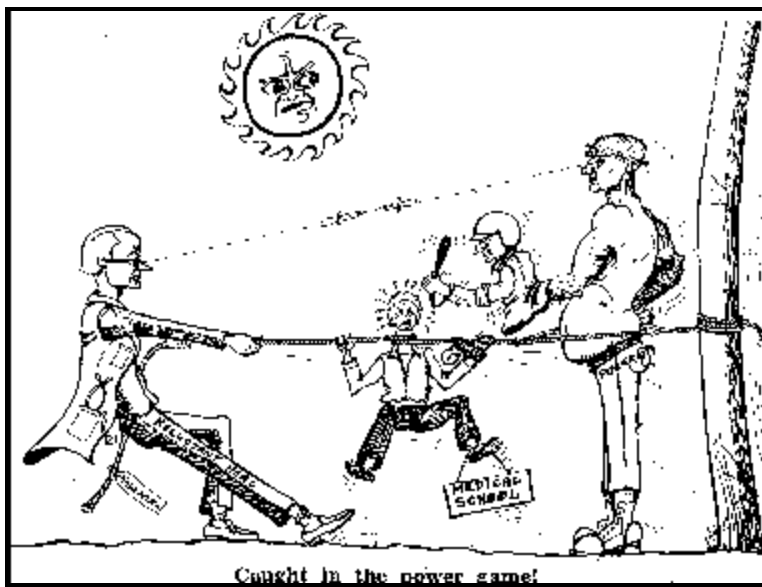


**THE MEDICAL STUDENTS CONTRIBUTION
DURING
THE DOCTORS DISPUTE OF 1977**

C. Savona-Ventura



**Malta
1999**

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***Cover illustration: Nalizpelra cartoon,
The Sunday Times of Malta, October 9, 1977, p.13***

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INTRODUCTION

It is very difficult to write the history of an event when one has been an active participant. The direct experience of a life-significant event would undoubtedly cloud ones viewpoint. History can only be truly written by individuals who have not participated in the event and whose outlook can be an unbiased view of the facts with a clear knowledge of the subsequent outcomes. I have lived through the doctor's industrial action as a third-year medical student and I have therefore first hand knowledge of many of the facts that I shall relate. I shall endeavour to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth, and in the process try to avoid as much as possible giving an interpretation of the facts. This I leave for later historians. Two active participants - the Hon Secretary of the MAM and the Attorney General - have previously described the events of the industrial strife between the medical profession and the government of the day. These authors have poorly or erroneously described the students' role in the strife¹.

¹ L.J. German: *Landmarks in Medical Unionism in Malta 1937-1987*. The author, Malta, 1991; E. Mizzi: *Malta in the Making 1962-1987. An eyewitness account*. The author, Malta, 1995

SETTING THE SCENE

The "winds of trouble" were first felt by the medical students on the 3rd February 1977 when the Medical School Secretary Mr. J.I. Camilleri published a notice announcing a meeting on the 9th February between the Minister of Health, Hon. Dr. Vincent Moran, and the final Year Medical Students². In the presence of representatives of the Medical Association of Malta [MAM], the Minister outlined the problem of junior doctor shortages in the government hospitals as presented to the government by the Consultant Staff Committee at St. Luke's Hospital. This committee had submitted to the Minister a memorandum outlining the recurrent shortage in junior staff resulting from the absence of statutory pre-registration requirements. After fulfilling the twelve-month period required by British pre-registration requirements, most of the junior doctors left government service to further their training abroad. Since the Medical Course intake was every two years, a marked shortage of junior doctor was left for about a year. It was the government's intention to legislate in favour of a two-year compulsory pre-registration period for all newly qualified Maltese medical practitioners to ensure adequate hospital staffing. This legislation was to be enforced by imposing a penalty of ten thousand Maltese *liri* for defaulters³. At the time, there were indications that the United Kingdom was possibly closing its doors to overseas doctors in the very near future. The final-year medical students envisaged that these imposed restrictions could possibly affect their likelihood of proceeding abroad to further their post-graduate

² J.I. Camilleri: *Notice, Office of the Medical School, Gwardamangia, 3rd February 1977*. [manuscript copy in author's holdings]

³ *Memorandum on the Medical Dispute*. DOI, Malta, August 1977, Annex 1, p.12-13; L.J. German, 1991, *op. cit.*, p.82

studies⁴. They looked at the imposition of a statutory two-year pre-registration period as a further impediment should the U.K. restrictions come into force. The MAM agreed in principle to the need of ensuring an adequate number of junior doctors to man the hospitals. Several discussions between the final-year medical students, the Association and Government were made in the subsequent months. The Association and the final-year medical students were not in favour of the enactment of legislation or the imposition of fines to achieve this objective. It was felt that better incentives, study facilities and improved conditions of service would ensure that young doctors would complete their two-year housemanship. The students resented the legal imposition, which was considered as discriminatory since no such imposition was placed on other university graduates. The MAM committee drew up a proposal for the students' approval. The proposal provided for newly qualified doctors to enter into a separate voluntary undertaking with the MAM to serve in government hospitals for two years after qualification. Any defaulter would become a *persona non grata* and be ostracised and boycotted by the other members of the profession. This would obviate the need for statutory pre-registration and imposition of a fine. The MAM proposal was approved by 32 out of the 36 students present at the meeting, the total number of students in the final

⁴ E.Mizzi, 1995, *op. cit.*, p.254. The last visitation of the British General Medical Council with the scope of reviewing the MD (Malta) recognition was in 1976. As Hon. Secretary to the Malta Medical Students Association [MMSA], I had represented the Medical Students during this visitation. The assessors were not satisfied that the Medical School resources and facilities were sufficient to deal with a proposed annual intake of thirty students. The Medical School was at the time producing about 35 students biennially. Recognition was extended for a further period of three years on condition that the number of students did not increase. The GMC registration was therefore to be reviewed in 1979.

year of the course was 39 including three foreign students. This proposal was submitted for the Minister's consideration on 18th February 1977. The government considered this proposal as insufficient to guarantee an important requirement of the health service. Accordingly the government considered that the best way to ensure compliance with the two-year internship was to legislate. The financial penalty was dropped⁵.

On the 22nd April 1977, the Minister of Health disclosed to MAM officials the contents of a draft bill to amend the Medical and Kindred Professions Ordinance. The Bill proposed to make it compulsory for all Maltese doctors graduating after January 1, 1977 to serve as houseman in a government hospital or clinic for a period of two years commencing immediately after qualification. The Bill also provided that any foreign doctor could be granted a temporary licence for a maximum of two years on the recommendations of the Minister. The Hon. Secretary to the MAM, Dr. German comments that there was no disagreement over the introduction of a statutory two-year pre-registration period, but the MAM objected that this period should commence immediately upon qualification and that failure to comply would debar the doctor from ever being allowed to practice in Malta. He continues that *"It is possible that some sort of compromise solution would have been reached on the houseman problem had the Bill limited itself to the introduction of the two-year registration period."* The MAM considered the amendment related to registration of foreign doctors as weakening the regulatory functions of the Medical Council, and amounting to a unilateral breach of the 1958 agreement with the previous Medical Officers

⁵ *Memorandum.....: op. cit.*, Annex 2, p.13-14; L.J. German, 1991, *op. cit.*, p.83-84; E. Mizzi, 1995, *ibid*, p.254-255

Union following the 1956 industrial dispute⁶. Other implications to the law were banded about. Thus a final-year militant student was to write that "*A newly qualified doctor, if the Minister does not like his face, may be sent to a District Clinic for two years and so will not fulfil GMC pre-registration requirements even two years after qualifying. Of course, if he is a 'friend of the people' he may get his licence to practice after two days and, who knows, may even get a 'scholarship' to further his studies abroad.*"⁷ The change in the law could have resulted in abuse in the law's implementation, but since the scope was the adequate manning of government hospitals, this was unlikely and subsequent experience shows that the nepotism described by the student never occurred.

The House of Parliament approved the bill, which amended the ordinance that regulated the admission to the medical profession and the powers of the Medical Council, on the 25th May 1977⁸. The following day the MAM at an extraordinary general meeting of doctors passed a resolution deploring the amendments, describing them as a restriction of individual freedom and a breach of the 1958 Agreement between the Labour Government and the Medical Officers Union. The MAM Council was empowered by the meeting to take all appropriate action. On the 1st June 1977, doctors were directed to

⁶ L.J. German, 1991, *ibid*, p.84-85; L. German: *Medical Association of Malta: Circular - Memorandum on the recent amendments to the Medical and Kindred Professions Ordinance Cap.51*. 15 June 1977, para.2 [manuscript copy in author's holding]

⁷ J. Borg Costanzi. *Before and After in Malta. A personal view*. 1977, p.27. My personal experience during the early years of the course was that nepotism in various forms was always rife in the medical faculty, particularly for sons and daughters related to the medical profession. This took various forms including pre-examination knowledge of the examination questions.

⁸ Act No XVII of 1977. *Malta Government Gazette (supplement)*. No.13366, 27th May 1977

take a series of industrial actions. This led to escalation and counter-measures by government over the subsequent weeks, actions which led to an industrial dispute which was to last ten years⁹. With no holds barred by both parties, this dispute was to use the three courses of medical students as pawns in the conflict. This required the students to initiate active measures to protect their rights to continue their studies in Malta, while others opted to continue their medical studies overseas. Subsequent events after the end of the conflict in 1987 were to prove that the pre-registration legislation was only an excuse for initiating the industrial action. The 1987 agreement altered the Medical and Kindred Professions Ordinance vis-a-vie the Medical Council's prerogative regarding licensing of foreign doctors, but retained the legal provisions for a two-year pre-registration period. The real reasons for the 1977 conflict must be considered to be not the students plight, but the amendment regulating foreign doctors licensing and its implications on possible strike actions by the doctors in the light of the wish of the Labour Government to introduce a National Health Service¹⁰.

⁹ L.J. German, 1991, *op. cit.*; E. Mizzi, 1995, *op. cit.*

¹⁰ MLP: *Lejn Malta Soċjalista - Il Quddiem fis-Sliem*. MLP, Malta, 1976, p.83. These views are the author's, but were freely discussed by the doctors and students during the weeks before the dispute. One must also consider the dispute in the light of the political situation and trade union unrest in the country at this time.

THE FINAL STUDENTS PLIGHT

In the early months of 1977, the Medical Faculty catered for three courses of students - two pre-clinical and three clinical. The medical course overall lasted for five years and each course started every two years. During 1977, there was one group of students in their final years of study, one in its first clinical year of study (third year students), and one in its first year of pre-clinical studies. The 39 final-year students were initially directly involved in the conflict. They were the first to be approached by the Minister of Health and presented with the Government's legislative proposals to ensure adequate manning of the government hospitals. The subsequent course of events is related above. The bill, which amended the ordinance that regulated the admission to the medical profession and the powers of the Medical Council, was approved on the 25th May 1977, six days before the final examinations of these students. The written examinations were completed, but after the initiation of the industrial dispute and the government counter-measure of "locking-out" the hospital doctors following the MAM directives, the clinical part of the examination was postponed to an indefinite date. In these circumstances, it was necessary to have these students undertake their examinations in the United Kingdom. By the 22nd August 1977, many of the final year students had left for the U.K. to sit the Conjoint Board [LRCP, MRCS] examinations. A further group left later in the month. Their participation in these examinations was arranged through the British Medical Association [BMA] and financial assistance of the MAM. Twenty-two of the 33 students who sat for their examination in September 1977 passed in all subjects and obtained a British medical qualification. The others passed their Conjoint Board examinations in

subsequent sessions; one of the final year students opted to remain in Malta and qualified from the University of Malta in 1979¹¹. These newly qualified doctors were helped by the BMA to find work in the U.K. and elsewhere. In mid-October 1977, the final-year students staged a peaceful demonstration in London and petitioned the Maltese High Commissioner Mr Arthur Scerri *"to intervene so that some sense may be seen in this folly"*. Other Maltese MAM doctors and the third-year clinical students who had by then left Malta to continue their studies in the UK joined them¹². These final-year students were subsequently offered the facility to obtain a Medical Doctorate from the University of Malta with each subsequent final examination held. Two doctors obtained their MD (Malta) in 1979, three in 1984, and one in 1985¹³. The saga of the final-year medical students was ended when the group was allowed to finish their "postponed" clinical examinations and awarded a Medical Doctorate from the University in Malta in 1989 on the occasion of the First Maltese Medical School Conference. Twenty-three of the 1977 class of 39 students were able to attend. Many of the final-year doctors had furthered their medical

¹¹ L.J. German, 1991, *op.cit.*, p.112; E. Mizzi, 1995, *op. cit.*, p.259-260. I still cannot understand why the University did not provide facilities at the Medical School for the clinical part of the examinations of the final year students. Hospital facilities were not essential for the conduct of the examinations. Clinical material could easily have been made available from alternative sources.

¹² H.A. Clews (ed.) *The Malta Year Book 1978*, De La Salle Publications, Malta, 1978, p.60 [records that the date of the demonstration was the 19th October, but the newspaper *In-Nazzjon Taghna* of the 15th October records that a silent march had been organised by medical students in London a few days earlier]; L.J. German, 1991, *ibid*, p.114, photo no.25. Photo shows clearly four individuals - Dr. J. Pace; final-year student - J. Borg Costanzi; and third-year clinical students - M. Vella and C. Sammut Alessi.

¹³ 1979: Drs. Alan Ellul, Joseph Zarb Adami; the latter previously qualified in the UK as LRCP, MRCS

well aware of the two-year pre-registration period being proposed by the authorities, but did not consider this a major problem for their future. Their concerns centred on the approaching end-of-year examinations in May-June. Many of the students were 'invited' to become associate members of the MAM¹⁵. The students' support for the MAM after the start of the dispute on the 2nd June 1977 was requested. They were asked to man the Action Headquarters of the MAM at the Astra Hotel in Sliema. On the 30th June, the MMSA committee issued a circular to its members confirming that the students were maintaining a 24-hour watch, including delivery of phone messages, typing and delivery of press releases, and other useful office work. They lamented that not all the student members were regularly turning up at the Headquarters¹⁶.

In the light of the summer vacations of the pre-university and university students, and the various trade union conflicts occurring during the summer months of 1977, concern was raised that students who had applied for the Summer Worker Scheme would be employed as strike breakers. On the 7th July 1977, the MMSA called a meeting for the Clinical Course Medical Students. A MAM committee member and clinical teacher [Dr. J. Azzopardi] attended this meeting. It was directed that Clinical Course Medical Students do not take up any jobs in Government Hospitals in Malta and Gozo during the lock-out imposed on University Staff. The meeting further deplored any attempt at using student summer workers as strike breakers of legitimate trade union

¹⁵ The invitation by militant final-year students was sometimes emphasised by veiled threats of possible failure in the oncoming examination.

¹⁶ MMSA circular dated 30th June 1977 [manuscript in author's holdings]

actions¹⁷. The students during the meeting raised the concerns that the clinical teaching requirements of 33 months may have been affected by the strike. The MAM representative reassured the students that the MAM was if necessary prepared to organise clinical teaching in general practice and private hospitals¹⁸.

On the 15th July, the medical students were invited to attend the Extra-ordinary General Meeting for MAM at the Hotel Phoenicia in Valletta. That day also saw the publication of the proposed amendments to the Industrial Relations Act. This listed 62 medical posts which were required to provide essential services to the community. The law resulted in the dismissal of the majority of doctors who had been in government employ, including those holding teaching appointments and the heads of the Departments of Surgery, Medicine and Obstetrics & Gynaecology - Profs. V.G. Griffiths, F.F. Fenech and A.P. Camilleri respectively¹⁹.

During the meeting, several clinical year students discussed their concerns regarding the eventual dismissal of Clinical University Staff and the possibility of applying to overseas medical schools. The dismissals were not generally taken seriously by most of the students since a solution was expected before the start of the academic year in October. Weeks later, the MMSA called a meeting to be held on the 9th September for the clinical students with the subject "The future of our Medical Education". A follow-up meeting was called for the 16th September to discuss new developments. The majority, but not all, of the students attended the meetings. During the meetings, the possible need of continuing medical

¹⁷ MMSA Circular dated 8th July 1977 [manuscript in author's holdings]

¹⁸ personal kept minutes of the MMSA meeting of the 7th July 1977

¹⁹ Act XXVIII of 1977. *Malta Government Gazette*, 15th July 1977

studies abroad with or without the financial help of the MAM was introduced. The students were advised by the Chairman of that meeting [M.P. Brincat] that the MAM had directed the students to apply for posts only through the student representative body - the MMSA. The Committee poorly received proposals made during the meeting from the floor of taking active measures at opening the medical school²⁰.

On the 22nd September another meeting was called jointly by the SRC and the MMSA to be held on the 27th at the Students' House, Tal-Qroqq. The University authorities on the same day of the meeting informed the Clinical Medical Students that their course was not starting on the 3rd October 1977 as scheduled. The aim of this meeting was to discuss further the predicament that faced medical students as a result of the dismissal of professors during the industrial dispute between the Government and the MAM. The press had been invited to attend²¹. MAM representatives also attended the meeting. Only one member [J. Booker] represented the MMSA committee. The father of the previous Chairman of the MMSA informed the meeting that his two sons had proceeded to the U.K. to obtain posts in universities there. At this stage about 19, including two foreign students, out of a course of 51 original students had already proceeded abroad to seek admission in U.K. Medical Schools. After a very heated discussion, an Action Committee of students under the chairmanship of G. Hysler was elected [C. Savona-Ventura, A. Schembri and R. Busuttill represented the clinical year medical students]. The

²⁰ MMSA Circulars dated 5th September and 13th September 1977 [manuscript in author's holdings]. Items discussed at the meetings based on personal minutes.

²¹ SRC-MMSA Circular and MMSA Press Release dated 22nd September; I. Ellul: UM Notice - Academic Year 1977/78 - Resumption of Studies dated 27th September 1977 [manuscripts in author's holdings].

brief of this Action Committee was to act and organise demonstrations aimed at forcing the Medical School to open. The medical students were advised to apply on an individual level to complete their studies in foreign medical schools and a list of Commonwealth Universities was circulated. The meeting was informed that the MMSA committee members had been supported by a letter of referral from the MAM, and the MAM representative present at the meeting was requested to arrange that all the medical students were to be furnished with a similar reference. A group of students [led by D. Gatt] undertook it upon themselves to collect certificates for all students from the MAM, previous academic staff, and the University authorities. Others preferred to collect all references themselves²².

In the subsequent six days, the Action Committee met daily at the Students' Club at Valletta. Its first objective being to stop the Official Opening Ceremony of the University of Malta scheduled for the 3rd October. All the university students, particularly the clinical and pre-clinical medical students, were actively involved in the preparation of placards and streamers carrying messages such as *Rape of the Medical Students - RIP, Irridu mmorru ghal ahjar mhux ghal aghar* and *Gustizzja mal-Istudenti tal-Medicina*. Posters carrying the messages *Fottejtu I-Medical School, Studenti Refugiati ghax*

²² Items discussed at the meetings based on personal notes of the meeting. On the evening of the 27th September, the author posted about 30 stencilled applications to various Medical Schools in the U.K., beside personal letters to past Clinical Heads of Department requesting references. References from Prof. V.G. Griffiths, and Prof. W.H. Bannister dated 28th September 1977 and Prof. F.F. Fenech dated 29th September were received. An Academic Progress Report from the University Registrar dated 28th September and a reference from the MAM were also received [personal correspondence files].

gew Eziljati, and Irridu l-Professuri taghne lura were printed at the National Press.

These posters were prepared as placards and also posted in various localities in Malta. Since the latter without the necessary permit from the Commissioner of Police was considered a violation of the Government Notice 270 of 1931, the clinical students were advised against personally posting posters, since their arraignment in court could impede their departure from the Islands should this become necessary. In fact, ten university students were arraigned in Court before Magistrate Dr. J. Herrera and charged with having fixed posters on Government property in Floriana on the 1st October 1977 without obtaining the necessary permits. The students were also charged with having covered traffic signs and other signals with the same posters, and of having caused damage amounting to less than LM50 to the signs and façade of Government property. The Court dismissed an application by the Prosecuting Officer for the case to be heard with urgency²³. Some clinical year students experienced difficulties when applying for visas from the British High Commission, but the problem was only an administrative one.

The Opening Day Ceremony of the Academic Year 1977/78 of the University of Malta was scheduled for 8.45 am on the 3rd October 1977. Well before the scheduled time, a large number of university students gathered in the University's main yard carrying their placards. A mourning black cloth was tied around the iron supports of the Assembly Hall which were barred with iron chains. The students

²³ Students in Court. Urgency Plea dismissed. *Times of Malta*, 7th October 1977, p.2; Incidenti waqt it-twahhil ta' posters. *L-Istudent - Lehen l-Istudent Universitarju*, special edition October 1977 No.5, p.2

proceeded to the back-yard of the Assembly Hall singing various slogans and faced the academic staff and ten new University students gathered in front of the Library Building. There, the students repeatedly invited the staff to join the protest, and after two minutes, two of the staff removed their togas and joined the student ranks amongst student applause. The remaining academic staff and new students did likewise, leaving the University Rector alone in front of the Library Building, while the University Standard was taken over by the demonstrators. The Rector proceeded to address the students. He emphasised that the University had been constrained to take the measures it had by circumstances. The measure of postponing the Clinical Course of Studies was a temporary one which could be withdrawn at any time. He appealed to the students to be patient and careful, and warned against anything which could harm their future.

The Rector then cancelled the Opening Ceremony. The students proceeded to march from the University to St. Luke's Hospital singing slogans along the way. The students sat in front of the hospital and sang the National Anthem and chanted several slogans in favour of the Maltese professors. Then they marched down to the Medical School stopping - after consultations with the Ass. Commissioner of Police Mr. A. Mifsud Tomasi and Police Superintendent W. Abela - at the top of the Pieta side-streets leading to the School. At the end of the peaceful march, the SRC President Mr. David Attard gave a Press Conference wherein he reiterated that that day's demonstration was only one of a series being contemplated to convince the authorities to open the Medical School. The whole activity was fully supported by the extreme left university students group *Xirka għall-Gustizzja*

***Socjali* who participated with its own placards and an eventual Press Release. The *Ghaqda Studenti Socjaliisti Universita* disassociated itself from the march, but sympathised with the medical students plight²⁴.**

²⁴ Students' protest to "Save Medical School" - Academic Staff support - opening day ceremony cancelled. *Times of Malta*, 4th October 1977, p.9,12; Ic-Ceremonja tal-ftuh tas-sena Akkademika fl-Universita' ma Saritx - Lecturers inghaqdu ma' Studenti fi Protest favur l-Istudenti tal-Medicina. *In-Nazzjon Taghna*, 4th October 1977, p.1,3,12; Protesta! Dimontrazzjoni I Marc flok Ceremonia. *L-Istudent- Lehen l-Istudent Universitarju*, special edition October 1977 No.5, p.1-2



Demonstrations 3rd October

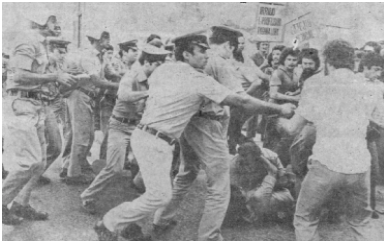
In the successful aftermath of the 3rd October protest-march, the Action Committee decided that an escalation of activities was necessary. Various possible courses of action were considered. Eventually it was proposed that a group of clinical year medical students may be persuaded to chain themselves to the railing in front of the Official Residence of the Prime Minister at the Auberge de Castille in Valletta. In the meantime an Extraordinary General Meeting for University Students was called by the SRC for the afternoon of the 5th October. The proposal was discussed with a number of clinical medical students, and it was decided to get together all the clinical students (excluding those with known political affiliations with the Labour Government) to discuss the possibility. The students met at the Patricia Hotel at Sliema in the evening of the 4th October. The meeting was a tremulous one. It was eventually decided at this stage that the activity should exclude the female students and would be held the next day if sufficient volunteers presented themselves. The volunteers were to present themselves at the Student House the next morning.

The next morning 5th October 1977 enough volunteers ready to chain themselves to the railings of the Auberge de Castille presented themselves to the Action Committee. The Committee then set in motion preparations for the protest. It set out to purchase the necessary chain segments and padlocks. It was decided that the Extraordinary General Meeting would be suspended and the students transported to Castille to support the chained medical students. Arrangements were made to rent the necessary private buses to transport the students from the University grounds to Valletta. The sympathetic press was alerted. Students were identified to serve

as communications officers using public telephone booths between the chained students and those at University. All was set for approximately 2.00 p.m. when the Prime Minister generally left the building.

The volunteer students, numbering 20, made their way to Valletta using their own transport. They as unobtrusively as possible made their way in small groups to the railings in front of the Auberge de Castille using a group of tourists crowding the area for cover. They quickly chained themselves, after which the group of supporting students handed them placards reading *I want to study in Malta* and *Irrid nistudja Malta*. In the meantime, the students responsible for communication with University passed on the message that the medical students had chained themselves. The message was relayed to the General Meeting being held in the Student House. The meeting was suspended and the students were transported to Castille Square with three private buses. At that stage Mr. D. Mintoff accompanied by Minister L. Sant left the building.

The students collected on Castille Square in support of the chained medical students shouting and singing songs and slogans. In a short while, the Commissioner of Police Mr. J. Cachia accompanied Ass. Commissioner Mr. J. Mamo and by a reinforcement of policemen and C.I.D. officials arrived on the spot.



Student Protests 5th October

In spite of the fact that the Chairman of the Action Committee [G. Hysler] informed the Commissioner that the demonstration was to last only ten minutes after which the students will peacefully disperse, the police took immediate steps to disrupt the support and forcefully dispersed the students. The police rushed the students splitting the crowd into two groups directing one group towards the Central Bank and the other to Freedom Square and subsequently to City Gate and on to Floriana. Several clashes with the police occurred with a number of students being beaten up and injured. One policeman was slightly hit in the face by the demonstrators²⁵.

Medical Student Protestors chained at Castille	
✓ John Aquilina	✓ John Mamo
✓ Raymond Aquilina	✓ Victor Mercieca
✓ Albert Bonnici	✓ Ivan Muscat
✓ Anthony Borg Grech	✓ Joe Said
✓ James Catania	✓ Charles Savona-Ventura
✓ Abraham Cutajar	✓ Raymond Scerri
✓ Joseph Patrick Ellul	✓ Anthony Schembri
✓ Denis Gatt	✓ David Spiteri
✓ George Grech	✓ Mark Vella
✓ Kurunat Grech	✓ George Xwereb
Student Protestors arrested or beaten up by police	
✓ Stephan Frendo	✓ Joe Gerada
✓ Pawlu Gauci	✓ Alan Muscat

²⁵ Police-Students clash at Castille - Twenty-three arrested, three hospitalized. *Times of Malta*, 6th October 1977, p.1,11,15; Jum Storiku għall-Istudenti Maltin - Faxxisti! Faxxisti!. In-Nazzjon Taghne, 6th October 1977, p.1,6-7; *L-Istudent- Lehen l-Istudent Universitarju*, special edition 7th October 1977 ; Prime Minister testifies in libel action against Students' Periodical. *Times of Malta*, 6th December 1977, p.2-3

In the meantime, the police took measures to cordon off the chained medical students by parking a police bus onto the pavement in front of the students to prevent tourists from taking photographs. At this stage, government supporters helped the police. Some clashes occurred when the chained students sitting down on the pavement refused to pull up their legs to allow the bus to park. Huge cutters were obtained to release the chained students and these were led into police vans. During the process, C. Savona-Ventura was roughly manhandled by one of the police and pushed into the police van. This resulted in a injury causing a bleeding lacerated wound on the scalp. His parents happened to be in the vicinity after hearing the commotion in Valletta and attempted to go to him. His mother was rough-handled and kicked by one of the attending government supporters. Another student - D. Gatt - had his glasses broken²⁶.

The police vans with the students proceeded to the Police Headquarters at Floriana. There they joined the other arrested demonstrating students. Four students were sent to hospital for treatment of their injuries - S. Frendo, J. Gerada, D. Gatt and C. Savona-Ventura. On arriving at the hospital in a police care, a C.I.D. sergeant G. Vella gave alternate orders to the attending police to return the students to the Depot. The attending Casualty Officer Dr. Lino Cuschieri intervened and the students were taken into the Casualty Department. Stephan Frendo was at this stage unconscious and suffering from concussion. C. Savona-Ventura, who helped Dr. Cuschieri to attend to Frendo's condition, accompanied him. C. Savona-Ventura himself required sutures to his scalp wound, these being done by a Czechoslovak doctor. Frendo

²⁶ *In-Nazzjion Taghna*, 7th October 1977, *ibid*, p.6; *L-Istudent- Lehen I-Istudent Universitarju* 7th October 1977, *ibid*, p.2

was admitted for observation to the hospital. Savona-Ventura unsuccessfully feigned concussion to enable him to stay with Frendo. He and the other students were returned to the Police Depot²⁷. The arrested students were interrogated and eventually released at 10.00 p.m. the same day²⁸.

On the 6th October, the students attended a General Meeting at the Student House at Tal-Qroqq. The medical students were given a tremendous welcome. The meeting lasted for about three hours and an effigy of the Commissioner of Police was burnt outside. A resolution was passed condemning the "aggressive and repressive" treatment meted out to the students in the peaceful protest. They called for the resignation of the Commissioner of Police and alleged that "criminal bullies" helped the police perpetuate the violence²⁹. Several associations and bodies showed their support for the medical student plight and condemned the police action. These included: the *Xirka Ghall-Gustizzja Socjali*, the National Council of the *Studenti Demokristjani Maltin*, the Malta Pharmaceutical Students Association, the University Students' Theological Association, the Medical Association of Malta, the Teaching Staff of the Medical School, the Malta Dental Students Association, the University Students Catholic Movement, the Executive Committee of the Moviment Zghazagh tal-Partit Nazzjonalista, the University Technicians Association, and the Confederation of Malta Trade Unions. The *Xirka Ghall-Gustizzja Sociali*, whose president was one of

²⁷ *In-Nazzjon Taghna*, 6th October 1977, *ibid*, p.6; *L-Istudent - Lehenl-Istudent Universitarju*, 7th October 1977, *ibid*, p.2. The ultimate insult to the event was receiving a bill from the Medical and Health Department for treatment and x-rays taken.

²⁸ University Students released from detention. *Times of Malta*, 7th October 1977, p.4

²⁹ *Times of Malta*, 7th October 1977, *ibid*, p.4

the students arrested, asked the "*labourites not to allow hatred to emanate from their partisanship*"³⁰. The Government side attempted to downplay the event through its statements to the media and the reporting of the event in the newspapers managed by the General Workers Union. Labour Party-related associations also condemned the student protests³¹.

A meeting had been scheduled on the 3rd October by the SRC-MMSA joint committee for the clinical students' parents due to be held on the 6th October. In view of the circumstances the meeting was held on the 7th October. At the meeting, the parents of the third and final year clinical students appealed to the President of the Republic Dr. Buttigieg and the Archbishop Mgr Mercieca to intervene in an attempt to find a solution to enable the Medical School to re-open as soon as possible. They further condemned the police violence used during the student demonstrations³².

On the same day, the SRC proposed the setting of fund to collect monies from individuals and institutions to assist medical students to continue their studies abroad³³. The medical students also presented a petition to the Hon. Secretary of the

³⁰ *Times of Malta*, 6th October 1977, *op. cit.*, p.11; *Times of Malta*, 7th October 1977, *ibid*, p.4,16; Medical Faculty Teaching Staff's Support - Dental Students' support. *Times of Malta*, 8th October 1977, p.20; Aktar kundanni għall-agir tal-Pulizija fuq l-Istudenti. *In-Nazzjion Tagħna*, 8th October 1977, p.3; Support for students. *Times of Malta*, 9th October 1977, p.15

³¹ Government Statement on Police-Student incidents. *Times of Malta*, 7th October 1977, p.4; *Times of Malta*, 9th October 1977, *ibid*, p.15

³² SRC-MMSA circular dated 3rd October 1977 [manuscript in author's holding]; Students' parents appeal to President. *Times of Malta*, 8th October 1977, p.20; Jitolbu għal ftuh immedjat ta' l-Iskola Medika. *In-Nazzjion Tagħna*, 8th October 1977, p.12

³³ Fund b'risq l-Istudenti tal-Medicina. *In-Nazzjion Tagħna*, 8th October 1977, p.12

MMSA (the only remaining committee member on the Island) calling for an extraordinary general meeting in order that a new committee would be elected. The signatories stated that *"they feel it should be done as the medical students fighting for their sacred rights are without a committee to lead them."* The meeting was scheduled for the 11th October³⁴.

A turning point in the student dispute occurred after the Prime Minister urgently called a meeting with the clinical year medical students on the 7th October at the Auberge de Castille. The meeting was attended by the remaining 32 third year students and three final year students who were still on the Island. The government side was represented by Mr. D. Mintoff, the Deputy Prime Minister Dr. J. Cassar, the Minister of Health Dr. V. Moran, the Minister of Education Dr. P. Muscat, the Minister for Development Mr. W. Abela, the Chief Government Medical Officer Dr. A. Grech, the University Rector Prof. E.J. Borg Costanzi, the Head of Pathology Prof. G.P. Xwereb, and the Private Secretary to the Prime Minister Mr. J. Camilleri. The Prime Minister started the meeting by accusing the students that they had been instigated to organise their protests. The students reiterated that their demonstrations had been envisaged as peaceful symbolic ones initiated solely because of their concerns for their future and that of the Medical School. There had been no clarification from government sources about their immediate future. The Prime Minister continued to maintain that the students had been brainwashed. None of the students had ever approached him, and the only information he had received about student demands was an open letter published in the *Times of Malta*. He went on to say that even when the Medical School re-opens, there

³⁴ MMSA circular dated 7th October [manuscript in author's holding]

was no guarantee that it will retain the same format or professors as previously. Here he introduced the concept of the Worker-Student Scheme for the medical course. In the discussion that ensued, the students brought up the problem of recognition. The Prime Minister accused the students of being brainwashed with a colonialism mentality. He felt that the Medical School should not produce doctors to supply to other countries. The government wanted to spend Maltese money for the benefit of the citizens. With regards to the question of postgraduate specialisation in the U.K., he added that the U.K. did not have a monopoly in postgraduate medical training. The British only accepted local doctors because these were needed to man their services. Once Maltese doctors were no longer needed, then the British would close their doors. Postgraduate medical education could be sought in other European countries. The language problems were not insurmountable³⁵. The proposed reforms in tertiary education based on the Worker-Scheme as proposed to the medical students were confirmed by the Minister of Education on the 9th October when addressing a seminar on "Why Education? And after school?" organised by the Zejtun Section of the Socialist Youth Movement. The Worker-Student Scheme was formally announced on the 14th October, while the scheme was discussed by the Prime Minister with the academic university staff on the 17th October³⁶. The launching of the Worker-Student Scheme in tertiary education was to serve as a continuing stimulus for the university student body

³⁵ Prime Minister meets students at Castille. *Times of Malta*, 8th October 1977, p.20; Students meeting tomorrow. SRC to consider result of meeting with PM. *Sunday Times of Malta*, 9th October 1977, p.15; personally kept minutes of the meeting with the Prime Minister on the 7th October 1977 [manuscript in author's holding]

³⁶ Reforms in tertiary education. From class to workshop. *Times of Malta*, 10th October 1977, p.16; H.A. Clews. 1978, *op.cit.*, p.60,99

to continuing its demonstrations even after the Medical School re-opened its doors to students. These demonstrations resulted in several clashes between the students and the police and government supporters³⁷.

The meeting with the Prime Minister left the students disillusioned with the prospects of being able to continue their clinical studies in Malta and obtaining a useful medical qualification. Individuals had in previous days started exploring the possibility of obtaining reductions in air flight costs by flying as a group. These efforts were now intensified and twelve students (nine male, three female) booked a flight to the U.K. for the early hours of the 15th October. The general attitude was that, in spite of not yet having been assigned places in U.K. Medical Schools, it was more reasonable to abandon the apparently hopeless local scene³⁸.

A meeting for the medical students was called by the Ministers of Health and Education on the 14th October 1977. During this meeting the details of the Worker-Student Scheme as this pertained to the clinical course of studied were detailed and the students were assured that the implementation of the

³⁷ Police Commissioner list incidents at University. *Times of Malta*, 6th December 1977, p.3. The incidents included: 31st October 1977 University Council members hassled and prevented from entering for the scheduled Council Meeting; 18th November 1977 clashes with government supporters and disturbances during the Graduation Ceremony. The clinical year students were by this time in the U.K., while the Clinical Medical Students studying in Malta did not participate. Pre-clinical students may have participated.

³⁸ I was approached by the group to accompany them. I however reasoned that an early departure to the U.K. prior to being assigned a place in a Medical School, or at least called for an interview, would serve no useful purpose. I was still awaiting correspondence to the application I had sent on the 27th September. These were received at the end of October-early November 1977.

Scheme was to be left to the academic clinicians. The students were informed that the government had decided to re-open the clinical course of studies on the 17th October, and the interested students were to present themselves to the Pathology Department at St. Luke's Hospital on that day. The meeting ended on a more positive note, and a number of students who had booked flights to the U.K. for the following days asked their remaining colleagues to keep them informed of subsequent events. On the 15th October, a group 12 students left for the U.K. At the airport, they were accompanied by their families and university students who staged a demonstration in their favour continuing with a carcade to Paola to outside the residence of the Minister of Health. Other students left on later flights or had left earlier since the meeting with the Prime Minister³⁹.

³⁹ Aktar studenti kellhom jeziljaw ruhhom. *In-Nazzjon Taghna*, 15th October 1977, p.1,3



**Burning the Police Commission's Effigy: 6th October
&
Silent March Protest in London: mid-October**



**Medical Students before meeting the Prime Minister
7th October**



**Departure of Medical Students
15th October**

On the 17th October, the twelve remaining clinical students presented themselves at St. Luke's Hospital for a meeting with Prof. G.P. Xwereb who was to act as co-ordinator for the clinical course of studies, and the Chief Government Medical Officer who was to employ the students in line with the concepts of the Worker-Student Scheme. The meeting was also attended by two final year students who were still in Malta. During this meeting the course structure for all phases of the Medical School as envisaged by Prof. Xwereb and Dr. A. Grech was detailed. The students were informed that confirmation was still awaited from the University authorities regarding academic matters and the government authorities regarding employment conditions, but great problems were envisaged. The academic problems envisaged at this stage were those related to repetition of lectures, tutorials, etc which would follow if strict adherence to two phases were followed. This was eventually circumvented by the lectures being given in the afternoon when the worker phase students had their official break. The other academic problem envisaged was a shortening of the number of clinical months required by the University regulations (set at 33 months). It was proposed that the course duration would be lengthened to cover the difference, and in fact the graduates finalised their studies in November 1979 in lieu of May 1979. The students were re-assured that foreign external examiners would continue to assess the final examinations. Steps were underway to appoint further university clinical staff to supplement those previously appointed and still giving their services in the hospital (Prof. G.P. Xwereb - Pathology, Dr. A. Azzopardi - Anaesthesia, and Dr. A.J. Psaila - Medicine). The final year students who were awaiting to finalise their clinical examinations were

to be employed until such time as their examinations could be held⁴⁰. Only one final year student - A. Ellul - availed himself of the opportunity and qualified in 1979.

Group of Clinical Students who continued their studies in Malta during 1977-1979	
✓ Mark Bailey	✓ David Spiteri
✓ Michael Borg	✓ Terrance Tilney
✓ Koronato Grech	✓ Adrian Vassallo
✓ Victor Mercieca	✓ Ivan Vella
✓ Charles Savona-Ventura	✓ John Xwereb
✓ John Schembri	✓ Mary Zarb
Final year Student who opted to qualify in Malta in 1979	
✓ Alan Ellul	

The group was split into two groups of six, one group starting the student phase, the other the worker phase. Lectures were continued throughout both phases. The students in the study phase were initially assigned clinical attachments with the various clinicians - including Prof. E.S. Grech - Obstetrics & Gynaecology, Dr. A.J. Psaila - Medicine, and Mr. A. Felice - Surgery. The students in the work phase were assigned clinical duties in the respective wards. Continuous contact was maintained between the students and the course co-ordinator through the selected student representative [C. Savona-Ventura]. In spite of the continuing MAM efforts to disrupt the organisation of the course, the clinical training

⁴⁰ H.A. Clews, 1978, op. cit., p.60; personal minutes of meeting with Prof. G.P. Xwereb and Dr. A. Grech on the 17th October 1977 [notes in author's holding]

gained momentum with the return of a number of specialist clinical staff who were appointed university lecturers and the contribution of foreign specialists from the U.K., Belgium, America, and Czechoslovakia.

These students quickly moved out of the limelight, concentrating on maintaining the standards of the clinical training. They generally did this through discussion with the course co-ordinator and the academic staff. On one occasion in 1979 direct confrontation with the Medical and Health authorities was resorted to when the status of the pre-clinical medical students was apparently being threatened. Their involvement with the rest of the university student body took place on one occasion in the early months of 1978 when the pre-clinical year students were meeting to pass a resolution condemning outright the Worker-Student Scheme. The clinical students tried unsuccessfully to modify this resolution. On another occasion, they were asked by the authorities to give an interview to a reporter from *World Medicine*. In spite of speaking freely with the reporter, she opted to base her comments on what the MAM had told her. She painted the students as a politically motivated group. This view was published irrespective of the fact that no less than five of these students had very actively participated in the 5th October demonstration.



The 1979 MD (New University) Graduates

This group of students eventually qualified from the New University, as constituted by the Act XXI of 1978, in 1979. Their qualification was confirmed by the Council and Senate of The University of Malta, as constituted by Act XII of 1980, in 1982. Seven of these doctors continued their postgraduate education in Yugoslavia, Belgium, the United Kingdom Ireland and Poland obtaining postgraduate degrees in diabetes care, paediatrics, anaesthesia, obstetrics and gynaecology, cardiology, and ophthalmology⁴¹.

The clinical students who proceeded abroad were slowly integrated into several British Medical Schools with the intervention of the British Medical Association. The tuition fees for 1977/78 amounted to £675 per annum, while the British Council recommended that for a single undergraduate studying the U.K. a sum of £1600 per annum would be required for maintenance. These students qualified in 1979, the majority sitting for the Conjoint Examination Board obtaining an LRCP MRCS licentiate⁴², while others qualifying in 1980 obtained a MB BS degree. A request to the University of Malta was made by two of these students [M. Brincal and S. Brincat] to enquire whether they would be eligible to sit for the MD examinations following their continuing medical studies overseas. This request was turned down by the Faculty Board of the University. One student [R. Xerri] eventually rejoined the MD course at the University of Malta

⁴¹ Mark Bailey MD, Lic.Spec.Paed.(Brux), MRCP(UK); Alan Ellul MD, M.Sc(Zag.); Victor Mercieca MD, Accr.Cert.Paed.(Leuv.); Charles Savona-Ventura MD, DScMed(Wars.), MRCOG(UK), Accr.Cert.Obs-Gyn(Leuv.), MRCP (Ire); David Spiteri MD, Accr.Cert.Anaes.(Leuv.), DEAA; Terance Tilney MD, Lic.Spec.Card(Brux.); Ivan Vella MD, MRCS LRCP(UK), FRCS(Edin.)

⁴² Correspondence from G.B. Clack Ass. Registrar of King's College Hospital Medical School to C. Savona-Ventura dated 7th October 1977 [personal correspondence file]

and qualified in 1984, having repeated his clinical training. Some of these students eventually continued with their postgraduate medical studies specialising in various branches of medicine. Some progressively returned to Malta and joined the Government Health Services.

THE FIRST YEAR STUDENTS

In the first half of 1977, this group of students was very far removed from the situation affecting the final-year clinical students. In June, they were in the final stages of the first year examinations in Anatomy and Physiology/Biochemistry. Their involvement throughout the summer months involved the participation of some of the more militant first-year students in the management of the MAM Action Headquarters. After the clinical course of studies was suspended in September 1977, the first-year students were mobilised by the Student Representative Committee of the University to support the plight of the third-year medical students. They, as group together with the rest of the University student body, participated very actively in the student demonstrations carried out throughout October-November 1977.

The suspension of the clinical course of studies did not in any way affect the pre-clinical course. Their concern about the Medical Doctorate course centred on the suspension of recognition by the GMC in 1977 and the political decision to introduce the Worker-Student Scheme announced to the third-year students by the Prime Minister Hon. D. Mintoff in October 1977. A White Paper dealing with the Proposed Reforms in Tertiary Education was published on the 12th June 1978 and included a draft Bill which provided for the introduction of the Worker-Student Scheme for tertiary education⁴³. In anticipation of the Bill, passed by the House of Representatives on the 30th June 1978, this group of students called a general meeting with the aim of

⁴³ Act XXI of 1978 - An Act further to amend the Education Act of 1974. *Malta Government Gazette*, 1978, No.13508; J. Zammit Mangion. *Education in Malta*. MAS, Malta, 1992, p.116-117

condemning the proposed system. This proposal was very actively opposed by the now fourth-year group of students who attended the meeting. These students observed that the medical student body would be condemning a system before its implications could be assessed and ignoring the fact that a good proportion of the same students would be joining the system in the near future. The resolution was passed by majority vote through the efforts of the militant students who had planned to continue their studies overseas⁴⁴. This majority of the group proceeded overseas, and during the academic year 1978-79 there were 29 worker-students in the third year of medical studies⁴⁵. The remainder had proceeded to various universities in the U.K. to complete their studies, their pre-clinical years having been accepted for registration purposes⁴⁶. The students, who opted to continue their studies in Malta, under the new worker-student scheme, qualified in 1982⁴⁷.

⁴⁴ personal experiences of the author.

⁴⁵ D.H. Walwyn-James: *Report by the Rector for the period 1st August 1978 to 31st December 1979*. New University, Malta, n.d.[1980], p.30

⁴⁶ L.J. German, 1991, *op. cit.*, p.113

⁴⁷ *The University of Malta - Calendar 1982*. University Press, Malta, 1982, p.97

THE MEDICAL SCHOOL AFTERMATH

The 1977 dispute resulted in a very tremulous period for the Medical School. The Doctors' lock-out and subsequent legislation pertaining to the Industrial Relations Act on the 18th July 1977 resulted in the suspension and dismissal of many members of the clinical academic staff. It did not initially affect the pre-clinical course of studies. In the circumstances, the GMC decided to suspend recognition of the medical degree but continued to recognise the pre-clinical studies⁴⁸. The Medical Faculty, throughout 1977-78 was divided into the pre-clinical course managed by Medical Faculty Board of the University of Malta, and the clinical course co-ordinated by Prof. G.P. Xwereb. The Education (Amendment) Act No. XXI of 1978 set up the New University under the rectorship of Dr. D.H. Walwyn-James and the Old University under the rectorship of Prof. E. Borg Constanzi. The Faculty of Medicine and Surgery was incorporated in the New University and catered for the twelve students who qualified in November 1979 (Table 1). The Faculty was formally constituted on the 23rd November 1979. The Education Act was again amended in 1980, and the New University was joined again to the Old University re-styled "The University of Malta"⁴⁹.

The change in the University's name caused concerns among the medical graduates who had qualified

⁴⁸ Another academic causality linked to the 1977 industrial dispute was the suspension of recognition given by the General Nursing Council of England and Wales to Maltese-qualified nurses. This recognition had been awarded in 1952. It is more likely that the suspension of recognition followed the previous visitation in 1976 and the general policies of the UK to restrict immigration. The Nursing Recognition has to date not been restored.

⁴⁹ D.H. Walwyn-James, n.d.[1980], *op. cit.*, p.30,49,52; U.M. Calendar, 1982, *ibid*, p.101. - Faculty Members included: Dean - Prof. E.S. Grech; Mr. J. Muscat, M. A. Scicluna-Spiteri, Mr. M. Pace

under the auspices of the New University in 1979. These expressed their concern about possible problems regarding their qualification to the Dean of the Medical Faculty - Prof. E.S. Grech, who forwarded them to the University Council and Senate. The Council and Senate approved in 1982 that a Medical Doctorate degree be awarded to those students who graduated at the New University in December 1979⁵⁰. The course of studies was based on the 5½ month work-phase and 5½ month study-phase concept of the Worker-Student Scheme. The acute shortage of medical personnel in the hospital during the 1977-79 period served as a means of ensuring that the senior Medical students in their work-phase were assigned clinical duties in the wards at St. Luke's Hospital. The academic content continued jointly for both study phase and work phase students without any distinction.

COURSE	Male	Female	Total	Year Qualified	Total Qualified
Inter. M.D. - Year 1->II	89 -> 85	23 -> 22	112 -> 107	1984	80+3*
Final M.D. - Year 1->II	27 -> 27	2 -> 2	29 -> 29	1982	29
Final M.D. - Year III	11	1	12	1979/1982	12+2*

Table 1: STUDENT POPULATION 1978-1979

[* number of candidates who had satisfied requirements in 1977 and registered for examinations]

The Worker-Student Scheme also brought up immediate concerns. The pre-clinical Medical Students had publicly condemned the scheme during

⁵⁰ U.M. Calendar, 1982, *op. cit.*, p.101. These included the twelve medical students of academic years 1974-1979 and two candidates who had satisfied all the requirements in 1977 and who had registered for the Final MD examinations in 1979; besides other 1979 graduates from other faculties of the New University.

the early months of 1978. In November 1978, the newly appointed Malta Medical Students Association - composed of representatives from the pre-clinical and two clinical courses - prepared a report on the Worker-Student scheme, wherein the advantages and disadvantages of the scheme on medical education were outlined. This was forwarded to the coordinator of studies⁵¹. The initial new intake courses went through variable attitudes towards the concept of the Worker-Student, and unfortunately not all of the work phase attachments were purely clinically related. In 1985, the Minister of Education entrusted a Committee chaired by the University Rector with the brief of evaluating the scheme. The Committee commented that while the scheme had its financial and work-experience benefits, the correlation between work and study was inadequate and the majority of work-assignments were not regarded as a learning experience⁵².

In the Faculty of Medicine, the strict demarcation between the study and work phases was not being strictly adhered to⁵³, and lectures were given to both groups of students throughout the whole year. In spite of its deficiencies, the Worker-Student Scheme in the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery was considered suitable for maintaining the standards of academic training of medical practitioners. This is evidenced by the fact that the Medical Doctorate awarded during this period was accepted by several

⁵¹ MMSA: *Report on the Worker-Student Scheme and Student participation in Medical Education in Malta*. MMSA, Malta, November 1978, +2p. [manuscript copy in author's holdings - the author was the Health and Education Officer of the MMSA]

⁵² *Report: Evaluation Worker-Student Scheme*. University of Malta, Malta, 1985, p.25

⁵³ F.F. Fenech: *Maltese Medical Journal*, Winter Issue 1988/89, I(I):p.3; *GuideBook for Medical Students. Faculty of Medicine & Surgery*, Malta, 1986

European countries including Belgium, Italy, Yugoslavia, Germany and France, enabling several graduates to obtain post-graduate qualifications from several universities in these countries⁵⁴. The United Kingdom recognition by the GMC had been suspended in 1977. This suspension of recognition partially impeded graduates from The University of Malta from furthering their clinical training in the U.K. The GMC regulations could however be circumvented. Non-recognised medical graduates, after a year attachment with a Medical Faculty, were eligible to sit for the Conjoint Board examinations and obtain a licentiate to practice in the U.K. One of the 1979 graduates made use of this option and proceeded to the U.K. after 1981. He sat for his LRCP MRCS examinations in 1983 and continued his postgraduate training in ophthalmology⁵⁵. Other 1982 and subsequent graduates sat for several Royal Colleges and University post-graduate qualifications which did not require a specified period of clinical training in the U.K. Other arrangements were made with those Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists whereby the clinical training requirements were made at St. Luke's Hospital and at the Catholic University of Leuven (Belgium). Others proceeded for clinical attachment in the University of Newcastle enabling them to sit for the Conjoint Board examinations prior to furthering their postgraduate education⁵⁶.

⁵⁴ *The Registers of the Medical Council, Malta 1998*. Medical Council, Malta, 1988 [for 1982 graduates who obtained postgraduate qualifications from Europe vide for example Registration nos. 1444 (Leuven), 1450 (Brussels), 1454 (Leuven), 1492 (Paris), 1462 (Padova),]

⁵⁵ *The Registers....., ibid*, p.71 [Reg. no,1331 Vella Ivan]

⁵⁶ *The Registers....., ibid*, [for 1982 graduates who obtained postgraduate qualifications from the UK vide for example Registration nos. 1446, 1447, 1449, 1454, 1461]

The success that the 1979-86 graduates, eventually referred to as 'Gap Doctors', had in obtaining postgraduate diplomas from overseas contrasts with the predictions made in the House of Parliament during the Education (Amendment) Bill debate in June 1978. *Dr. J. Rizzo Naudi (N.P.) said it was not true that the opposition opposed the Bill capriciously. The six months' study/six months' work system was a retrograde step which would produce doctors of an inferior standard*⁵⁷. The Worker-Student Scheme was reviewed by the General Medical Council (UK) after the University of Malta, through the efforts of the Dean of the Faculty Prof. Edwin S. Grech, submitted a formal request for restoration of recognition of its medical degree on the 12th December 1985. In a statement in the House of Representatives, the Minister of Health, Dr. V. Moran, announced that the GMC had decided to lift its suspension and that holders of the medical degree conferred by the University of Malta after May 1, 1986 will once more become eligible for registration in the UK. Registration was however "limited", in line with UK policies on immigration⁵⁸.

The situation vis-a-vie UK registration has been maintained in spite of the overhaul that were made in the structure of tertiary education and the abolition of the Worker-Student Scheme after the change in administration of May 1987. The initial changes involved a formal prolongation of the study phase to 8 months. The Scheme was dismantled by the Education Act XXIV of June 1988⁵⁹.

⁵⁷ Education Bill passed in Committee with amendments by Minister. *Times of Malta*, June 30, 1978, p.28

⁵⁸ L.J. German, 1991, *op. cit.*, p.163

⁵⁹ F.F. Fenech, 1988/89, *op. cit.*, p.3-4; J. Zammit Mangion, 1992, *op. cit.*, p.114-115

CONCLUSIONS

The 1977 MAM-Government Dispute was one which was carried out with no holds barred. Both sides used whatever means were available at their disposal to bring the opponent to its knees. The situation resulted in a stalemate which lasted until a change in government acceded to the Association's demands ten years later. The Medical Faculty and the medical students were brought in the conflict, initially as an excuse to launch an opposition to the diminution of the powers of the Medical Council, and later in a more direct manner by the suspension of the clinical examinations of the final-year students and the suspension of the clinical course of studies. The Medical Students protests of October 1977, supported by the remainder of the University Student Body and large sections of the population, forced the re-opening of the Medical School under the Worker-Student Scheme which was being envisaged for the whole of the tertiary education system. In spite of being politically branded inferior doctors, the doctors qualifying during 1979-1986 were to achieve postgraduate successes in the United Kingdom and elsewhere in Europe and America. The 299 so-called 'Gap Doctors' now form the foundations for the Health Care system of the Maltese Islands both in services offered by the state and in private practice accounting for about 30% of doctors registered in the Principal List of the Medical Register⁶⁰. A large proportion of medical students attending the Medical Faculty in 1977 proceeded abroad to complete their medical education. The circumstances of their forced emigration stimulated them to compete in their adopted country by furthering their postgraduate training. Some have returned to Malta and are

⁶⁰ ⁶⁰ *The Registers....., op. cit., p.19-75*

actively contributing towards the health care service.

APPENDIX I

The University Student riots of the 10th May 1919

The Medical students had only on one previous occasion risen in protest against the administrators setting in motion a series of events which had long-term effect on the whole of the Maltese community. The occasion was to precede the Sette Giugno Riots. In 1916, the University authorities proposed that the Doctorate awarded in Medicine, Law and Theology should be replaced by a Bacheloriate, in line with the practice in British Universities. This amendment in the University Statute laid down that the degrees of M.D., LL.D., and D.D. previously granted would be substituted by the M.B., LL.B., and D.B.; the doctorate being obtained as a result of further examinations after two years.

On the 10th May 1919 the situation came to a head and the students of the three faculties entered Valletta in protest. The students smashed the University furniture and some glass, locked the gate leading to the University and finding Francesco Azzopardi, the unpopular member of the Executive and Legislative Councils who have spoken in favour of the amendments, treated him to a shower of eggs. They finally demonstrated in Kingsway.

Four students - R. Frendo Randon, Carmelo Mifsud Bonnici, Paolo Borg Olivier and Eduard Critien - were charged with disturbing the peace. The accused drove to the courts in a motor car garlanded with flowers; crowd of students and spectators accompanied the car as it slowly drove through Kingsway; flowers were thrown at the heroes of the morning and on arrival at the Courts a very

vociferous demonstration took place. The students were represented by Dr. A. Caruana Gatto, Dr. S. Vella, Dr. U. Mifsud and Dr. G. Degiorgio. The Magistrate put the case off for a week and subsequently freed the accused⁶¹.

The student riots were not the trigger for the subsequent riots on the 7th June 1919. The Sette Giugno riots had their origins in long term and intermediate causes related to the political environment and the overall economic situation of the country. The Student Riots probably serve as an immediate trigger for the later uprising.



Student's protest in Valletta - May 1919

⁶¹ T. Zahra: The "Sette Giugno" Saturday, June 7th, 1919. *Civilisation*, PEG Publ., Malta, 1984, 14:p.368-369; A.V. Laferla: *British Malta*. 1947, vol.II, p.221-222; H. Ganado: *Rajt Malta Tinbidel*. 1977, vol.I, p.215-216