

Press Release

Lehen is-Sewwa – 80 Years of Catholic Journalism

A Thanksgiving Concelebrated Mass shall be held at St Publius Church, Floriana, on Wednesday, 24th September, at 6.30 pm., presided by His Grace the Archbishop Mgr Paul Cremona O.P. to mark the 80th year of Catholic journalism of *Lehen is-Sewwa*, the *doyen* of local journals.

Following the introduction of the freedom of the press in Malta in 1839, there appeared several newspapers which were inspired by Christian ideals. But most of them were shortlived.

After the first World War (1914-1918), various countries in Europe and Latin America found themselves in the throes of great ideological conflicts. Not only human rights were being stifled by emerging dictators, but also the Christian civilization and moral values were being attacked

openly far and wide. The Holy See was deeply concerned at these disturbing events and Pope Pius XI (1922-1939) spared no effort to point out the errors against the faith and crimes being committed against humanity and freedom of worship.

By the mid twenties, this disturbing wave reached our shores and became a matter of concern for the Church leaders in Malta. It was in this context that the Archbishop Dom Maurus Caruana (1915-1943) decided to start a new Catholic weekly newspaper in Maltese by the name *Lehen is-Sewwa*. Its first editor was Canon Enrico Bonnici who on the 1st September, 1928, published its first issue..

But only after five years of its publication, under its second editor Canon Arthur Bonnici, because of financial difficulties, *Lehen is-Sewwa* was destined to close down. Instead, the local ecclesiastical authorities decided to pass over its management to the Catholic Action, and

Dr Herbert Ganado, then a young lawyer who was very active in the Catholic Action, became its third editor.

Dr Ganado succeeded to steer the paper through turbulent times preceeding the second world war, and not only converted *Lehen is-Sewwa* into a daily paper, but also gave it a new look. He widened its scope by covering a wider range of subjects and made it a means for the promotion and dissemination of Catholic culture with a broad view on all religious, social, cultural and even political spheres of Maltese society set within a global context. This is the same policy still followed today.

But unfortunatley, in 1939 Dr Herbert Ganado was unjustly interned without trial by the colonial authorities and subsequently exiled with a number of distinguished nationals to Uganda.

Mr Michael Caruana who was a man of action and had already acquired extensive experience in journalism was appointed as

the fourth editor and ably edited *Lehen is-Sewwa* through the difficult days of the war up to the end of 1942.. It is to his credit that even throughout the darkest days of the war, *Lehen is-Sewwa* as a daily paper never missed a single issue. Besides under his editorship, *Lehen is-Sewwa* sailed on undaunted, doing its utmost to boost the morale of the population during the siege.

In December 1942, Mr Michael Caruana resigned and Fr Salvino Bartoli Galea, who was still a young priest, was appointed to succeed him. As from January 1943, the new editor reverted the paper to its original role as a weekly, but two years later it became a bi-weekly publication.

Mgr Salvino Bartoli Galea steered the paper for 30 whole years with great discernment and moral courage. It was to his credit that after the war, which left indelible morale and physical scars on Malta and its people, *Lehen is-Sewwa* was in the forefront of the struggle to place Maltese

society on the road to reconstruction and, eventually, to the attainment of independence. During the events that characterised the political, religious and social life in Malta during the Sixties, the Seventies and most of the Eighties, the paper once more proved its mettle in defence of moral, human and Christian values.

After the sudden death of Mgr Salvino Bartoli Galea in January 1973, Chev. Paul Saliba was appointed editor and steered the paper for 31 whole years with great determination not only to improve the paper both in its contents as well in its presentation according to modern needs, but also to make it a suitable tool to convey the word of truth, unbiased and uncontaminated by political or economic interest, intent on helping the Maltese christian to live his vocation in the present day pluralistic and rather materialistic society.

This is also the course that the present editor Canon John Ciarlò, as the seventh

editor of *Lehen is-Sewwa*, is following since his appointment in 2004. *Lehen is-Sewwa* as a Catholic paper, today perhaps far more than in the past, feels the need to continue to fulfill its role to educate the mind and form public opinion in accordance with the Gospel spirit. Its task today is to offer to all a message of truth and hope, highlighting events and situations where the Gospel is put into practice and helping public opinion to look at, interpret and live the present situation in today's relativistic society with God's eyes.