSO, 1947) p. 10.

6 Malta. *Constitution, 1947*. (Valletta: Government Printing Office, 1947) p. 10.

7 Jeremy Boissevain. "Some Notes on the Position of Women in Maltese Society". *Nord Nytt* 3 (1972) pp. 208-209.

8 *Ibid.* p. 208.