

# Famous Portraits Series

## Manwel Dimech

Social reformer, thinker, journalist, writer and poet  
Born: 25 December 1860 - Died: 17 April 1921 (Aged 60)

## Reggie Miller

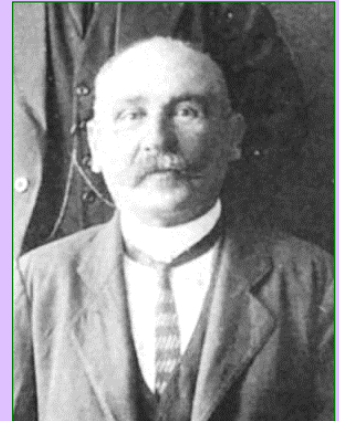
Trade unionist and founder of the G.W.U.  
Born: 15 November 1898 - Died: 21 July 1970 (Aged 72)



1. Photograph of Manwel Dimech in 1870 (aged 9)



2. Dimech as founder of the Fellowship of the Enlighthened in 1898 (aged 37)



3. Dimech photographed during his forced exile in Egypt (1914–1921) (aged around 58)



4. Monument of Manwel Dimech at Castille Square, Valletta, inaugurated in 1976



5. Reggie Miller addressing a G.W.U. Conference at the Radio City, Hamrun in 1952 (aged 53)



6. Miller at the time of his resignation as General Secretary of the G.W.U. in 1958 (aged 59)

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### Image credits:

1. <https://one.com.mt/160-sena-mit-twelid-ta-manwel-dimech/>
2. [https://www.maltatoday.com.mt/news/national/109215/manwel\\_dimech\\_100\\_years\\_of\\_amnesia\\_and\\_defiance](https://www.maltatoday.com.mt/news/national/109215/manwel_dimech_100_years_of_amnesia_and_defiance)
3. <https://timesofmalta.com/article/a-voice-that-never-ages.865011>
4. <http://fmimalta.com/manwel-dimech-100-years-of-amnesia-and-defiance-by-james-debono/5>
5. Pirotta, Joseph, M. *Fortress Colony, The Final Act 1945–1964*, Vol. I, p.309.
6. <https://www.pressreader.com/malta/malta-independent/20140921/281775627371646>

**Manwel Dimech** was born in Valletta on Christmas Day, 1860. He lost his father while still a little child. Due to a bad company of friends, he got into trouble and at the age of sixteen he was found guilty of complicity in a murder. He was not executed because he was still a minor. However, he was sentenced to twenty years imprisonment. After his release in 1890, he was jailed again soon after, this time on the charge of circulating false coins.

Dimech reformed himself whilst in prison. He learned six languages and took to writing poems on sensitive issues. He also wanted to do his best to encourage schooling for the children of the working class. Once out of prison, Dimech earned his living by teaching Italian, English, French and Maltese. He also became highly interested in politics. In 1898, he started publishing a newspaper in Maltese called *Il-Bandiera tal-Maltin*. It included articles of a nationalistic and radical nature to spread political awareness among the Maltese.

Dimech attacked the servile aspects of the Maltese character and the blind loyalty towards the Catholic Church and the British Crown. This criticism attracted the wrath of both the Church and the Colonial Government. In 1911, Dimech set up a philanthropic association called *Xirka tal-Imdawlin* (Fellowship of the Enlightened) and later *Xirka Maltija* (Maltese Fellowship). A few months later Dimech was excommunicated by Bishop Mgr. Pietro Pace because of the ideas which Dimech's followers were propagating.

In September 1914, shortly after the outbreak of the First World War, the Colonial Government arrested Dimech because his open anti-war sentiments were agitating the dockyard workers against the Government. He was exiled to Alexandria in Egypt where he died, still a prisoner, three years after the war had ended.

**Reggie G. Miller** was born in Sliema. At sixteen he went to study at the University but had to discontinue his studies owing to poor health and family financial problems. In 1917 he started to work as a clerk with the Admiralty. He became aware of the very low wages which Maltese dockyard workers were paid when compared to fellow British workers.

In 1934, Miller was elected secretary of the Civil Service Clerical Association (CSCA). In this new role, he spoke in favour of better wages and rights for workers at a conference in Margate, England. Miller was also secretary of the Imperial Workers' Union which represented manual workers.

During the Second World War, he issued a call for all those interested in the formation of a new trade union. On 28 March 1943, the General Workers' Union (GWU) held its first meeting at the Mile End Sports Ground in Hamrun with Miller as its General Secretary. Between 2,000 to 3,000 workers attended the meeting and by July of that year the GWU had increased to 9,000 members. After the war the GWU organised various successful strikes, but Miller began to distance himself from the union when it became closely involved in party politics. Because of this attitude he lost considerable support from union members. In 1958 he resigned and spent the remaining years of his life in England with his adopted daughter, Ariadne.

#### Further reading:

- <https://www.um.edu.mt/library/oar/bitstream/123456789/40018/1/Manwel%20Dimech.pdf>
- <https://timesofmalta.com/article/a-voice-that-never-ages.865011>
- [https://mt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reggie\\_Miller](https://mt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reggie_Miller)
- <https://gwu.org.mt/en/history/>

### Questions

1. Briefly describe Manwel Dimech's childhood and teenage years.
2. What was Dimech's major turning point in his life?
3. Why did he get into trouble with the Church and the Colonial Government?
4. Mention TWO adjectives that describe his character and personality and give reasons for your answer.
5. What do we know about Reggie Miller's early life?
6. What career did he choose in his early adult years?
7. How and why did he get involved in trade unionism?
8. What were his main achievement and his main failure as a trade unionist?