

THE 'ECONOMIC' ORIENTATIONS OF MALTESE  
MIGRANTS IN LONDON  
WORK, MONEY AND SOCIAL STATUS

by EDWARD L. ZAMMIT

Migration and the pursuit of 'economic' advantages are generally considered to be closely related. The migrant aspires to a wider range of opportunities available with regard to his work and financial benefits. In Malta, this relationship has been traditionally emphasized by the proponents of emigration as a remedy to the Island's chronic problem of overpopulation and scarce 'economic' resources. In his study of Maltese migration during the nineteenth century, C.A. Price contends that the principal factors affecting the scale of migration at that time were 'economic'. Successive periods of poverty at home sometimes drove the Maltese overseas while at other times they were attracted by boom conditions abroad.<sup>1</sup> Such an attitude towards migration has persisted throughout the present century and has received a new emphasis from both the proponents and the opponents of migration since World War II.

'Economic' motives are considered to be the 'natural' and obvious reasons for migration. Such reasons are internalized by individuals in Malta because they are deep-rooted and widely circulated throughout Maltese society. Such reasons are presented as the acceptable ones for estranging oneself respectably from the established local networks of social relations, in particular from one's nuclear family.

Therefore, it is to be expected that migrants tend to give mainly 'economic' reasons to enquirers and perhaps even to themselves as an explanation or justification of their own motives for migrating. Indeed, there may be no reason for doubting the sincerity of such statements – although these do not exclude the possibility of other underlying motives. Nevertheless, the importance of the 'economic'

<sup>1</sup>Price C.A.: *Malta and the Maltese; A Study of Nineteenth Century Migration* (1954) *passim* & p 114.

factor alone necessitates an investigation on its own merits.<sup>2</sup> An assessment of the extent of 'economic' motivations on the part of the migrants necessitates an empirical exploration of the presumed relationships between patterns of 'economic' behaviour of the migrants in their original background and in their new situation.

The migrants' former occupational distribution in Malta and their present one in Britain bear striking similarities. As seen in Table 1 (below) the largest proportion of workers in Malta have remained in their respective work category in Britain.<sup>3</sup>

**Table 1**  
MIGRANTS' OCCUPATION IN MALTA AND BRITAIN

OCCUPATION IN BRITAIN	OCCUPATION IN MALTA (%)			
	NON MANUAL	SKILLED	UNSKILLED	
NON MANUAL	60.8	3.8	7.6	(24)
SKILLED	30.4	65.4	39.0	(82)
UNSKILLED	8.8	30.8	53.4	(74)
	(23)	(52)	(105)	

A minor trend towards better paid or more specialized occupations is also noticeable. However, before proceeding along this line of argument, one must probe further into the migrants' occupational background in terms of their age on leaving home and their various locations within Malta. This helps one to visualize certain essential characteristics possessed by them before their departure from Malta.

<sup>2</sup>The present report is drawn from an empirical investigation – based on a structured questionnaire – which was administered on a random sample of 180 Maltese migrants residing in Inner London. The complete study which was concluded in 1970 dealt with the links between the migrants' original social background and their present patterns of behaviour.

<sup>3</sup>For the purpose of analysis the migrants' occupations have been classified as follows: 'Non-Manual' including professional, managerial, and clerical grades; 'Skilled' including technicians and self-employed tradesmen; and 'Unskilled' including semi-skilled and unskilled employees, farmers and persons who were not engaged in any conventional job.

As seen in Table 2 (below) a larger proportion of 'young' migrants (under 24 years of age) than of 'adult' migrants (over 24 years old) worked in unskilled occupations. On the other hand, relatively fewer 'young' migrants worked in non Manual and Skilled occupations than the older ones did.

**Table 2**

MIGRANTS' FORMER OCCUPATION BY AGE (%)

OCCUPATION	AGE	
	YOUTHS (15-24)	ADULTS (25+)
Non Manual	9.6	17.2
Skilled	25.4	36.2
Unskilled	64.0	46.6
	(122)	(58)

With reference to the specific types of occupations, 'older' migrants were found predominantly engaged in professional, skilled and small business occupations. The 'young' migrants were predominantly out of work, employed as unskilled labourers in small firms or worked on family farms.

The hypothesis that the heterogeneity of the London Maltese immigrants is correlated with their diverse geographical distribution in their original country, merits investigation. Migrants from urban origins (73.9% of the sample) in some respects contrast with migrants from rural origins although they basically share similar characteristics. Provided that such a hypothesis can be established, attention should be devoted to the articulation of social institutions in the contrasting areas of the migrants' background with a view to a better understanding of their repercussions on the migrants' later behaviour.

It can be deduced from Table 3 (below) that there is a considerable degree of similarity between the occupational distributions of 'urban' and 'sub-urban' migrants. In contrast, the distribution for 'rural' migrants manifests a relatively different tendency. The latter tend to have larger proportions of migrants in non-manual and skilled occupations.

**Table 3****MIGRANTS' FORMER OCCUPATION BY PLACE OF ORIGIN (%)**

OCCUPATION	PLACE OF ORIGIN		
	URBAN	SUB-URBAN	RURAL
Non Manual	12.0	12.0	14.9
Skilled	27.9	26.7	36.2
Unskilled	62.1	61.3	48.9
	(58)	(75)	(47)

It can be safely argued that on the basis of the existing occupational stratification in these Maltese localities the opposite tendency should have been expected.<sup>4</sup> Rural migrants, therefore, do not directly reflect their original backgrounds. They tend to be representative rather of occupational minorities in their areas.

The same argument, however, is not applicable to migrants from urban and sub-urban origins. Within such areas there is a higher degree of stratificational complexity which tends to obscure minor trends. Particular localities within these areas often accommodate large proportions of certain employment categories to the relative exclusion of others. For this reason the general trends presented in Table 3 (above) may depict an over-simplified picture. 'Urban' and 'sub-urban' migrants are largely representative of their particular localities. A comparison of the migrants from Cottonera – the centre of industrial activity in urban Malta – and Sliema – the modern suburb, whose population is mainly composed of non-manual and a hard core of highly skilled workers – provides an illustration of this point.

	<u>COTTONERA (%)</u>	<u>SLIEMA (%)</u>
Non Manual:	3.8	20.1
Skilled:	30.7	43.3
Unskilled:	65.5	36.6
	<u>(26)</u>	<u>(30)</u>

<sup>4</sup>cf Malta Censuses 1957, 1966.

Unlike those for rural migrants, the above distributions approximate the general occupational structure of the two localities concerned.

Malta's urban area provided a vital link in the establishment of migration to Britain – particularly through activities around the Grand Harbour. Traditionally, the 'normal' pattern of movement was from rural to urban and sub-urban Malta and eventually to Britain. This pattern was followed by people from all walks of life. However, those who migrated abroad directly from the villages were, in a sense, pioneers. They managed to establish their own route to the outside world – aided by their own contacts with urban and endowed with their specialized education, occupational skills or simply an enterprising personality. The implications contained in these observations regarding the migrants' subsequent patterns of behaviour – particularly with respect to their aspirations for upward social mobility are numerous.

The migrants' present occupations in Britain largely follow the general pattern established in Malta. Most 'young' migrants work in unskilled occupations and as they grow older they succeed in acquiring better ones. This is shown in Table 4 (below).

**Table 4**  
MIGRANTS' PRESENT OCCUPATION BY AGE (%)

	YOUNG (15-24)	ADULT (25+)
Non manual	3.8	14.9
Skilled	19.3	50.0
Unskilled	76.9	35.1
	(26)	(154)

The migrants' emergence into adulthood is normally accompanied by their marriage. Most respondents (74.4%) are now married. The added responsibilities characteristic to married life offer them a further incentive towards a successful career. This incentive seems to be particularly effective among manual workers. There is a higher proportion of married migrants who are skilled (53.7%) than unskilled (35.6%). Conversely, single migrants tend to occupy unskil-

led (64.1%) rather than skilled jobs (20.5%). Marriage and age introduce a certain stability in the migrants' lives which enables them to proceed in their career.

However, there is no significant difference in proportions between the non manual married and single respondents. Each approximates the proportion of non manual workers in the total sample (13.4%). This phenomenon underlines the fact that the transition from manual to non manual occupations (and vice versa) is only accessible to a minority among the migrants. Such a transition is dependent on variables other than marriage or age with their accompanying incentives and stability.

The migrants' length of residence in Britain is another useful dimension along which to visualize their work performance. As shown in Table 5 (below) there is a visible tendency for the migrants to improve their type of job as they settle down in Britain.

**Table 5**  
MIGRANTS' PRESENT OCCUPATION BY YEARS OF  
RESIDENCE IN BRITAIN (%)

	0 - 9	10 - 19	20+
Non manual	10.4	13.4	22.2
Skilled	39.5	53.7	44.4
Unskilled	50.1	32.9	33.4
	(86)	(67)	(27)

However, among migrants who have been in Britain longest there is a marked decrease in the proportion of skilled occupations. A further analysis reveals that this trend is concentrated on those migrants whose settlement dates back to twenty-five years and over. In fact, among these latter there are the highest proportions of Non manual (27.3%) and Unskilled (54.6%) and the lowest proportion of skilled occupations. The early post World War II waves of Maltese migrants consisted almost exclusively of unskilled merchant seamen. Meanwhile, the older tradition of Maltese 'intellectuals' settling in Britain was resumed through the re-establishment of shipping links after the termination of war hostilities. Therefore the old migrants are less evenly stratified than the more recent ones.

They are sharply divided into the two extremes of the occupational scale.

Having explored to an extent the migrants' work situation in Malta and Britain respectively, further attention must be devoted to their occupational mobility trends with reference to migration. Although, as seen in Table 1 (above), only a minority among the migrants now occupy completely different categories of work to those they occupied in Malta, most migrants (65.6%) did in fact change within these broad categories. When analysed in detail these moves indicate a significant trend towards higher occupations.<sup>5</sup> In fact, among the higher occupations at present there are larger proportions of new recruits. The following are the migrants in each of the four higher occupations at present who had previously occupied inferior jobs when in Malta:

Professional/Managerial:	58.3%
Clerical:	50.0%
Skilled:	48.5%
Small business:	31.3%

These upward moves in employment affect 27.7% (50) in the total sample. If one also includes other moves towards more specialized or lucrative occupations (e.g. clerical to skilled or small business) then approximately 33.3% (60) migrants in the sample are affected.

Naturally, many migrants found the transition from one occupational structure to the other predictably difficult. When the migrants first went to Britain they often had to accept occupations which were considered inferior in status to those they had left in Malta. The following list represents those migrants whose first occupation in Britain was inferior to their last one in Malta (taking each of the four higher occupations in Malta as the basis):

Professional/Managerial:	40.0%
Clerical:	50.0%
Skilled:	59.7%
Small Business:	74.5%

<sup>5</sup>The following occupational hierarchy is operationally proposed - in descending order: professional or managerial, clerical, skilled, small business, semi-skilled or unskilled and unemployed.

It is evident from the above data that migrants with higher occupations in Malta have a better opportunity of finding equivalent occupations soon after their arrival into Britain. In other words, the better equipped migrants with professional training and specialized skills, have least difficulties in finding their place in the new occupational structure.

Since most migrants did not possess the above qualifications it might appear that the majority were disappointed at the outset. However, the nature of their reactions depended more on their job aspirations than on the actual job. In fact, most migrants had realistic job expectations when they went to Britain. Almost half of those interviewed (47.2%) claim they were prepared to undertake 'any job' whatsoever and had no particular type of employment in mind when they migrated. These came predominantly from unskilled and small business occupations (68.3%). Migrants with higher occupations who had definite job expectations often preferred similar occupations to the ones they had in Malta. This finding corroborates the fact that these migrants did actually find better opportunities of equivalent employment in Britain.

Therefore those migrants with definite expectations (52.8%) soon managed to find the job they expected in Britain. Only 22.2% (40) of the sample found first jobs which they did not anticipate, two-thirds of which (24) were occupations inferior to the migrants' expectations.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the migrants' present occupational stratification definitely reflects a situation superior to what they had in mind before migrating. Eventually many other migrants participated in the trend for upward movement so that at present only 10.0% (18) in the sample still occupy jobs inferior to their original expectations. On the other hand, 20.0% (36) now occupy jobs beyond their original expectations.

These job expectations – whether fulfilled or not – must have influenced the migrants' initial reactions and hence also their subsequent behaviour. Undoubtedly the migrants attached great importance to work among their major considerations in the migration

<sup>6</sup>The highest rate of unfulfilled expectations were among those who aspired to skilled occupations (22) of whom 50.0% found unskilled ones. This is partly due to more advanced technological standards required in Britain.



process. Yet most migrants had realistic expectations regarding the type of work available to them in Britain. Few expected to ameliorate their work situation radically as a direct result of migration. In order to clarify this paradox it is necessary to determine the specific aspirations motivating the migrants in their work performance. This exercise helps to uncover the areas of possible dissatisfaction in their original work situation and to explain their subsequent intentions. For this purpose those interviewed were requested to specify (a) their present attitudes towards work by ranking their guidelines in work selection; (b) the actual factors which determined their job mobility; and finally (c) to evaluate along a scale their relative present and past degree of 'contentedness' in terms of four selected items.

Income, the extrinsic compensation for work, figures prominently among the various factors which make one job preferable to another one. This opinion is shared by 62.8% (113) of the sample. In order to be acceptable to another 20.0% (36) of sample a job must pertain to a 'particular trade or skill' in which the migrants feel competent or inclined to engage themselves. Finally, the general 'working conditions' — including working hours, duty, danger or other hardships involved — have a major influence on the choice of 8.9% (16) informants. The general pattern (income — trade — conditions) is consistently upheld by migrants from all walks of life. The emphasis on income in their job assessment is placed particularly by those migrants who have achieved a relative stability in Britain and have assumed the added responsibilities of marriage and adulthood.

Each informant was then presented with a card on which were listed a number of factors pertinent to job selection. The migrants were requested to point out their preference.<sup>7</sup> Clearly the attitudes thus exhibited are less representative because they lack a degree of spontaneity by leading respondents along definite mental categories. However, it is argued that elements which may have been overlooked were thus brought to the migrants' attention.

Once again 'income' was accorded priority above all items. However, 'social' values received considerable prominence partly at

<sup>7</sup>The following items were listed: income, working conditions, pleasant company, chance of advancement, particular trade and proximity to home.

the expense of the former. Thus 43.9% (79) of the sample recognized 'income' as their main preoccupation. Meanwhile, 19.4% (35) and 15.0% (27) selected 'pleasant company' and 'proximity to home' respectively. A further 8.9% (16) of the sample preferred a job which promises a 'chance of advancement'. Fewer respondents, on the other hand, gave prominence to jobs being in a 'particular trade' (5.0% - 9) and with satisfactory 'working conditions' (5.6% - 10). A breakdown of the 'prompted' and the 'spontaneous' sets of figures reveals that migrants at present in 'skilled' and 'non manual' occupations tended to mention 'particular skill' when asked spontaneously and to select 'chance of advancement' or 'pleasant working company' when presented with the list of prompted answers. Moreover, young, single migrants who spontaneously referred to 'working conditions' later pointed to 'proximity to home' as factors which determined their occupational preference. The two sets of figures, therefore, are interpreted as being complementary to each other. These variations are mainly attributable to the differing techniques used. More significantly, the emphasis on income as a determinant of job assessment was sustained throughout at a consistently high level.

The Maltese migrants maintain a high rate of job mobility. Only 12.2% (22) respondents still work at their first job in Britain. On the other hand, 56.6% (102) of those interviewed have been engaged no longer than five years at their present jobs (Modal Length:  $3\frac{1}{2}$  years). Therefore the process of selecting a new job is significant because of its frequency. The motives behind the migrants' early movements in Britain from one job to another are particularly meaningful because they illustrate the factors which actually guided the migrants' work selection. At that time they were keen on putting into practice their work aspirations as a mark of success of their venture in a new country.

As mentioned above, a number of migrants did not change their first job (12.2%). These are mainly engaged in self-employed business enterprises. Another 12.2% of those interviewed were compelled to leave their first job in Britain. Sometimes this happened because their firms reduced the size of their labour force or because they were inefficient.<sup>8</sup> More often the migrants were dismissed be-

<sup>8</sup> 31.8% of the 'skilled' workers were dismissed from their first jobs in UK.

cause of some misconduct on their part – usually fighting. Among the remainder of the sample (75.6%) the majority left their first jobs because they were offered better wages in different ones (51.4%). Thus in their actual choice of occupation the migrants are aided by the above preferences.<sup>9</sup>

Few migrants have left their first job because they preferred work in a different trade (6.3%). Non manual and skilled workers in particular regard this as one of their conditions *before* engaging in any occupation. Some migrants left their first job in Britain because they were dissatisfied with existing conditions at work (16.7%). Clerical workers and young migrants generally found their first jobs in Britain more demanding and impersonal than they had anticipated. Other migrants (13.4%) – particularly those employed with the Services and the Merchant Navy – chose new jobs which were closer to home.

The migrants who changed their first jobs in pursuit of higher wages represent a cross section of the whole sample. However, this tendency is most pronounced among those migrants who felt that their previous work in Malta did not provide them with adequate financial incentives. Typical among these latter were migrants who intended to set up small business enterprises in Britain. They often had to accept other, less lucrative jobs initially until they had consolidated their position in the new country. They could later embark on projects which would enable them to realize their aspirations.

It is clear, therefore, from the above data that whatever motivations the migrants had in the sphere of work were mainly inspired by financial incentives. This explains why few migrants initially aimed at improving their occupational status in Britain. The migrants' eventual advancement at their work indicates that as they settled in Britain and acquired the necessary skills, more openings became available to them. They increasingly participated in the local occupational structure and this, in turn, facilitated the realization of their deep rooted financial aspirations.

<sup>9</sup>This figure (51.4%) closely approximates the average between the 'spontaneous' (62.8%) and the 'prompted' (43.9%) response specifying 'income' as a first preference.

'Economic' considerations played a leading role in the migration process. Many respondents have attributed their departure from Malta to what they regarded as an income below an acceptable level. In some cases the migrants were out of work and therefore were deprived of any reliable income. In other cases they were dissatisfied with the jobs which were available in Malta. In each case the migrants believed that better 'economic' opportunities would be within reach in the new country.

More respondents have subjectively related their decision to migrate to the 'economic' than to any other relevant factor. A total of 76.1% (137) of those interviewed are reported to have been variously influenced by 'economic' considerations in their deliberations. The majority (99/55% in the sample) stated that these had a determining influence on them – outweighing any other consideration. Thus when this factor was related to the other relevant factors and measured accordingly it again emerged as the dominant one. It has received 26.4% (608) of the total (weighted) scores (2261) relating the various factors in the migration process.<sup>10</sup>

The importance of 'economic' considerations extends throughout the whole sample and penetrates every migrant category. Only minor variations were discovered when the (weighted) mean scores were analysed in terms of respondents' age and marital status at the time of migration. Adult and married migrants tended to allot more importance to this factor than the rest of the sample. This is shown in the following table:

**Table 6**

MEAN SCORES FOR 'ECONOMIC' CONSIDERATIONS  
ACCORDING TO AGE AND MARITAL STATE

YOUNG (15 – 24 YEARS)	ADULT (25+)	SINGLE	MARRIED
3.2	3.6	3.3	3.6

<sup>10</sup>In addition, there were 28 (15.5%) migrants who worked in the British Merchant Navy or who were transferred to Britain in connection with their work in the Service Establishments. Eventually they settled in Britain. Therefore in these cases as well 'work' was the predominant factor conducive to migration.

The migrants were asked to specify the particular characteristics of their jobs situation which they subjectively considered as powerful determinants of migration. Only 23.9% (43) migrants were immune to such pressures. Among the remainder approximately one in every four respondents (20.6% of the complete sample) were in financial difficulties due to unemployment. Some of these explained their plight by quoting the Maltese proverb '*Għal kull għadma hemm mitt kelb*' – meaning literally: 'There are a hundred dogs for every bone'. Among them, however, some refused jobs which they considered below their 'standards of living'. In order to preserve a certain level of existence which they considered vital, they chose to work abroad by resorting to migration. Reference was often made to the patronage system prevailing in Malta on account of which they failed to obtain a satisfactory job.

55.5% (100) of those interviewed had been dissatisfied with their jobs in Malta because these did not provide them with the opportunities for 'advancement' which they had envisaged. Many complained of working with small concerns ('*mal-partikular*') where they had to work hard without enjoying the benefits of employees in large Government or Service establishments. Whatever prospects the migrants had nourished of a higher eventual standard of living – accompanied by a relative general upward social trend – had become dampened by the insecurity prevailing in those Maltese occupations.

In a similar plight were the 23 informants included in the above figure (12.8 in the complete sample) who had specialized jobs with the Services and were threatened with redundancy or who suffered similar setbacks in their trade or professions. These felt that even if they did succeed in finding alternative employment in Malta, this would entail a diminution of their present status. They preferred to migrate to Britain where a wider range of employment and general 'economic' opportunities would be available. Such persons sometimes took a cynical view of life in Malta generally which, they felt, offered little scope for their specialized skills, professions and ideas.

Nevertheless migrants with unsatisfactory occupations in Malta did not expect to improve their type of employment radically as a direct result of migration – any more than did the rest of the sam-

ple. Their attentions – like those of other migrants – were mainly focussed on the higher incomes which they looked forward to earning in Britain. This basic pre-occupation with incomes again becomes evident when the migrants' present attitudes towards job selection are specified. A minor qualification, here is necessary: Migrants who had jobs in Malta – albeit unsatisfactory ones – are relatively less pre-occupied with incomes than those who were out of work. Concurrently, while the latter also tend towards jobs with favourable 'working conditions', the former tend towards jobs requiring their specialized, 'particular skills'. This emphasis is particularly upheld by those migrants (12.8%) who had adopted a cynical attitude towards working in Malta. These trends are shown below:

**Table 7**  
FORMER 'WORK PROBLEMS' BY PRESENT ATTITUDES  
TOWARDS WORK SELECTION (%)

	UNEMPLOYED	UNSATISFACTORY JOB	LACK OF SCOPE
INCOME	67.6	63.6	50.0
WORKING CONDITIONS	16.2	9.1	7.7
PARTICULAR SKILLS	8.1	19.5	34.6
	(37)	(77)	(23)

One conclusion drawn from the above data indicates that migrants with previous unsatisfactory jobs in Malta – as they became increasingly acclimatized to the British working scene – became more conscious of their 'particular skills' and selected new jobs on this basis.<sup>11</sup> These jobs, they argued, offer better prospects of advancement. In contrast, migrants coming from a back-

<sup>11</sup>Migrants with former 'unsatisfactory jobs' in Malta were, in fact, as preoccupied with income as all other migrants when they changed their first job in Britain. Hence, their present attitudes towards income must have been acquired more recently.

ground of unemployment are more intent on acquiring jobs with high incomes and favourable working conditions. However, these trends do not necessarily imply a decreasing interest in incomes on the part of the former. A more likely interpretation is that as they became more involved in their new occupations they regarded eventual success in them as the means to higher incomes. It is clear that this increasing rate of participation in the institutions of the host society had far-reaching implications in the migrants' related spheres of social activity.

When the migrants' former 'work problems' are analysed in terms of their geographical background in Malta, a predictable trend emerges – consistent with the occupational distributions of migrants from these localities discussed earlier. Among urban migrants there were the largest proportions of unemployed and among rural migrants the lowest. Meanwhile, the former had the lowest proportions of migrants with 'unsatisfactory jobs' and the latter had the highest proportions in these occupations. These trends are shown below:

**Table 8**

FORMER 'WORK PROBLEMS' BY PLACES OF ORIGIN (%)

	URBAN	SUB-URBAN	RURAL
UNEMPLOYED	31.6	28.4	17.2
UNSATISFACTORY <sup>12</sup> JOBS	68.4	71.6	82.8
	(45)	(60)	(35)

Admittedly a small but significant proportion of rural migrants were engaged in farming (3.3% in the complete sample). Migration provided these with the attractive opportunity of an outlet from their laborious and thankless farm work. In Malta, farming is generally looked down upon and allotted the lowest position in the occupational structure. In contrast to the urban areas, in rural Malta there is a more restricted range of occupational choice. The relative absence of patrons in these areas makes it even more difficult

<sup>12</sup>Migrants who found no scope in work in Malta are included under this category.

for potential migrants to find satisfactory employment. On the other hand, among urban migrants a significant number of respondents – particularly those who possessed specialized skills or education – refused to consider jobs which they regarded as inferior to their qualifications. They readily chose migration – which was well established in their respective areas – as a solution to their unemployment problem. Meanwhile, the proportions of ‘unemployed’ and ‘unsatisfactorily employed’ sub-urban migrants approximate the average distribution for migrants with ‘work problems’ in the complete sample.

Having studied to some extent the specific motivations which presumably have contributed towards the migrants’ work performance in terms of their own subjective assessment. The migrants were requested to specify their present degree of ‘contentedness’ at their present work when this is compared with their former work in Malta.<sup>13</sup>

For the purpose of this study only the relative direction of the degrees of ‘contentedness’ expressed are taken into account. This avoids giving an absolute interpretation of the values which were expressed in subjective terms.

Table 9 (below) presents the differences between the migrants’ current attitudes towards their present occupations in Britain and towards their last ones in Malta. The attitudes are broken down in terms of ‘wage’, ‘company at work’, ‘boss’ and ‘working conditions’. The scores of the migrants expressing a particular attitude with reference to their Malta jobs are deducted each time from the scores of those expressing similar attitudes about their present jobs. In other words, the migrants’ present occupations are taken as the positive starting points so that when the results show a positive balance on a given attitude this reflects an equivalent increase in the migrants’ subjective evaluation of their present occupations. Likewise, when the result shows a negative balance, this reflects the migrants’ lower evaluation of the particular attitudes with reference to their present occupations. Since the scale

<sup>13</sup> The migrants were presented with a card on which an attitude scale was set out. The word ‘contented’ was selected because of its similarity to its Maltese counterpart: *kuntent*.



includes attitudes in opposition to each other, the results are not to be taken at face values. For instance, an apparently negative balance towards the end of the scale actually refers to a higher rate of discontent in their Malta jobs than at their present ones. Consequently, insignificant differences reflect a similarity of response to the two situations.

In order to avoid over-representation, the attitudes of migrants for whom certain items were not applicable (e.g. due to unemployment or self-employment) have been excluded from the calculations which follow:

**Table 9**

ATTITUDES TOWARDS PRESENT OCCUPATION WITH  
REFERENCE TO LAST OCCUPATION IN MALTA

	WAGE	COMPANY	BOSS	CONDITIONS
VERY CONTENTED	63	-8	29	46
QUITE CONTENTED	12	-8	4	0
MORE OR LESS "	-3	10	-1	-4
NOT SO "	-32	3	-10	-15
NOT AT ALL "	-40	3	-14	-27
NOT APPLICABLE	(25)	(39)	(57)	(26)

A system of relative weighting need hardly be applied to the above figures in order to visualize trends. A clear, positive balance is visible in preference of the migrants' present jobs in terms of their wages, bosses and working conditions. Significantly, the former working companions in Malta are preferred to their present ones in Britain. However, this is a relatively minor setback in view of the more wholehearted support for present occupations with a view to the other three items.<sup>14</sup>

The most contrasting attitudes towards former and present jobs pertain to the 'wage' element. This is predictable considering the

<sup>14</sup>A negative correlation exists between 'contentedness' with present and former jobs with reference to these three items. Migrants contented with present occupations tend to be discontented with their former ones.

migrants' preoccupation with incomes. In fact, the intensity of favourable attitudes expressed towards present incomes forcefully underlines the deep significance which money occupies in their lives. The migrants' original aspirations towards work in Britain were largely confined to their eventual incomes. These have influenced their early movements between jobs soon after their arrival in this country. The migrants themselves have acknowledged this major preoccupation in their job assessment.

The highest degrees of 'contentedness' with present incomes were expressed by adult migrants (over 24 years of age) – in skilled and non manual occupations – with an experience of at least five years in Britain. These same migrants have earlier been described as more concerned with incomes than the others. Moreover, married rather than single migrants tend to be proportionately more 'contented' with their present incomes. To these latter ones, in particular, it must be the source of considerable satisfaction that their financial aspirations have been fulfilled – in view of the heavier demands made on them. As it was earlier suggested, such demands provide the migrants with stronger incentives towards the realization of their ambitions.

At this point it is relevant to probe into the significance which income has in the migrants' lives. Thrift has long been regarded as one of the marks of a 'sensible person' (*'bil-għaqal'*) in Malta. It is likely that Maltese people have developed a habit of saving on account of the successive periods of unemployment and famine which have characterized Malta's economy throughout history. This idea is deeply embedded in the minds of the migrants interviewed – 91.6% (165) of whom gave an affirmative answer when asked whether they share the opinion that everyone should save part of his regular income – even though one may have to do without certain commodities like a washing machine or a television set. Only a minority among these [(23.9%) in complete sample] qualified their answers by allowing themselves basic necessities such as food – a qualification which was probably taken for granted by everyone including those who gave an unqualified reply. The migrants were then asked why they consider long-term saving important.

In the opinion of 58.4% (105) of the sample saving is so necessary that it merits no rational justification. In their view: 'If a

person can, he ought to save. It's commonsense.' They contrast their attitude with that of the average Englishman's for whom 'tomorrow never comes!' On further probing, however, some migrants were able to speak their minds more specifically on this matter. They insisted that saving is more important for them in their migrant situation. Money gives them 'security' in case of an emergency like sickness or unemployment – when the income from Social Security may not be sufficient. It is significant that while these are the traditional motivations towards saving among the Maltese, they acquire an added emphasis among migrants. As one of them remarked: 'Anything can happen away from Malta. You're totally on your own away from your relatives and friends. You have to rely entirely upon your own resources.' Another migrant expressed his emotional as well as his physical 'insecurity' in Britain by the words: 'One needs money in England. It's a cold climate.'<sup>15</sup>

Meanwhile other migrants (33.2%) are of the opinion that saving enables them to attain a higher social position. Financial possessions endow them with personal independence from cumbersome family and friendship ties – as a bare minimum. With the improvement of their standard of living visualized through certain status symbols the migrants hope eventually to dispel any feeling of superiority which they believe some British still nourish towards them. Ultimately, many migrants look forward to eventually retiring in Malta where they could live comfortably on a clearly higher social level than the one they left behind – thus reaping the fruits of migration. As one migrant put it: 'That's why we're here, otherwise we might as well have remained in Malta'.

The few migrants who are against saving (8.4%) do not believe that this is necessary in a country with adequate social assistance in case of sickness or unemployment. At any rate, they justify their position by stating that it is impossible for them to save on account of the high cost of living, taxes and often their self-confessed addiction to betting. These migrants, however, represent

<sup>15</sup> As far back as the nineteenth century Maltese migrants preferred places near to Malta to enable easy access to home in case of an illness. In particular, America and Australia were avoided because they were regarded as the permanent sources of strange and deadly diseases. (Price, op. cit., P XII).

negligible minorities scattered throughout the sample and following no regular pattern.

The general pattern of the majority who consider saving as a necessity is found in all walks of life and penetrates every significant migrant category. Nevertheless, slightly higher proportions uphold traditionally 'conservative' Maltese values – of saving for a general sense of security – among those migrants who were earlier described as the more preoccupied with incomes. These tend to be married adults with some years' experience of settlement in Britain – often working in non manual and skilled occupations. On the other hand, young single migrants who have recently arrived in Britain – often working in unskilled occupations – tend proportionately to save money as the means of attaining a higher social status.

The above evidence suggests that a generational division characterizes the migrants' attitudes towards work and money. The 'adult' generation are proportionately more inclined towards 'conservative' values traditionally held in Malta. They have to maintain themselves and their dependants according to certain 'respectable' standards. On account of their heavier financial commitments and the accompanying incentives – they are constantly engaged in providing the necessities required by their particular state in life. 'Security' acquires for them an imminent significance since it is related to the maintenance of their standard of living. Meanwhile, the possibilities of further upward social mobility on their part become increasingly restricted with the passage of time. Thus it is somewhat ironic that as these migrants participate more closely in the British occupational structure, they simultaneously develop and confirm themselves in 'conservative' Maltese attitudes towards money.

In contrast, the 'younger' generation of migrants nourish optimistic hopes of fulfilling the financial goals in pursuit of which they have migrated. They have recently settled in a new land where, they believe, exist abundant possibilities of the realization of these ambitious. Presumably, as they grow older, experience has a stabilizing effect on them.

It must be emphasized, however, that 'security' bears intrinsically a subjective significance. It is not necessarily related to the

provision of the basic necessities of survival. Particularly in the case of financial savings there are no objective criteria specifying any limits which suffice in order to induce 'security'. This depends on the subjective values and ambitions of individuals. Conversely, a person may never feels completely 'secure' in society regardless of where he ranks along the social scale – particularly if he regards money among the main criteria of status assessment. Further financial acquisitions may be regarded by him as the means of 'securing' a constant improvement of his social position. In such a situation, therefore, the two motives behind saving as described above ultimately converge in the migrants' lives.

In order to acquire a complete estimate of the migrants' own assessment of their financial development, they were asked whether they regard themselves as financially better off now in Britain or formerly in Malta. They were to take into consideration both the higher cost of living as well as the higher wages obtaining in Britain. The migrants' replies were:

Better off in Britain:	70.0% (126)
Worse off in Britain:	16.7% (30)
Generally the same:	11.1% (20)
Undecided:	2.2% (4)

The above distribution clearly shows that the migrants' satisfaction with present incomes – by comparison to their former ones – is not limited to wages as such but extends to their whole standard of living at present. The majority view themselves as financially better off in Britain. Prominent among the benefits of financial prosperity they regard a general sense of 'security' and the move to a higher social standing. The migrants' subjective assessment of their social status is based mainly on financial criteria. It is also defined by them in terms of ideas and values borrowed from Malta and transferred to their present situation. This fact emerged when the migrants were asked to locate themselves according to a classification of the local British social strata which was proposed to them. It became clear that most migrants initially found difficulty in doing this on the grounds that they found no status awareness in Britain. In their view, everyone leads the same kind of life in that country and social strata only exist in Malta.

They are, therefore, insensitive to the existence of social strata in Britain in which they participate mainly as outsiders. Consequently, they based their decisions on Maltese criteria and accordingly the results – measured by local objective standards – lean heavily towards the upper end of the scale. On account of their superior present incomes and occupations, from which these are derived, the migrants are convinced that they have made significant progress along the social scale. Table 10 (below) shows a definite upward trend between the former migrants' social status in Malta and their present status in Britain.<sup>16</sup>

**Table 10**

MIGRANTS' SOCIAL STATUS: SELF-ASSESSMENT IN MALTA AND BRITAIN

	UPPER-MIDDLE	MIDDLE-MIDDLE	LOWER-MIDDLE
UPPER-MIDDLE	36.2	14.8	19.5
MIDDLE-MIDDLE	43.1	42.0	12.1
LOWER-MIDDLE	20.7	43.2	68.4
	(58)	(81)	(41)

The Upper-Middle status is occupied by a large proportion of migrants who have progressed from inferior positions (63.8%). On the other hand, the Lower-Middle status is occupied by a smaller proportion of migrants who have regressed from the relatively superior positions (31.6%). Meanwhile, the Middle-Middle status category is composed mainly of migrants who previously occupied a lower or the same position. However, if the migrants were to be assessed according to objective criteria which are currently acceptable in Britain, few of them would be placed above the lower social positions. These criteria would include educational and cultural characteristics as well as the complete range of occupational ca-

<sup>16</sup> A card was proposed to the migrants listing the following classification: Upper, Upper-Middle, Middle-Middle, Lower-Middle and Lower. For the purposes of analysis, however, the Upper and the Lower ends of the scale were subscribed to the Upper-Middle and the Lower-Middle classes respectively. There were only 6.1% (11) migrants at each end of the scale.

reers contributing towards styles of life which are generally beyond the migrants' reach. Their own evaluations are indicative of progress within their particular social frameworks which incorporate values originating from Malta. The migrants keep in touch with developments at home both through direct contacts and also through their links with other Maltese migrants in Britain.

The majority of the migrants in the sample (70.0%) find themselves in a better financial situation than they were in Malta. This has been made possible mainly by corresponding improvements in their occupational position. In the migrants' view, this progress has also been accompanied by an advancement of their social status.