

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

Monday, 6 June 2016

Programme of the Commemoration of *Sette Giugno*

- 15.45** The Police Band marches from the Parliament of Malta in Freedom Square to Hastings Garden
- 16.00** The Police Band takes its position near the *Sette Giugno* Monument at Hastings Garden
- 16.05** Guests to be seated next to the *Sette Giugno* Monument at Hastings Garden
- 16.20** The Hon. Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Hon. Prime Minister and the Hon. Leader of the Opposition take their seats next to the *Sette Giugno* Monument at Hastings Garden
- 16.22** Speech by the Hon. Anglu Farrugia MP, Speaker of the House of Representatives
- 16.45** After the speech, the Hon. Speaker of the House of Representatives proceeds to the *Sette Giugno* Monument
- 16.46** *Last Post*
- 16.47** A Minute of Silence
- 16.48** *Reveille*
- 16.50** The Hon. Speaker of the House of Representatives lays a wreath at the foot of the *Sette Giugno* Monument
- 16.51** Laying of wreaths by the Hon. Prime Minister, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition, the Dean of the Diplomatic Corps, representatives of the Political Parties and other organisations (according to the Order of Precedence)
- 17.00** National Anthem
- Reception at the Parliament of Malta

Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Opposition Leader, Emeritus Presidents, Emeritus Speakers, Honourable Members, Former Members, Excellencies, Distinguished guests.

A year has passed since I delivered my last speech during this commemoration on the occasion of *Sette Giugno*, a day that without doubt is of great importance as it reminds us of when, on the 7th of June 1919, the people raised their voices in the struggle for their own rights, the rights of the Maltese Nation. This is an occasion that helps us better understand what is and what we should expect from parliamentary democracy that we started to embrace by virtue of this event, two years after which event, we were given the Amery-Milner Constitution.

In the speech I delivered last year on the same occasion in front of this monument, a monument that commemorates the start of the history of the Maltese parliament as we know it today, I had referred to the fact that on the 18th March of last year the National Feasts Committee had asked for my views in respect of the proposal to move this monument from this garden to a more prominent place. After all, this place was meant to be temporary. From the outset and without hesitation I had expressed my view that I agree with the proposal that this monument by sculptor Anton Agius should be relocated in a more appropriate and visible place. There is an intrinsic and precise connection between what is represented by this monument and the Maltese Parliament.

A year has passed and nothing has changed in spite of the fact that as I could see for myself earlier last month, the National Feasts Committee is unanimously in favour of moving this monument. Therefore I feel that to convey this message and also to show the appreciation of the Maltese and the Gozitan people towards this monument, that above all represents the historical journey of the Parliamentary Institution, a symbolic gesture needs to be made today on the occasion of this national day; a national day connected to the struggle of the Maltese people which led our country to attain its first Constitution in 1921. Therefore I propose that after my speech and after this ceremony, I will symbolically walk with you along the stairs that actually lead us to the Parliament building.

On an occasion such as this, it is always important that one examines in detail what happened at the time when the Maltese and Gozitan people rose up against the English rule in an uprising in which several buildings in Valletta and in other places were damaged. The main issue seems to have been caused primarily by the increase in the price of bread. In research which I myself have conducted, both in the past as well as this year, I have focused more on the people who participated in this uprising rather than on the victims or other people who on that day might have seemed to be the enemies of the Maltese and Gozitan people. Research always leads to more research and this is why I felt that I should also look into the views of some of those who exercised authority in our country, and also of traders. One of these protagonists was Anthony Cassar Torreggiani who used to represent the Chamber of Commerce, or as it was referred to at the time and as we still refer to it today, 'Il-Borża'. In the book written by Nicholas de Piro which depicts in detail what happened on that day, we find that Mr Cassar Torreggiani said, and I quote:

“On the day when I was to address the Assembly, I hailed a carozzin at St Julian’s (I had rented a small place by the sea for my family). I was running a little late and told the cab-driver to hurry to Valletta. I rehearsed my speech on representation and taxation until, suddenly, a friend making frantic gestures, stopped the cab. “Quick”, he said, “hide. The millers are the target. Do not go to the Assembly - your house is ransacked - there are bodies outside your front door.

My first reaction was not fear but fury. Two months earlier in March of 1919 the price of wheat had soared to an all time high. The local milling industry was faced with the dilemma either to buy at a high price and face the public with a rise in the price of bread to 9½d. per rotolo, or decline to import the wheat requirements of the island. My pleadings with Lord Methuen to suspend the bread tax until more favourable times, were to no avail. I was told that the current Government expenditure had risen to over £800,000. His Excellency would not give way.”

It should be noted that at the time there were several flour milling machines around Malta and Gozo and amongst the traders who used to provide the wheat for the daily bread for the Maltese and Gozitan people, there was namely Mr Cassar Torreggiani who personally had tried to convince Governor Methuen to suspend the tax on bread, always on the principle that *“there could be no taxation without representation”*.

Something that was not noted for several years by the researchers in this area, was that this trader had spoken to the Governor with the help of Lieutenant Governor William Robertson who had fixed an appointment for him with the Governor to try to persuade him not to continue with the increase in the tax on the importation of wheat.

At one stage, when the issue on the price of wheat became quite complicated, in March 1919, the same trader had asked that at least there should be a guarantee by the Governor that would cover the losses that might occur in the importation of wheat as it was being transported to Malta, due to the great difficulties that existed at the time in the shipping trade. At the time, in 1918, the First World War had just ended and it was getting very difficult to find ships for these voyages since there was a *“scarcity of ships remaining afloat”*.

This contributed significantly to the precarious situation that the population in our country was facing, so much so that in de Piro’s book we find the following and I quote:

“By 1919 the populace was in a state of exasperation because of the high cost of foodstuffs and the low standard of living.”

There were ships that left from Gibraltar and others that left from England to bring the merchandise to Malta but failed to arrive, so much so that when a ship managed to arrive, there used to be great elation in the Harbour with people shouting: *“We are saved!”* This detail also emerges from the aforementioned De Piro’s work which describes how the ships that used to be sent to Malta tried to make it to the Grand

Harbour with great determination, at times even against the advice of the authorities due to attacks from the enemy.

All this led to a situation where the price of wheat almost doubled. This, besides the increase in the tax imposed by the English authorities at the time under Governor Lord Methuen, who for no reason wanted to relieve the tax on bread, at least – as a number of persons were trying to persuade him, amongst which the traders of wheat – until better times came around which would allow for the introduction of the said tax.

From what is quoted above, always from De Piro's writings, it transpires that the Maltese people were not appreciating that there were people in the country in positions of authority that were doing their utmost so that the tax would not be imposed. As always, both sides of the story need to be considered to better understand what occurred. This applies to any problem that a country might face. One needs to try to understand all the parties to draw the right conclusion in respect of what has happened and in respect of the decisions that need to be taken, especially when the issue is seen in light of parliamentary democracy.

Nowadays, the concept of parliamentary democracy is a reality and no longer an aspiration. It is a system which is acknowledged as one that contributes significantly so that the administration of the country is credible and healthy.

A healthy administration also needs to be based on the concept of good governance. This term could be said to refer to the correct administration which should be applied rigorously by the institutions in the administration of public affairs, including the use of public resources. For correct governance to be credible and to give satisfaction to the people, it is implicit that all procedures should be carried out in the most transparent manner. It is not enough to have correct administration of public affairs; rather, there should be no doubt that any decision was not taken within the full scope of correctness.

I take this opportunity in my capacity of Speaker of the House to show my appreciation for the fact that all the employees in the Institution that I lead feel free to remark and discuss all that which was not done

correctly. This is especially felt now that we are in a new building where we are still encountering problems in the building due to works which were not carried out as they were meant to. Gone are the days when one was afraid of speaking up or tried to hide for fear of being isolated or even scolded. My actions go against this. I feel that for the purposes of good governance one should be encouraged to draw attention to the procedures that do not reflect correctness in the administration of public resources. I believe that one should feel free to draw attention to every issue without being afraid of repercussions. I accept and thank all those persons who come forward with suggestions for the improvement of the practices or of the systems that are used.

As an Institution we have made great strides from last year's speech. For example in respect to television broadcasting, nowadays, the Maltese Parliament is being transmitted also on free-to-air frequencies. This step has opened Parliament further to the public since now whoever would like to follow what is going on in this Institution no longer needs to pay a television subscription. This was a request that this Office was receiving constantly once the parliamentary sittings started being broadcasted on television on the 4th of May of last year with the help of GO and Melita, whom from here I would like to thank.

During the past year we have moved the Parliament archives from where they were situated in the Grand Master's Palace to a temporary place in the proximity of the new building. We now need to find funding to transform the tunnel from where the train used to enter in the old days, into a place where there will be another committee room, an archive and a reference library, as well as a small cafeteria where Members can meet in an informal environment. This project, for which we are trying to tap European funds, will enable us to strengthen the support services extended to Members of Parliament and will enable us to better disseminate to the public the information that is found in the Parliamentary documents, in particular the old ones which have a historical value.

The argument that the highest institution of the country can never be free from every obstacle and tie if administratively it will continue

being considered as a Government department, has been expressed over a number of years by several Speakers during the *Sette Giugno* speeches. It is therefore with pleasure that today I can say that during this past year three sittings have already been dedicated to the discussion at Second Reading stage of the Parliamentary Service Bill. I hope that this Bill will not take long to become a Parliamentary Act so that this dream of a number of Speakers before me, as well as my own, will come true, and for the first time in its history, Parliament will start enjoying full administrative autonomy.

I augur that the same will occur with the Bill on Standards in Public Life that is on the Parliament's agenda. This law, which provides for the appointment of a Commissioner for Standards in Public Life by means of a resolution approved by two-thirds of the House, should serve as useful guide for those who are in public life, whereby everyone will be under scrutiny and if anyone is not correct in his ethical conduct, or worse, there is a breach of law, the Commissioner, together with the Standing Committee on Standards in Public Life, chaired by the Speaker, will be in a position to act in accordance with the law.

The need to update the Standing Orders of the House has been mentioned several times. It would be useless to keep on talking about this need without doing anything about it. Amongst other provisions, the Standing Orders provide for Members of Parliament the right to speak for 40 minutes. Our Standing Orders provide that the Minister who is introducing the debate on a Bill at Second Reading stage, may speak for one hour and a half. The Shadow Minister may also speak for one hour and a half when replying to that speech on behalf of the Opposition. These are provisions that I dare say do not exist in any European or Commonwealth Parliament and therefore should be reviewed so that the time of the House may be used in a more productive manner.

I believe it is time that nobody in Parliament, whoever it may be, should be assigned more than 15 or 20 minutes to speak, except in exceptional cases. Speakers need to focus more on the salient points that they want to address in their speeches, and should do this fully prepared, as is already happening in some cases. I have to say that recently we are

hearing a number of speeches that are duly prepared. We need to keep on working in this direction so that we will manage to say what we have to say in a short time, even in five or two minutes. There are even parliaments in Europe where a fine may be applied if one exceeds the allocated time. I do not think that we should arrive to this point, but we should amend the Standing Orders of the House, where required, as soon as possible. Also, with the aim of improving the speeches delivered in the House, on the administrative side, we are striving to increase the assistance provided to Members, even in preparation for the Presidency of the Council of the European Union next year. For this purpose we shall increase our team of research analysts by another five members. I believe that there will come a time when we will have to adopt the system followed in various other Parliaments where the Members are allocated a form of allowance in order to employ assistants to help them in the preparation of their parliamentary speeches.

Another change in the Standing Orders that has long been felt as needed, is the requirement for the allocation of sittings for private Member's work on the same lines as the system followed in the House of Commons. Even though our Standing Orders, as originally drawn up, took this in consideration, along the years various administrations introduced practices that eroded this right of private Members that mostly, let's face it, affects the minority in Parliament. Therefore, while I acknowledge the fact that during this legislature a considerable number of sittings were allocated to the consideration of motions by the Opposition, I repeat what was expressed even in Rulings delivered by preceding Speakers, that in this respect, a more effective regulation is required.

The Maltese Parliament has also made great strides in the international field. Last November the Maltese Parliament was the first national parliament that hosted a debate amongst the candidates for the office of Secretary General of the Commonwealth. This debate, apart from being very interesting and which was followed by several people from around the world, enabled the Maltese Parliament to play its part in the valuable work that was carried out during the CHOGM that was held in Malta in the last part of 2015. The Maltese Parliament was instrumental

in another task at interparliamentary level within the Commonwealth, that is, the establishment of the Commonwealth Association of Public Accounts Committees, whose Secretariat is hosted by the Parliament of Malta.

Today, the Parliament of Malta can also boast that it made strides in respect of parliamentary diplomacy due to the tireless work of several parliamentary delegations in international organizations such as the European Parliament, the Council of Europe, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, the Interparliamentary Union and others. This required more effort from the Members of Parliament but also more resources from the Parliament administration. The recruitment of new research analysts in 2015 was a measure that allowed Parliament to provide assistance to the Members who participated in a more active way in these interparliamentary fora. Therefore it is clear that if we really want our Members to be more prepared in the performance of their parliamentary duties, we need to provide them with all the possible assistance.

Allow me to mention an example of the useful work that is carried out during such visits. Recently, the Chair had the opportunity to lead a parliamentary delegation to the Middle East and after long and detailed discussions I can say that for the first time we attained the establishment of a parliamentary working group between the Palestinian Legislative Council, the Maltese Parliament and the Israeli Knesset; and this with the blessing of the President of the Palestinian Authority, His Excellency Mahmoud Abbas. The main scope of this working group is to work together to get the parties ever closer to each other through ideas and concepts that may give positive results.

The lack of thinking that creates value, would leave you at a standstill. Here, the first thing that comes to mind is the most recent publication by Professor Edward de Bono that bears the title *Thinking to Create Value* which he presented to me a few weeks ago. Amongst other things in this publication we find a suggestion by the author for an exercise where “*Parliaments would have special sessions for positive value sensitivity*” from which one can derive positive or negative values.

During a discussion that I had with the same Professor de Bono I raised the point as to whether he believes or not that at this point in time, the Maltese Parliament should be the first national parliament in the world to have a committee on ‘thinking’. We all know that the solution for certain problems will only be found if there is more ‘thinking’ which is not necessarily conventional but open to other ideas, concepts and methodologies.

I am saying this because we are all aware of the fact that it is not the first time that the Maltese Parliament, unfortunately, got carried away in lengthy debates due mainly to lack of preparedness prior to the delivery of certain speeches. This is particularly evident when the criticism that is made, whatever the subject, includes attacks even on family members. I consider this the lowest level we could fall into. I think that we should understand and remember that the family members at no point should feature in the controversies that could emerge between politicians. When we do this we would be lowering the level of politics and of free discussion as it should be according to the values of a parliamentary democracy.

We need to acknowledge that to safeguard self-respect in our political work, we need to have courage, the kind of courage Dun Karm displayed when on the occasion of the granting of the Constitution to Malta in 1921, even though at the time writing in Maltese was a taboo, he wrote the patriotic anthem *Lil Huti l-Maltin Nhar l-Għoti tal-Kostituzzjoni* (*To my brothers and sisters on the granting of the Constitution*). That anthem, that closely resembled the Maltese National Anthem as we know it today, was inspired by the need for national unity in a period which was characterized by a strong partisan divide. On that day, Dun Karm was an example; through what he wrote in that anthem he rejected partisanship and showed great patriotism when he spoke on unity and peace. As a priest and as a poet he used to be very upset when he used to be linked to a political side but he still chose to deliver his message through that poem in 1921. This was very well explained by Professor Friggieri in his publication *L-Istorja tal-Innu Malti* (*The history of the Maltese Anthem*), where he says the following:

"The 1921 election, approximately a year only before he made public the verses of the Maltese Anthem, was a confrontation between these parties *Unione Politica Maltese* (UPM) of Monsignore Ignazio Panzavecchia, the Labour Party (PL) of Colonel Willie Savona, the Nationalist Democratic (PDN) of Dr Nerik Mizzi and the Constitutional Party (PK) of Count Sir Gerald Strickland. When he wrote in Italian, Dun Karm could have been perceived as a follower of Mizzi (Nationalist), just as when he wrote in Maltese he could be considered a follower of Strickland. He rejected every partisan position to choose a Maltese position, a national position, above partisan politics. He tried to describe himself in the sonnet '*Lil Malta*' (*To Malta*) (1939), where from his appreciation for the cultural Italy and the appreciation for the political England, he moves on to prefer Malta, "because only you are my mother, you that gave me a name".

I have to say that there is a lot that we all need to learn until we really manage to be exemplary at all times. There is always something left to be learnt but certainly we should not give up. We have to keep on striving to see how we can carry out our work with more dignity and respect. Each and every one of us in Parliament, and whoever works in this Institution, has the duty to do his part freely and at all times, without conditions, without threats and without fear, so that the Maltese Parliament will always be in a better position, as it should be, to address the ever increasing aspirations and expectations of all the people of Malta and Gozo.

I thank you.