

giving way to darkness, it was replaced by a cold north-easterly wind. Only the series of sporting events at the Marsa were cancelled but, it was announced, that whatever the weather, the celebrations would go on. And they did. The weather conditions proved little or no deterrent. The people were there in thousands, all over the Cottonera area, muffled against the bitter wind. They watched a programme of water sports including a regatta, yacht races, wind-surfing. Even this was unusual — it started from a point near Customs House and the boats raced each other deep into Dockyard Creek to finish near the landing steps immediately opposite the Vittoriosa monument. A folk programme, in which various Maltese and foreign groups took part, was held at Senglea.

The real focus of the evening was at Vittoriosa where, by this time the many distinguished guests, Maltese and foreign, began gathering for the flag-raising ceremony. They included the representatives of many countries. Chief among them was Colonel Muammar Gaddafi of the Libyan Jamahiriya, the only Head of State, except for President Buttigieg, to be present for the ceremony. Both Presidents arrived together to be given a tumultuous welcome.

The Prime Minister Mr. Minto, who throughout the ceremony stood among a number of people, smiling broadly, arrived just five minutes before the ceremony began. He too was given a tremendous welcome. The cheering of the crowd was accompanied by the hooting of sirens from tugs, horns from smaller boats.

The Union Jack was by this time flying over the tall, white painted mast, somewhat limply despite the strong breeze which was prevalent elsewhere but was not so badly felt within the square, bounded by the church and other high buildings.

The climax of the ceremony arrived at one minute before midnight. A young British sailor, Signalmen David Gilchrist, 23, of H.M.S. London, whose home is at Sheringham, Norfolk, slowly hauled down the Union Jack, carefully wrapped it round his left arm, then moved forward to shake the hand of Carmel Boxall, 22, of Vittoriosa, an employee of the Public Works Department.

There were cheers and applause as the Union Jack was hauled down with more cheering and clapping a minute later when Alfred Xuereb, 45, of Cospicua, a Dockyard welder, hoisted the Maltese flag. A police bugler, P.C. Richard Cauchi, 28 of Hamrun stood by.

These four men enacted a living tableau of the permanent one represented by the bronze figures high above the rough mound leading up to the four figures making up the monument.

With the hoisting of the Flag, the bells of St. Lawrence Church, the same temple where the Knights of St. John and the Maltese sang the Te Deum on the lifting of the Siege of 1565, pealed joyously, their message being repeated by every church in Malta and Gozo. Fireworks were let off and there seemed to be no end to the cheering and hooting.

## President's solemn oath

In a short address to the nation after the flag-raising ceremony, the President, Dr. Buttigieg, said the closure of the base marked the opening of a new period in the history of Malta.

Dr. Buttigieg, visibly moved, said that apart from rejoicing and celebrating the event, they had gathered together "to swear never again to have a foreign military base on our soil and that Malta remains for evermore a free Republic run by the Maltese for the Maltese".

The President imagined that united in spirit with the Maltese on the historic event were all the Maltese scattered all over the world, as well as their forefathers. He mentioned the thanksgiving for the Great Siege victory on that historic site in 1565, and said that "although our forefathers fought and bled on the bastions, they continued to be ruled by the foreigner in his own interests, they continued to be trod upon by him, they continued to live in misery, above all their country continued to be a fortress from which the foreigner made war on our neighbours in the Mediterranean".

Malta today had freed itself from the foreign military base not out of hate or vengeance but out of a strong act of faith because it wanted to fulfil a new mission of peace in the Mediterranean in the interest of peace in the world. The removal of the military base was considered as a big step forward towards peace.

The President said the word "peace" meant more than this. The word peace and its concept which the Maltese had inherited from the Semitic peoples did not merely mean "absence of strife", but rather well-being and happiness and good relationships.

Dr. Buttigieg said "our neighbours need no longer fear an attack by the foreigner from our country. Malta is now completely free and entirely in our hands. Not only shall we not attack them, but we must work together with them for prosperity and progress, so that the Mediterranean, historically a sea of war, will be turned into a lake of peace".

The President closed his speech with a hymn in salute to Malta.

The Band of the Armed Forces of Malta then played the *Innu lil Malta f'Jum il-Helsien* (A Hymn to Malta on its Day of Freedom). The music is by Miki Theodorakis, the well-known Greek composer, the words by the Maltese poet Karmenu Vassallo.

President Buttigieg, carrying a bouquet of flowers, walked up the rough ramp and placed the first of the many bouquets of flowers which before the night was out virtually covered the

whole base of the monument, designed by Mr. George Agius. With him walked 11-year-old Jerry Grech Hurst of Senglea who attends Bighi Secondary School and 10-year-old Odette Buhagiar, a schoolgirl from Zabbar. They too carried flowers which they placed alongside those of the President.

The Prime Minister and Mr. George Agius, General Secretary of the General Workers Union together walked to the urn, carrying burning torches and between them lit the flame which is to be kept continuously alight. They, carrying flowers, went up the slope and placed them in silent tribute. Behind them followed Cabinet Ministers and their wives, Mr. Minto also finding time to warmly shake by the hand the man who hoisted the Maltese flag. Colonel Gaddafi, uninformed but smiling broadly, went up with a basket of flowers and acknowledged the cheers by waving to the people time and again before he and the officer of the Libyan Army who accompanied him saluted smartly and went back among the representatives of other countries present.

By this time organizations, representing workers and other sectors of the population, started walking from Gavino Gulia Square in Cospicua to Vittoriosa, carrying flowers which they placed at the foot of the monument.

So it went on until well into the early morning. The people still stood in the area for a long time afterwards, trying to get a closer look at the monument. So ended the day and the night during which Malta passed from one era into another.

## Today's programme

The final events which will close the festivities will be held this morning. His Grace Archbishop J. Mercieca, will lead a pontifical Mass at St. John's Co-Cathedral, Valetta; His Lordship Mgr. N. Cauchi, will lead another pontifical, in Victoria, Gozo.

There will be commemorative ceremonies in various towns and villages.

The very last Royal Navy ship, the destroyer London, will slip her moorings from No. 8 buoy at 11 a.m. and steam slowly out, firing a 21-gun salute to which the saluting battery of the Armed Forces of Malta will reply from Fort St. Elmo. The "London" will be carrying Rear-Admiral O.N.A. Cecil, Commander British Forces Malta and other members of his staff who are expected to land in Sicily during the early evening. They will travel to Britain overland.

Earlier, the Air Commander Malta, Air Commodore H.D. Hall will leave Malta in a "Nimrod" maritime reconnaissance aircraft. The plane will fly low over Grand Harbour in salute and will fly round Malta before setting course for Britain.

President Buttigieg will salute both Admiral and Air Commodore from Fort St. Elmo.

**THE GUIDED MISSILES DESTROYER HMS London leaving Grand Harbour at 11 this morning in a water-colour by maritime artist Edwin Galea. She is wearing the flag of Rear Admiral O.N.A. Cecil, as well as the flag of the Commander, British Forces Malta from the starboard yard-arm. The flags on the port yard-arm are her international signal. A Maltese flag flies from the mast over Fort St. Angelo.**

