



PARLAMENT TA' MALTA

# SETTE GIUGNO

2019



Valletta  
6 June 2019



**Official Programme**  
**and**  
**Address by the Honourable Anglu Farrugia**  
**Speaker of the House of Representatives**  
**Parliament of Malta**  
**on the occasion of the commemoration of**  
**SETTE GIUGNO**

**Thursday, 6 June 2019**

## **SPEECH ON THE OCCASION OF SETTE GIUGNO 2019**

Prime Minister  
Leader of the Opposition  
Presidents Emeriti  
Speakers Emeriti  
Honourable Members  
Former Members  
Excellencies  
Distinguished guests

This year's Sette Giugno commemoration is more than the annual occasion during which we stop to remember the events in which people lost their lives at the inception of the parliamentary and democratic journey of our country. Today's commemoration is more significant because we are commemorating the centenary of these events that are so closely connected to the history of the Parliament of Malta.

When one speaks of the events that occurred a hundred years ago – and here we are recalling particularly the revolt of the Maltese people against British rule that culminated on 7 June 1919 – it is opportune to go back in time to see what the Maltese and the Gozitan people had to go through and why this was necessary. This commemoration also serves as opportunity to consider what we have achieved to date with regard to parliamentary democracy in our country.

At the end of World War I our country faced huge problems, especially in agriculture and in the importation of wheat, on which the availability of food for the Maltese people depended. As I have said before on the occasion of this commemoration, the high costs of wheat and the consequent lack of staple foods such as bread, as well as the lack of other agricultural products, such as potatoes, left the Maltese people with no other option but to rebel against British rule which did not appear to pay much attention to the extreme hardships that the people were facing.

However, there is another aspect that, in my opinion, is not given its due importance when speaking about the riots of 1919. The lack of basic food was not the only problem that led to these riots. One must not forget that, apart from the poverty that the Maltese people were experiencing, there was also discontent among many workers, especially blue-collar workers, who had assisted the British Empire so much during World War I. I am referring specifically to the Dockyard workers who felt that they were being much less respected than their foreign counterparts who were brought to Malta from England and who were doing the same work. This discrimination was thus another factor that led the Maltese workers to rebel. We find a reference to this situation in the report of the June Disturbances Commission, a Commission set up to investigate what had happened during the Sette Giugno riots. The report of the Commission, submitted to the Governor of the time, Lord Plumer, states the following:

*“Unrest among Dockyard people.*

*They complain of differences in the pay and in the advantages between the English and the Maltese workers. We have ascertained that the difference is not as between English and*

*Maltese workmen, but between workmen sent out from England under an agreement and those locally engaged. They admit that English workmen sent out from England should receive extra remuneration in the shape of colonial allowance, but their grievance is that for identical work and equal hours the English workman gets much more pay, and that the English workers are kept quite separate from their Maltese fellow workmen.”*

This is clear testimony of the situation that was causing discontent and frustration among manual workers.

It was not just manual workers who had problems. There were also the university medical students who, in spite of having finished their studies, could not be granted their warrant owing to an anomaly in the warrant awards system. This anomaly is also mentioned in the same inquiry report which states that:

*“The New Statute was enacted in 1915, but the effects could only be felt by the students who were to receive the degrees in 1919, as the New Statute was not applicable to the students who received their degree in 1916. We consider that it was a great mistake not redress the grievance, if well founded, before the students had recourse to violence.”*

In fact, after the Sette Giugno riots, many students were taken to court and found guilty, along with many others as I will mention later on.

Furthermore, at that time there was great discontent in the civil service owing to anomalies and injustices, including very low salaries and a

difference in treatment between categories of employees. So much so, that the same report states that:

*“Another cause of discontent was that a remuneration was allowed under some name or other to a high official, while the question of Bonuses with regard to the inferior employees had not yet been considered. One of the witnesses complained that while one pound a day was given to that officer, 3/4d (three quarters of a penny) was given to the low paid employees.”*

The report continues:

*“It must be added that people have complained that the salaries of Heads of Departments were increased before the question of increasing the pay of the minor employees had been solved.”*

I am mentioning this to show how, apart from the lack of basic food, the population was enduring other hardships. At this point I would add that according to the inquiry report the British even tried to blame the riots on articles that appeared in the media at the time. So much so, that the report tried to put the blame on one of the publications, *La Voce del Popolo*, which was the official organ of the *Comitato Patriottico* that sympathised with Enrico Mizzi. In fact, the report states that:

*“On the 3rd of February 1919 Political censorship of the press in Malta was abolished, and the Comitato Patriottico having fallen under the influence of Dr Enrico Mizzi, the official organ of that Committee – La Voce del Popolo became an*

*instrument of sedition in the hands of Dr E. Mizzi and of the few persons who share his ideas.”*

In this regard, the report of the June Disturbances Commission refers to articles published at the time, and I quote: *“praising Italian Rule to the prejudice of British Rule.”*

It is clear that this report by the Commission that was set up to investigate the effects of the Sette Giugno incidents was so manipulated and, I dare say, dishonest, that in its conclusion one finds that the four soldiers of the British Forces who fired shots, killing some of the Maltese present at the riots we are commemorating today, were not obliged to answer for their actions even though they had not been ordered to open fire. For the sake of correctness I quote from the report:

*“I do not think that either he or the four private soldiers who fired without order can be justly punished for their action on the occasion and I do not think it is in the public interest that they should be brought before a Court Martial.”*

When I read this, I could hardly believe that one could effectively arrive at such a conclusion.

Whereas the report that was drawn up under the direction of the Governor of the time, Lord Herbert Plumer, made it clear that no steps would be taken against the British officers, the same cannot be said with regard to the Maltese, including those who simply happened to be at the site of the riots. More than 115 Maltese people were found guilty; some of them, like Salvatore Bartolo, were even sent to prison, with the charge of *“Being present at a sedition; did not do his utmost*

*to prevent it*” and *“Attempting to induce members of HM’s forces to act in a manner which he knew to be in contravention of the orders of the Army”*. On 13 September, after a court martial held under the direction of the Governor of the time, Salvatore Bartolo was sentenced to 20 years imprisonment.

Another case is that of Giovanni Miller, who was also accused to have *“Attempted to induce members of HM’s forces to act in a manner which he knew to be in contravention of the orders of the Army”*. He was sent to prison for 15 years. Another Maltese citizen, Francesco Debattista, was also sentenced to seven years in prison simply because he was present at the riot; the charge stated *“Been present in a sedition; did not do his utmost to prevent it”*. This means that the British expected the civilians present to take action against those who were protesting or taking part in a demonstration. For this lack of action, some were sent to prison for two years, as was the case for Giovanni Busuttill and Carmelo Mallia, some were sent to prison for five years, as in the case of Giorgio Ciantar; the list is never-ending. There was also Margerita Frendo, who was in Valletta with her son and who was sent to prison for five days simply because she had a few packets of rice in her bag and could not explain exactly how they came to be in her possession. There were others who were imprisoned for a few days and others who were fined.

This goes to show some of the hardships endured by the Maltese people which led them to react by sending a clear message that they wanted the right to manage at least the internal affairs of the country. Today, on the occasion of the centenary of the Sette Giugno, it is opportune to remember those riots and what led to them, so that they are never forgotten. We must keep in mind that it was the deaths of these four Maltese people and the hardships of those wounded as well

as of those who were sent to prison, that enabled our ancestors to acquire the right to at least decide about the country's internal affairs. We must keep on recalling all of this so that we, who are fortunate enough not to have lived through those difficult times, can understand that the rights that we presently enjoy would not have been possible without the suffering of those who came before us; rights which we must continue to defend with due discernment and respect.

Therefore, on this occasion we cannot but remember and celebrate the achievements of our Institution, the Parliament of Malta, that originated from the events of 7 June 1919, the centenary of which we will be celebrating in two years' time. I don't want to be interpreted as saying that our work is complete and that there is no room for improvement, but when I look back at the last hundred years, as Speaker of the House of Representatives, I cannot fail to note the progress that has been made and how much our Parliament has evolved, not only in terms of the facilities with which it is equipped, but also with regard to the legislative framework within which it operates.

From my experience participating in various interparliamentary Commonwealth meetings, including in my role of President of the Small Branches of the Commonwealth, I can say that, on various occasions, the Maltese Parliament has served as an example to other parliaments within the same Commonwealth. This is because the Maltese Parliament is held in very high regard when compared to those of other countries, and I am saying this responsibly. I believe that this high esteem was acquired through the Maltese Parliament's contribution to the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, for example through its input to the publication on benchmarking and good governance in a parliamentary democracy published by this

same Association. I say this first and foremost with respect to the work carried out by the Maltese Parliament during the last year.

I have to say that since my last speech on the occasion of the Sette Giugno commemoration, the Maltese Parliament had one of the best clearance rates in its work when compared to that of other national parliaments because during this period the Maltese Parliament managed to approve nearly 40 legislative acts.

I am a firm believer not only in scrutiny, but also in transparency without delay. A fairly recent development that I believe will contribute to greater accountability by Members of Parliament is the appointment of a Commissioner for Standards in Public Life, empowered to investigate breaches of statutory or ethical duties by persons in public life, as well the setting up of the parliamentary Committee for Standards in Public Life. A year ago, I had commented on the need for the relevant law that was passed by Parliament in March 2017 to enter into force and become operational. I am pleased to note that the Standards in Public Life Act entered into force on 30 October 2018 and, during the sitting of the same day, by virtue of Article 4 of this Act, Dr George Hyzler was unanimously appointed as the first Commissioner for Standards in Public Life. Furthermore, a few weeks later, on 12 December 2018, the Standing Committee on Standards in Public Life was also appointed. This Committee, which I chair as Speaker of the House, is composed of four Members, two from each side of the House. Both the Commissioner and the Committee embarked upon their important tasks soon thereafter, tasks that I believe will strengthen the Maltese people's trust in the parliamentary institution. I believe that this trust is necessary for people not to give in to populism, a trend we are witnessing in various

European countries, because facts show that this choice lacks practical and sustainable solutions.

In last year's speech I had mentioned the development planned for the subterranean level of the Parliament building. Our aim is to have an additional committee room, as well as a Parliamentary library and archive, organised in such a way as to make parliamentary records more accessible to the public. Last year, the development application was approved and works have started and are progressing at a steady rate. I hope that the project will be ready by next year so that we will have an area which is state-of-the-art, equipped with the necessary modern technology so as to make Parliament's records more accessible not only to Members of Parliament but also to historians, students and the general public.

As I have already had occasion to mention, although Parliament has made big strides forward, there still remain various measures that can be considered so that the legislative framework in which Parliament operates is further strengthened. As I have mentioned in previous years, I feel that the time has come to address the matter of the parliamentary privilege that each Member enjoys when speaking in the country's highest institution. Here I am specifically referring to the fact that a citizen who feels wronged by an address delivered in Parliament has no right of reply. I believe that the way forward is to continue the exercise that was embarked upon by both sides of the House – Government and Opposition – to introduce regulations intended to safeguard the decorum we normally uphold in our parliamentary debates, that is in the way in which Members address the House.

In my speech last year, I referred to what I had already said back in 2015 on this proposal because it is something in which I wholeheartedly believe, and I quote:

*“Much remains to be done to continue improving the level of transparency and accountability of each and every one of us towards the people we represent. For instance, I believe that the time has come to address issues which arise when citizens feel aggrieved by statements made about them in Parliament, and to establish a mechanism which grants citizens a right of redress. This obviously needs to be done without impinging on Parliamentary rights and privileges, since these are intended to allow Members of Parliament to speak without fear.”*

I am still of the opinion that this would be an important development in parliamentary accountability with regard to the behaviour of Members in the House.

Following last year’s Sette Giugno speech, I was approached by a number of citizens who felt wronged by what was said by certain Members in Parliament in their regard. In the absence of mechanisms that provide for such situations, I could offer no remedy to these citizens. Until such time that Parliament adopts such mechanism, I believe that the time has come for me to consider tabling in the House all the complaints I receive from citizens in writing when they feel wronged by what has been said about them in the House. As we commemorate the centenary of the Sette Giugno riots, I am of the opinion that without any further delay, we should move ahead with the introduction of some kind of mechanism so that whoever abuses their parliamentary privilege is made answerable for their actions.

Members of Parliament represent the electorate, and whoever they may be, and whichever side of the House they hail from, they should always be accountable for what they say; they must always be honest and seek the country's best interests. Therefore, I reiterate my call for a revision of the Standing Orders of the House of Representatives in order to introduce such a remedy, which I feel all citizens should be entitled to.

I am of the opinion that one other development that Parliament needs to achieve relates to the gender balance of its elected Members, an issue which we have not yet adequately addressed. As we know, out of 67 elected Members in the present Legislature, there are only ten female MPs, amounting to 15%. Earlier this year, Government, through the Parliamentary Secretariat for Reforms, Citizenship and Simplification of Administrative Processes launched a public consultation proposing to address the under-representation of women in Parliament, which consultation closes on 8 June. This means that at this stage, everyone still has the opportunity to make proposals with regard to this reform. Irrespective of how it is done, it is important that the reform be implemented quickly and in a responsible manner, so that in the short term we will have a mechanism that can address this discrepancy which one may argue that it constitutes a democratic deficit in Parliament. I believe that the adoption of such a mechanism will strengthen representative parliamentary democracy.

The lack of representation of women in Parliament is a phenomenon that we have been witnessing for a long time in spite of the fact that women have been granted the right to vote as well as the right to stand for elections since 1947. This dearth becomes more apparent when we compare ourselves to other countries not only in Europe but also across the Commonwealth. A few days ago, the Maltese Parliament welcomed Emilia Monjowa Lifaka, the Chairperson of the

Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, who is also the Deputy Speaker of the Parliament of Cameroon. During our discussions it emerged that 31% of the Members of the Parliament of Cameroon are women. Here I also refer to a recent report published by the Inter-Parliamentary Union titled “Women in parliament in 2018” which shows that the EU average is 28.5%. Therefore, it is evident that the time has come for us to address this problem responsibly, by seeing that all the necessary measures are introduced so that more women are encouraged to stand for elections to represent the citizens in Parliament. In this respect, I would like to thank both the Government and the Opposition parliamentary groups, for their co-operation enabling Parliament to meet at hours that are more favourable to the work-life balance of Members of Parliament and all those persons who in some way assist them in the performance of their parliamentary mandate. This measure has enabled us to spend more time with our families.

I believe that we must continue to take further initiatives to ensure that democracy in our country remains not only alive and relevant, but also more representative of society at large, so that the Maltese people truly feel well-represented in Parliament, with elected Members of Parliament who have the citizen’s best interests at heart.

On the hundredth anniversary from the events of the Sette Giugno, I am proud of the significant advances that the Maltese Parliament has made and is still making in order to give the citizens a stronger voice and a more participative role therein. I feel that this is essential for the Institution to be truly representative of the people and to properly address their aspirations.

Thank you.