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EDUCATIONAL CONSTRUCTION IN MALTA

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The development of educational institutions in Malta is seen as being influenced mainly by geographical, religious and political factors The development of public primary schooling from 1838 onwards is outlined, with particular reference to problems which arose in connection with the use of a second language Despite the concerted efforts of the 1950s, post-primary education has been slow to expand Third-level education has been marked by a number of significant innovations (in university, teacher training and technological colleges) over the last twenty years

The 'educational explosion' which has taken place during the past three decades is usually seen as an agent of democracy Whether in deference to human rights, or in pursuit of economic objectives, states have found plenty of inducements to foster the talents of all their citizens for life in a more complex world Yet, paradoxically, the explosion has also threatened to produce a new kind of educational inequality Small, unproductive or backward communities are hard put to keep pace with the technological progress of their more fortunate neighbours In particular, communities with a surplus population, which must emigrate to live, are confronted with the problem of how to prepare their emigrants for a worthwhile place in some highly-industrialized environment Malta, the subject of the present case-history, makes a fruitful study for the comparative educationist because of her island position, and her intimate relationship with several different European cultures Unavoidably, perhaps, the development of Maltese educational institutions has depended on a large measure of international co-operation In general, three groups of factors—geographic, religious and political—may be seen to be of special significance

Lying midway between Gibraltar and Lebanon, the Maltese Islands mark what is almost the exact geographic centre of the Mediterranean Sicily is 58 miles to the north, Tripoli 220 miles to the south, and Tunis 200 miles to the west For many centuries, Malta has been a point of contact between Europe and North Africa, and between the Christian and Moslem worlds Maltese culture, while largely dominated by the Italian influences of Sicily, is therefore an amalgam of many different roots Even more important however, is the dependence of the Maltese population on employment overseas The total area of the three largest islands (Malta, Gozo and Comino) is only 122 square miles, there is a singular lack of natural resources, vegetation being sparse and the soil rocky Emigration has

become a necessary part of national policy in face of a population rise from 242,000 in 1922 to 312,668 in 1950 Since the Second World War an official Department of Emigration has developed close contacts with English-speaking countries abroad Though in 1950, for the first time, emigration exceeded the natural increase in population, this rate has not been maintained, while the run-down of British military bases since 1957 has reduced opportunities for employment at home still further (19) In educational terms the effect of the situation has been two-fold official policy has come to emphasize the need to provide preparation for technical employment overseas, while, and particularly since the Parish Migration Conference of 1950, foreign assistance has concentrated on schemes for vocational education

Religious influences took on a characteristic form during an occupation by the Order of St John of Jerusalem (1530-1798), when the islands proved of considerable strategic importance in the defence of Christendom against the Turks During 1565 Malta withstood a determined siege by Turkish forces, one year later the foundation-stone was laid of the city of Valletta, a place which both Napoleon and Nelson described as 'the greatest stronghold in Europe' (6) As the embodiment of a vigorous military tradition of Christianity the Catholic Church holds a position of remarkable strength in the islands When Napoleon was foolish enough to interfere with the liberties of the Church, during his brief occupation in 1802, he caused the failure of his scheme for both technical and elementary schools, on the lines of those in Revolutionary France (2) British occupation coming as the direct result of the religious revolt against the French, rested upon close co-operation with the Church When, during 1964, Malta became an independent state within the Commonwealth, Chapter One of her Constitution laid down that the 'teaching of the Roman Catholic faith shall be provided in all state schools' (6) The state system of education, while under wholly secular control, is impregnated through and through with Catholic ideals

Religious instruction receives more painstaking and enterprising scrutiny than any other part of the school curriculum It is supervised by a clerical Departmental Inspector, who is assisted by twelve Spiritual Directors In addition, the Archbishop of Malta, and his suffragan the Bishop of Gozo, perform the prodigious task of examining the children in each school every year, frequently producing lengthy reports for the attention of the Education Department Compulsory tests in religious knowledge are, in fact, imposed for all school examinations above the lower classes of primary schools (9), for admission to training colleges (17), and (under Article 98

of the *Statute* promulgated in 1935) for admission to the Royal University of Malta * A recent tendency has been to promote a sense of liturgical worship among children by the celebration of a 'family mass' in the school precincts, and all new school buildings are now designed with facilities for this purpose (18)

Catholic domination of the school curriculum is made possible by the absence of a non-Catholic minority of any significant size Yet the part played by the Church in Maltese education is not only due to its privileged position as the established faith of the land The Church is seen as an instrument for inculcating good citizenship and social conscience As one recent Director of Education (Joseph Brennan) decided, religious instruction 'should not be limited to the enlightenment of the child's mind as to the principles of Christian doctrine, but should proceed hand in hand with the training of the child in the practice of his religious duties, thus initiating him into a good Christian life' (9, p 443) It is largely with social objectives in mind, that the Church has been encouraged to give unity and meaning to the entire process of education Moreover, quite apart from the state system of education in Malta, there is a body of fee-paying independent schools, most of which are under direct Church control † Such schools serve the demands of the more affluent sections of the population in a way common to several other European systems of education However, the common influence of the Church is the main reason why there is no sharp distinction between state and private sectors, such as is so evident in the case of the United Kingdom

Finally, it must be noted that Malta's constitutional position under British rule was never one of subservience As an official spokesman put it in the House of Lords, during 1839, the Maltese people, 'by their own act of authority, *voluntarily assented* to the protection of Great Britain' (4) The Maltese retained considerable control over internal affairs under successive constitutions produced in 1813, 1849, 1887 and 1921 (though the last was suspended for some years because of unstable relations between political parties) (1) Close association with the British armed services, and a common experience of resistance to enemy action during the Second World War, has given the Maltese a genuine admiration for British institutions While sacrificing little of their own cultural traditions,

*Article 2 of the Statute of Malta University states that 'the Roman Catholic Religion is the basis of instruction and no teaching inconsistent with its principles is permitted '

†In 1966 there were 76 primary and 27 secondary schools under private control, with altogether 17,053 pupils The comparable figures for state schools were 113, 14 and 42,235 respectively Thus 28 percent of the population was attending independent institutions (20)

they have relied heavily on the results of educational experiment in the United Kingdom, and moved closely in step with British practice

PRIMARY EDUCATION

The first public school system in Malta was designed along the lines of recommendations made by a Royal Commission in 1838 Religion aroused no controversy, in striking contrast to the difficulties experienced by National Education in Ireland during the same period Since *all* children at government schools would be Catholics, it seemed reasonable to the Commissioners that religious instruction should be directed exclusively by the Catholic clergy 'the parish priest should have access to the school-room at all hours, and should be allowed to use it out of school hours for the purpose of instructing the children in the religion of their parents and country' (5, p 5) Thus, the system was frankly committed to Catholic interests from the beginning A more perplexing problem was presented by the languages to be taught The Commissioners considered that Italian would be more useful than any other language, with the exception of the Maltese vernacular, accordingly, they recommended that as soon as a child had learned to read Maltese, he should be taught to read and write Italian, English was to be taught only if there was time during the later years at school (5)

An official assessment of the success of these arrangements was made by Sir Patrick Keenan, Resident Commissioner for National Education in Ireland, who made an examination of Maltese education on behalf of the Colonial Office, during the autumn of 1878 His report makes in the main dismal reading, standards were low, teachers badly trained, and equipment exceedingly short

> At Zeitun, although the house is large and commodious, I found forty-five little boys packed together in one small room, at Crendi, the sixteen boys in the first class were kept in a dark and unventilated apartment which was separated from the principal one by a yard, at Zebbug, a class-room downstairs was very unwholesome, at Vittoriosa Girls' School, although the school-house is magnificent, and contains splendid halls (which are unused), the infants are huddled together in a small stifling room Indeed, throughout all the schools, the first class (the little children) fared worst, as a general rule, in the accommodation assigned to the pupils (5, p 5)

Keenan was apparently the first to recommend sending Maltese teachers for training in Catholic colleges in England, a suggestion which was not put into practice for more than a half-century afterwards He showed himself to be highly critical of the preferential treatment given to the teaching of Italian The effect, he decided, was to discourage efficient instruction in Maltese, and in any branch of knowledge imparted through its medium In utter consistency with views which he had already expressed concerning the absurdity of teaching Irish-speaking children in Ireland through the medium of English (21) he argued that it was necessary to give early lessons through the language of the home 'The education of the children frequenting the primary schools must be based upon the principle of teaching them how to read their native Maltese language as correctly as English children of the junior classes are taught how to read English in an English National School' (5, p 91) Moreover, observing a contrast between the rapid growth of the English language amongst the Maltese population and its scanty treatment in schools, he considered that 'there would be nothing revolutionary, violent or unjust' in the replacement of Italian by English He would have made English the language of instruction at secondary and university level (5)

Though Keenan's views were based on educational considerations alone, they helped to precipitate a rift in Maltese society which was to last for many years afterwards On one side were the influential Italian-speaking professional classes to whom their language was something of a class symbol by virtue of the fact that it was used by the clergy, the courts and the university On the other was a pro-English, or *reformista* group, later to blossom into Gerald Strickland's Constitutional Party during the 1920s, anxious for sweeping constitutional and social reforms, they saw in the English language a means of extending democratic influence British administrators, for their part, viewed these dissensions with dismay, and attempted to remove the language issue from politics, the 1921 constitution, section 57, stipulated that 'nothing shall be done by way of legislation or administration which shall diminish or detract from the position of English as an official language, or to reduce its use in education or in the public service' However, language remained a source of friction until the first Italian bombs of the Second World War drove the Maltese into closer unity (2)

After the war the requirements of the emigration programme led to a general acceptance of English as the medium of instruction at all school levels The use of English as the medium for all infant classes after 1952 might well seem unwise in view of Keenan's observations concerning the

language of the home, while a large majority of Maltese are likely to be bilingual, there may well be a need for the consideration of educational difficulties in individual cases Moreover, it seems regrettable that the study of other languages should have been dropped for some years from the primary school timetable This defect was removed in 1962 when, on the instructions of a Nationalist government, Italian and French were introduced as optional subjects in the final year (16)

The Second World War, which brought extensive damage to Maltese towns, was largely instrumental in causing a major overhaul of the school system The chief architect of the revised system was an Irishman, Joseph Brennan, who served as Director of Education from 1940 to 1949 Brennan's initial problem was to ensure the smooth running of regulations for compulsory attendance between the ages of six and fourteen, which became statutory in 1946 The question of compulsion was not in itself significant since the majority of parents showed themselves well aware of the advantages of instruction, in 1946, for instance, while 39,859 children attended voluntarily, only 4,561 were compelled to attend, and 624 failed to obey the law (9) A far more pressing problem was the need to make available teachers and equipment for a primary school population which had jumped from 27,000 in 1939 to 45,000 in 1946 (8) Brennan was forced to rely on a series of makeshift arrangements, private houses were requisitioned as school buildings, school furniture was manufactured by local tradesmen, infant classes (and later all primary classes) were placed on 'half-time'—an arrangement by which the same teacher and classroom served for two successive classes of children Few were more aware of the educational shortcomings of such arrangements than Brennan himself, they were, he explained, 'a specific remedy to an abnormal situation (which would) not be retained longer than necessary' (9) In operation, the scheme proved more expensive than originally anticipated, was abused by teachers who were anxious to augment their incomes, and gave little attention to 'the real education of the child, the moulding of his character' (7) Yet, when withdrawn by a Labour administration in 1948, it had already given valuable time for the preparation of plans for teacher-training

POST-PRIMARY EDUCATION

The extension of post-primary facilities presented immeasurably greater problems of finding finance, accommodation and staff The only major reform which Brennan was able to accomplish during his term of office was the replacement of scholarships by a system of graded fees, remarkably

similar to that devised for Northern Ireland by the Hall Thompson plan of 1947 It could now be said that no child was excluded from the advantages of secondary education for lack of means Yet the number of places available remained pitifully few At the Lyceum (the only state-maintained grammar school for boys), 660 applications were received in 1945 for the 166 places available Opportunities for girls were slightly more favourable, partly because parents were slower to appreciate the advantages of secondary schooling for their daughters, and partly because the facilities of the Girls' Lyceum had been extended during 1943 by converting three central schools formerly used for the training of teachers (8) By 1955 the participation of primary school leavers in further formal education was only eight per cent, seven per cent going to grammar schools and one per cent to technical schools (12)

When plans for the development of post-primary schools took shape during the mid 1950s, they rested upon revolutionary new assumptions concerning the needs of Maltese society Successive Directors of Education had remarked 'an extraordinary prejudice' against technical education, which was thought suitable only for those of inferior ability, ambitious parents continued to aim at placing their sons in one of the learned professions (8) However, increasing government participation in emigration programmes produced an official awareness of the need for technical training In addition, a British Defence White Paper of 1957, foreshadowing the run-down of Malta as a military base, made necessary the construction of some new form of industrial economy For these reasons it was decided that the main expansion in secondary facilities would take the form of secondary technical schools, three being planned for boys, and one for girls Yet, so far from allowing the growth of a divisive school structure of the kind which had emerged in England since 1944, it was intended that there should be equality of status between technical and grammar institutions, equality was to be achieved by allowing pupils in both to sit for GCE examinations, and to engage in the specialist study of a Sixth Form, while their teachers were granted equality of status irrespective of the type of school in which they served Tuition fees were abolished in all post-primary schools during 1955 (12)

The chief obstacle to the success of these plans lay in the scarcity of suitable staff Few graduate teachers were available, though their number had increased since 1946 when arrangements were made for the secondment of staff from the United Kingdom (9) Teachers of technical subjects were scarcer still The solution decided upon—to send candidates for training in technical colleges in England—was undoubtedly the most economical

arrangement possible, yet it also had the merit, as Maltese educationists were quick to appreciate, of countering the disadvantages of geographic isolation by providing 'experience gained outside the narrow limits of our shores' (12) After the introduction of the Commonwealth Teacher Training Scheme in 1960, about twenty-three candidates were sent every year for combined academic and training courses (14)

A further obstacle was presented by the shortage of finance The task of building new secondary technical schools threw a severe strain on Maltese resources, and prevented any major expansion of grammar school facilities In 1959 it proved possible to erect new buildings for the Lyceum, which now contained, for the first time, facilities for the study of the sciences at sixth form level, yet the number of Lyceum places available was still inadequate, while the size of the institution (1,500 boys) seemed undesirably large (13) Shortage of grammar school places resulted, after 1961, in the award of 100 state-sponsored places annually in independent schools—in itself a fortunate arrangement, since it set a precedent for co-operation between state and private sectors of education (17)

Moreover, parental distrust of the secondary technical schools proved exceedingly difficult to uproot It was not generally appreciated that the new institutions differed from technical schools proper in that they provided an academic education with preparation for scientific courses in the university The successful establishment of the Sixth Form in one secondary technical school during 1963 did something to improve the situation Yet it seemed evident that facilities must be provided for technological studies at an advanced level if public interest was to be engaged

Malta's participation in the Paris Conference of 1950 had already resulted in a large measure of external assistance towards the promotion of scientific and technical subjects Initially, this had been concentrated on the production of skilled workers for service overseas, in 1956, for instance, the International Labour Organization sent a team of four experts from Australia to organize courses in building, mechanical engineering and metalwork (12), in 1963 a Technical Institute was established at Paula mainly through the support of the Colonial Development and Welfare Fund (17) When, however, during the early 1960s plans were pushed forward for a College of Art, Science and Technology, it seemed that a powerful new inducement was about to be provided for the study of technical subjects in post-primary schools With opportunities for careers in science and technology at the highest level, some at least of the traditional inhibitions of Maltese society might be expected to break down

TERTIARY EDUCATION

The Royal University of Malta, unlike most colonial universities, is a venerable institution, having been founded as a Jesuit college in 1592 and raised to university status by Pope Clement XIV in 1769 (3) Nevertheless, its development during the post-war period has set a headline for other institutions in former colonial territories The Report of the Asquith Commission on Colonial Universities in 1944 made two far-reaching recommendations that colonial universities should enjoy the same autonomy in their own administration as was usual for similar institutions in the United Kingdom, that an inter-university council should co-ordinate the work of universities in the United Kingdom with that of those overseas (22) Both recommendations received the unqualified approval of the Royal University of Malta When, during the summer of 1946, Vice-Chancellor I L Evans visited Malta as representative of the newly-constituted Inter-University Council, he agreed to recommend claims totalling £125,000 from the Colonial University Grants Committee At the same time the University undertook to reform its constitution on the lines laid down by the Asquith Commission Under the terms of *Ordinance No XXXII*, passed by the Council of Government in 1947, a University Council was set up, with power to make new statutes and amend existing ones, while the interests of the academic staff were safeguarded by reserving certain rights to the Senate (23)

Since 1947, assistance has been provided by the Colonial University Grants Committee on an even more generous scale As one result of financial stability, the University was enabled to proceed with the erection of new buildings, the first of which were occupied during the autumn of 1967 A suburban campus was chosen, on a lofty site overlooking Msida Creek Significantly, perhaps, the College of Art, Science and Technology is less than a mile away, it was clearly intended that the work of both institutions should be closely co-ordinated in the future The buildings themselves, while strikingly similar in character to the new universities of Essex and Kent, are grouped collegiate-style around one central quadrangle, and present an intriguing interpretation of the English university tradition on overseas soil Among a reasonably full spread of professional faculties, there is as yet no department of education An attempt to provide evening classes for a Diploma in Education, during 1949, failed through lack of co-operation between the state and University authorities, it was the opinion of the former that mere 'paper qualifications,' gained without residence or other character-building influences, would contribute little to

the training of a teacher, and must be inferior to courses available in the training colleges (7) While a purely academic study of education, out of contact with the practical work of schools, is of doubtful value in any system of education, it would seem that the University could be used to supply two outstanding deficiencies in Maltese education first, there is a need for research, which is now taken second-hand from the United Kingdom, and may have little relevance to local educational conditions, second, and even more important, there is a place for courses of training specially suited to secondary teachers, for whom the training colleges have been unable to make provision

The provision of training facilities for primary teachers came during Joseph Brennan's period of office as Director of Education, and as the result of arrangements which he had made with Catholic teaching orders in England A one-year course for both men and women candidates opened in October 1947 under the auspices of the Sacred Heart Sisters In 1949 this was transformed into a one-year residential course for women alone However, in Brennan's view, it seemed desirable to carry the advantages of residence much further, on the grounds that 'teachers need to be well-educated men as well as men of knowledge in order to see the idea of service to the community and the practice of social virtues, residence is most necessary' (9, p 443) Moreover, a two-year course was necessary if Maltese teachers were to have qualifications good enough to allow them to serve overseas Since government resources were still inadequate to build a new training college, the Sisters went ahead with plans on their own initiative, and Mater Admirabilis Training College was opened by Queen Elizabeth II in 1954 Meanwhile, the Brothers of the Christian Schools had begun the instruction of men candidates in premises which were so inadequate that their Principal described them as 'an ideal holiday house for a family ' The extreme urgency of their needs produced a grant from the United Kingdom Exchequer for the construction of St Michael's Training College, which opened in 1954 (10)

The opening of a College of Art, Science and Technology at Msida in 1963 represented a courageous venture in face of the absence of any tradition of advanced technological education in the islands UNESCO arranged both for the provision of expatriate lecturers from the United Kingdom, and for the training of local staff on courses abroad From the outset, courses were available leading to the B Sc degree of the Royal University of Malta, and to the certificate of the Royal Society of Arts, and the City and Guilds Institute Since preference was given to high academic standards rather than economic numbers of students, the College had been, unavoid-

ably, a costly experiment (17) The cost is likely to continue since, until graduates in technology are available in large numbers, it will be impracticable to provide sixth form preparation in all secondary schools Nevertheless, seen in long-term perspective, the experiment in technology is likely to have revolutionary effects on the Maltese education system as a whole

CONCLUSION

Educational developments in Malta cannot be viewed in isolation They are largely a commentary on international co-operation in education, and show that the machinery of the Commonwealth, UNESCO and even NATO can be used to far-reaching educational effect Yet this should not obscure the value of the experience which the Maltese have achieved on their own initiative They have evolved a unique partnership between Church and State in which each has co-operated closely with the other in a national system of education They have found it possible to entrust considerable social responsibility to a teaching profession which is almost entirely lay Finally, in their search to make technical instruction more acceptable to the Maltese people as a whole, they have come to emphasize their belief in the interdependence of all subjects in the school curriculum, and their intention to avoid, so far as their resources will allow, the creation of barriers in education

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