

MEMORANDUM FOR CABINET BY
THE HON. PRIME MINISTER

Salary Negotiations with the Medical Association of Malta

Following the Cabinet decision of the 19th July, 1966 (Memorandum No. 617), information about the adjustments in salaries then agreed was communicated to the Medical Association of Malta. In discussion with the Association it appeared that, apart from the minimum salary of basic grade Medical Officers and of Consultants without private practice, agreement could be reached on all the other points on the basis of the Government's offer.

2. After the last meeting, however, the Medical Association wrote to place on record their understanding of the position with regard to the various points, to insist upon a maximum of £1,300 for basic grade medical officers (this after accepting £1,250) and to ask for an assurance that negotiations about doctors' salaries would only be conducted with the M.A.M. The clarification they are seeking is that in any future salary adjustments the differential between the salary of the C.G.M.O. and the highest civil service salary should invariably be of £90. It is not considered that this is an assurance which can be given as it would remove Government's future freedom of action. In any case, in any opening of the concertina, differentials might have to be widened and it is considered that the only assurance which can be given to the M.A.M. is that the salary of the C.G.M.O. would be on an equal level to that of Secretaries to Ministries and that, if these move in relation to the highest civil service salary, the C.G.M.O. would move with them.

3. The assurance requested that salary negotiations for medical officers would only be conducted with the M.A.M. raises an important point of principle. There has so far been no definite policy with regard to the recognition of associations by Government and the practice has been to consider

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representations from, and indeed to negotiate with, each and every registered association which may come forward even though that association happens to represent a minority interest. In this particular case some doctors, mainly those without private practice, are also members of the Malta Government Professional Officers Association and the latter association has already made it clear that they would want to speak on the salaries of doctors. Within the context of the practice obtaining at present and which has been followed for quite a number of years the assurance requested cannot be given.

4. In view of the sombre financial and economic position of the country it is considered that the time has come to determine the limits of any salary adjustment for doctors since the salary levels of medical officers will affect the salaries payable to other grades in the Service. Any further adjustments in this sector will almost certainly necessitate massive adjustments all down the line. Determination of the utmost limits of Government's offer is essential if the official negotiators are to know the limits within which they must work in the current round of salary negotiations.

5. Pressure is being exerted both in Parliament and in the Press for the early implementation of the salary adjustments accepted by Government. Implementation could have taken place at any time after corresponding points assimilation was conceded, but has in fact been held up because of an undertaking given to the M.A.M. that implementation of doctors' salaries would be held over pending finalization of negotiations with the Association. The Malta Government Professional Officers' Association, which also represents doctors without private practice, is however pressing for implementation.

6. The Crown Advocate General's view is that there would be no legal obstacle to the implementation of all adjustments except those in respect of doctors provided that the salary adjustments in the case of doctors, at not less than the levels proposed, are implemented later on with effect from the 1st April, 1966, i.e. the same implementation

date as for all other grades. In his opinion, however, if Government were to decide that the salaries offered were the maximum which could be granted the M.A.M. could be so informed and there would then be no reason for withholding implementation in their case.

7. Ministers are asked to advise that the M.A.M. be told (a) that no justification is seen by Government for the salaries offered to be further increased, (b) Government cannot be bound to maintain the differential between the C.G.M.O. and the highest civil service salary at £90, (c) the question of exclusivity of salary negotiations on behalf of doctors is not a matter falling within the current negotiations and (d) that the salaries offered are being implemented.

10th October, 1966.