

# *Η Κυπριακή Αριστερά στην Πρώτη Περίοδο της Βρετανικής Αποικιοκρατίας: Εμφάνιση, Συγκρότηση, Εξέλιξη*

[THE CYPRIOT LEFT DURING THE FIRST PERIOD  
OF BRITISH COLONIALISM:  
EMERGENCE, FORMATION, DEVELOPMENT]

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The book is the outcome of a conference organised by the Promitheas Research Institute, based in Nicosia. It examines the history, influence, aspirations, and actions of the influential Communist Party of Cyprus (hereafter CPC), during the period 1926–1941. This compilation of papers is a rare attempt at tackling an aspect of the history of Cyprus – that of the Communist Left – which is almost absent in the Cypriot literature. For a long time there has been no systematic endeavour to analyse the communist party in spite of it being one of the oldest and longest-living political parties/institutions in the island, apart from the institution of the Church. The book focuses exclusively on Cyprus but it also offers findings, which can be useful to compare and contrast with eras, institutions and perceptions in other colonised countries of the Commonwealth and elsewhere. The Promitheas Research Institute, in collaboration with the Department of History and Archaeology of the University of Cyprus, aims to bring to academic scrutiny, through this volume, the subject of the Left in relation to alternative readings of Cypriot history and society. The volume comprises fourteen papers plus an introduction.

The lack of archival sources, or negligence on the part of researchers in seeking such sources, makes the CPC difficult to study. Any account of the party is doomed to be based on limited secondary sources such as the memoirs and personal accounts of its past members. The available literature is the focus of Konstantinos Kouratos in his contribution, which also indirectly responds to the alleged argument that there is a ‘secret’ archive hidden by AKEL (Progressive Party of the Working People). It is regrettable that the CPC archives were destroyed by the colonial administration of the island and the only other archival material was destroyed by Yiannis Lefkis, one of the leading members of the party and the person in charge of the archive, years later!<sup>1</sup>

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1 Personal communication with Rolandos Katsiaounis, 27 April 2013, Nicosia. According to Katsiaounis, the

The remainder of the contributions in the volume can easily be divided into sections, each one examining a specific aspect of the history of the communist movement. The first section concerns itself with the framework through which the communist movement made its appearance, the passage from the Ottoman rule to British colonial rule, and the international influences that helped the movement to take shape. Menelaos Menelaou reviews the transition from Ottoman to British colonial rule, but the impression given is that the author holds the belief that for all the ills of the history of Cyprus during the twentieth century, it is the era of British colonial rule that is held largely responsible. Although Menelaou's argument has a valid point, a false impression is conveyed that the British were the only guilty ones, thus neglecting, or assigning secondary significance to other factors. The paper succeeding Menelaou's is by Kolokassidis. His contribution describes the international developments that provide the structure for the ideological osmosis that would follow. He bases his account on two documents, both by leading figures of CPC. The first is a text by Leonidas Striggos that was sent to the Central Committee of AKEL in July 1976, while the second is based on Yiannis Lefkis' publication, *The Roots*. In both writings, the consequence of the October Revolution in Russia had the most direct, dynamic and influential effect, coupled with the port of Limassol that functioned as the channel through which communist ideas were introduced in Cyprus.

The next section, consisting of four papers, deals with the press in Cyprus up until 1940. Christos Alexandrou focuses on how the October Revolution was perceived by the Cypriot bourgeois press, and gives a depiction of the Revolution. The author provides fascinating insights concerning the language that was employed in the press, such as the use of the term 'maximalists' when referring to the Bolsheviks, and 'minimalists' – an expression unknown in terms of communist terminology – in reference to the Mensheviks. At the same time, however, it constructed – consciously, I would add – a negative image of Lenin himself, presenting him as a 'German spy' no less. Andreas Sofokleous then discusses the leftist press in Cyprus. But the title of his paper is rather misleading, allowing the unsuspecting reader to assume that the first leftist publication took place in 1878, a date that refers generally to the first newspaper in Cyprus, while the first leftist newspaper dates from the early 1920s. Sofokleous locates 11 newspapers and a journal. The vast amount of the leftist printed material is by itself important when considering that since 1931 the CPC, and its materials, were declared illegal and banned. The author, for instance, recounts useful information on all the printed material such as establishment dates, names of the founders with brief biographical information and, most importantly, the basic ideological characteristics of each one of them. Leftist ideas and a programme different from the irredentist vision of *enosis*, is heard for the first time. For example, *Neos Anthropos* [New Man], the official organ of the party established in 1925, is quite revealing. Specifically, it takes an active stand against the racial hatred that divides the Greek and Turkish communities of the island, and lends support in favour of a common anti-imperialist struggle

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keeping of the CPC archive was assigned to Lefkis; however, he had to destroy it many years later, out of fear of it falling into the wrong hands.

for the independence of Cyprus. Moreover, this was the first time that a newspaper had taken an active stance against *enosis* with Greece, and the policy of the Church.

One might expect that the themes of the press would be limited to ideological and organisational issues but instead, the themes are diverse in content. By way of illustration, the review *Avgi*, which is the topic of Andreas Chatzithomas' paper, is characterised by its important role in shaping the intelligentsia of the island; establishing ties with Greek intellectuals in an effort to preserve Greek elements in Cyprus – regardless of the fact that it was because of *Avgi* and despite the great reactions this caused, that the demotic language was promoted on the island. The last paper in this section, by Kyriakos Iakovidis, studies the bourgeois press and its riposte to the Popular Fronts in France and Spain that made their appearance during the 1930s. Making great use of the press and secondary bibliographical material, the author very eloquently broaches the negative attitude of the Cypriot press, since they believed that the Popular Fronts were 'demons that threatened societies' and aimed at their 'bolshhevization'.

In the subsequent section the paper by Chrysanthos Chrysanthou is devoted to the leadership of the Left. Chrysanthou extends a brief biographical sketch of the main actors who played a role and contributed significantly to the formation of the CPC and the communist movement in general, while the papers by Tonia Yeorgiou and Maria Mavrou respectively, centre on Ploutis Servas, the man responsible for the rejuvenation of the party after 1935, and Kleio Christodoulidou, one of the first female figures of the leftist movement.

The founding of the CPC in 1926 is the topic of Alexis Alekou's paper. The author presents the framework that helped the formation of the CPC prior to 1926. He describes how the party came to be an active and emergent group, and how the communist bodies all gathered around a coherent party organisation. Michalis N. Michael turns his attention to the anti-colonial rhetoric in Cyprus, and how this wound up being monopolised by the Church and the bourgeoisie. Within this structure, simultaneously and against the 'modernising conservatism' of the Church and the bourgeoisie, there was another anti-colonial oratory emerging – that of the Left. As the author correctly argues, the anti-colonialism of the Left is politicised, and it challenges the role of the Church, while, at the same time, this rhetoric carries elements that move beyond the dividing ethnic differentiation line, and talk about a unified political entity. Following on from Michael, Yiannos Katsourides reviews the relationships between the trade unions and guild movements with the CPC. He articulates very powerfully not only the gradual organisation of the trade union movement and the promotion of a bi-communal agenda, but also the difficulties and deficiencies which the movement had to face due to poor industrial development and state interventionist policies. The last paper of the volume belongs to Giorgos Georgis who covers the topic of the Cypriot volunteers in the Spanish Civil War. It is quite remarkable to note the number, considering the size and population of Cyprus. One of the most prominent Cypriot figures in the Spanish Civil War is perhaps Ezekias Papaioannou, the then future general secretary of AKEL. Additionally, the author expands on how the press in Cyprus handled the civil war, the role of the British authorities and the attempts to gather money through fund raisers in order to help the anti-fascist struggle in Spain.

On the negative side, for the most part the book is edited poorly and numerous errors abound, the most important of them being the date on which the CPC was declared illegal, i.e. November 1926 (p. 47). The party was declared illegal following the October events in 1931. The papers of the volume are a depiction of the oral presentations made during the conference, or at least this is the impression gleaned by this reviewer when reading them. Some of the papers are extremely short, rather like encyclopaedia entries which provide no analysis whatsoever. Moreover, the book lacks a standardised stylistic form concerning footnotes, or even names, as in the case of *Λεύκης* and *Λέφκης*; both versions are used in the book but the form used by the author himself is *Λέφκης*. In conclusion, because there is a dearth of available sources, almost all of the papers fall into the trap of continuously repeating the same information. As an instance, by the time Alekou has dispensed with the actual establishment of the CPC, all the information, scattered as it is throughout the book, has already been stated, implicitly or explicitly, leading to a disquieting echo of repetition. A better structured book would perhaps avoid such pitfalls.

Finally, apart from the difficult task of studying the Cypriot communist Left, there are several questions that emerge concerning the available data. We might, for example, enquire what efforts were made by scholars and researchers, or even AKEL itself, to locate any archival material in the UK or elsewhere such as in Greece, in the archive of the Communist Party of Greece (KKE). Is there any information about the CPC in the Greek communist publications, i.e. *Neos Kosmos* [New World], *Kommounistiki Epitheorisi* [Communist Review], or in *Rizospastis* [Radical], the official newspaper to date of KKE, or to locate and make use of the personal archives of past members? These sources might also prove to be very useful. *Rizospastis*, for example, even criticised the CPC '... for not taking into consideration the Turkish Cypriots',<sup>2</sup> a comment which leads me to my next remark. Apart from Michael and Katsourides, and then only briefly and in haste, there are no references to the Turkish Cypriots and the role they played in the communist/workers' movement in the island. A paper by a Turkish Cypriot scholar, or at minimum a paper concerned exclusively with the Turkish Cypriot influence on the communist movement in Cyprus, could undoubtedly be of vital significance and advance a useful contribution to such an understudied subject, perhaps providing other angles to approach the issue of the communist movement during the first colonial period of the island. Instead, the Turkish Cypriot factor is totally neglected and absent in the book, thus diminishing its importance.

To sum up, the outcome is rather disappointing in spite of all the good intentions. Most of the information offered in the book is already known, or easily accessible. The book provides no fresh information on the CPC, relegating it to just another reference book. Hopefully, the Research Institute will afford better studies in the future.

NIKOS CHRISTOFIS

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2 *Rizospastis*, 'About A Manifesto', 14 November 1928, p. 1; *Rizospastis*, 'Cyprus', 18 October 1930, p. 1.