

AIDE MEMOIRE

Mr. A.E. Davidson, British Consul in Tunis, called on the Honourable Acting Prime Minister on Tuesday, 23rd June. He was accompanied by Mr. I. Watt, Acting United Kingdom Commissioner, and Mr. A. Spencer. The Hon. Mr. E. Cuschieri, Administrative Secretary, and Mr. F.E. Anato-Gauci were in attendance.

Mr. Davidson explained the position of the Maltese farmers in Tunisia whose property was liable to be expropriated by the Tunisian Government as a result of a recent law passed in that country. He said that the number of families affected by the law number between 60 and 70. These were of Maltese origin but so far no case of a Malta-born farmer had come up. The holdings appeared in general to be very small and this indicated that the farmers depended on some other provision for a livelihood. The total number of persons of Maltese origin in Tunisia was about 2,500.

Mr. Davidson stated that the Tunisian Government was sensitive to the reactions of other Governments on the subject and also took account of press criticism. He felt that the action of the Tunisian Government in passing the law expropriating agricultural lands emanated from their attitude towards the French settlers. The French Government had reacted sharply to the measure and so had the Italian and Swiss Governments. In the case of the Swiss Government, the Tunisian Ambassador in Switzerland was recalled for consultations. The Italian Government had cancelled a state visit of Monsieur Bourgiba to Italy. Besides the Maltese farmers there were only two English farmers affected and as Britain did not grant any financial or other assistance to the Tunisian Government it was not possible for the British Government to apply any pressure against the Tunisian Government. It was desirable, however, that the British Government should continue to apply such pressure as was favourable to them in this case.

The measure of expropriation taken in regard to agricultural land could well be followed later on by expropriation of residential property. It was therefore in the interest of the countries concerned to make full representation now and to insist on prompt and adequate compensation. In this regard Mr. Davidson said that much depended on the form the compensation would take. The Tunisian dinar was valueless outside Tunisia and the Tunisian Government had balance of payments difficulties.

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It was possible that the compensation would take the shape of Tunisian Government bonds or payment in Tunisian currency with the possibility of restriction on the transfer of such currency abroad.

Mr. Davidson stated that the Maltese community in Tunisia did not speak English. Their second language was French. In general they were elderly people who would not look on emigration very favourably. They would certainly find difficulty in emigrating to Britain or Australia.

The Acting Prime Minister assured Mr. Davidson that the Maltese Government was very sympathetic towards the Maltese affected by the expropriation law and he asked Mr. Davidson to convey to the Tunisian Government the anxiety of the Maltese Government on the subject. He also asked Mr. Davidson to convey to the Maltese community in general expressions of sympathy on their position in that country. The Acting Prime Minister did not think that the Maltese Government was in a position to do more by way of assisting the Maltese community in their plight. He expected Mr. Davidson however, to keep the Maltese Government fully informed of developments.

25th June, 1964.