

THE CYPRIOT COMMUNIST PARTY AND THE COMINTERN¹

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Abstract

Today's Communist Party of Cyprus (AKEL) had a short lived predecessor: KKK (Kommounistiko Komma Kyprou). This party passed through the usual development phases of a communist party under the control of the Communist International. During the Second World War and after the dissolution of Comintern, however, a new party was put up on principles of democratic socialism: AKEL. After the Cold War broke out AKEL was forced back on the path of Stalinist orthodoxy.

Research Situation

The story of the first Communist Party of Cyprus (KKK – *Kommounistiko Komma Kyprou*) is still waiting for its historian. The only accounts so far published are a British government paper and two articles.² The historian³ of the second CP of Cyprus AKEL (*Anorthotiko Komma tau Ergazomenou Laou* – Progressive Party of Working People) used that British paper extensively⁴ and almost exclusively as the basic source during the early years of the party.

The source situation on KKK is indeed desperate. The party has not published any collection of documents except an album⁵ which contains a few reproductions. An accessible party archive does not exist. Only very few of the former protagonists have written any memoirs.⁶ Until very recently there was not even a major quarrel in the party which might have induced some of the purged comrades to wash the party's dirty linen in public. AKEL has for quite some time been promising to publish an official history of the party but so far has apparently found no historian able to cope with the problem of presenting a party history which will not need constant rewriting according to the oscillations of the party line.⁷ Though in the early years members of the Greek Communist Party (KKE) and KKE/AKEL often cooperated and had close personnel links, not even the Greek communist documentary collections contain noteworthy information on KKK. The same is true of the reminiscences of former KKE protagonists. Apparently the early story of Cypriot communism was considered an embarrassing affair better skipped in the family saga.

Faced with that predicament, the author of this study can only supply the reader with an overview of the party's history containing sporadic pieces of research, point to certain special problems the Cypriot communists have been confronted with and show where future researchers could do spade work.

The history of KKK is rather short: The party was founded in 1926. Right from the beginning it was under the tutelage of the Greek CP (KKE) which often obliged the Cypriot party to steer a disadvantageous course. In 1931 the colonial authorities suppressed KKK and forced it underground. During the Second World War the British lifted the ban and a new party, AKEL, was founded. Right from the start AKEL's character was very close to what we call today democratic socialism. Within a rather short period AKEL absorbed the remnants of KKK.

Economic and Social Conditions in a Colonial Society and the Founding of the Communist Party of Cyprus (KKK)

If Greece in British eyes was considered a kind of protectorate,⁸ Cyprus since the mid-twenties was a crown colony. Though both countries had been parts of the Ottoman Empire, only Greece inherited the specific political culture which was described in my paper on KKE.⁹ In Cyprus British influence since 1878 reduced the Ottoman heritage to such a degree that one might come to the conclusion that at least today Cyprus' political culture more closely resembles European than oriental structures.¹⁰ But on the other hand, Cyprus was a colony. The struggle of the Cypriot communists was therefore twofold: primarily a struggle for social change and only some time later a fight for national liberation from the colonial yoke.

At the turn of the century Cyprus was an agrarian society.¹¹ Less than 20% of the population lived in the various small towns of which Limassol was the most prosperous. There were a few oil mills, cheese dairies, small plants drying fruit and vegetables and wine and cigarette producing units, but all this could scarcely be characterised as industry. There were mainly two factors which obstructed any industrial development: the heavy tax burden and the depredatory character of the Cypriot usurer capital.

When the Ottoman Empire leased Cyprus to Britain, England had promised to *"pay to the Porte whatever is the present excess of the revenue over the expenditure in the Island; this excess to be calculated upon and determined by the average of the last five years."*¹² The Turkish diplomats apparently managed to inflate the alleged net tax revenue so that London committed herself to pay £93.000 annually.¹³ In reality the average gross revenue before the cessation had scarcely exceeded £130.000 *per annum*. When London took over the island it soon found out the truth. However, as London was not ready to spend the British tax payer's

money for this purpose there remained only one solution: squeeze more tax out of the island and do not spend much there. Very soon the efficient new British tax collecting system managed to collect revenues which amounted to £160.000 and £180.000 annually. However, not one pound was paid to the Porte; the money collected was used to pay the interest of an earlier Ottoman loan which had been guaranteed by the British government, and with the rest the British administration was kept running. No wonder that the investment in the infrastructure and the cost for education remained below 3% of the gross income. The main burden of this system was carried by the peasantry since taxes on income or profit were unknown.¹⁴

Due to the lack of any banking system the peasants' need for credit was met by usurers. As the colonial administration and the usurers were competitors in the exploitation of the peasantry the latter did not have the chance to accumulate enough capital to invest in any industrial enterprises before 1914.¹⁵

The First World War, however, changed the situation. The price increase for agricultural products induced the Cypriot peasants to increase their production. This, however, necessitated investment capital which was again supplied by the usurers. Thus by the end of World War I the Cypriot peasants were more in debt than before and the usurers who were traders at the same time had absorbed all profits. When the war was over, prices for agricultural products fell again and many of the indebted peasants lost their properties to the usurers.¹⁶

The dispossessed peasants *moved* to the towns and to the mines to find work. Mining had started in 1914 when copper pyrite was discovered and foreign companies (Canadian and American) invested in the island. The mining companies found ideal conditions in Cyprus. The British administration granted them extraterritorial rights so that they had a free hand to exploit their workers at random. As there were many more workers than jobs the entrepreneurs in the towns and the mines exploited them pitilessly. Although in the meantime Great Britain had annexed Cyprus and made it a crown colony the tax burden was not reduced, at least not the indirect taxes. Sixty-three per cent of the island's revenue came from indirect taxation and only 12% from direct taxation, i.e. the rich were almost tax free. The mining companies' profits were enormous: In 1922 the Amiantos mines paid 40% dividend.

During those early years a few intellectuals apparently influenced by Christian social thinking published a journal called *Nazoraïos* which, however, did not gain much importance. Soon after the Russian revolution news about this went round the island. Thus in 1919 the first signs of opposition by the working class against this exploitative system became visible: the construction workers of Limassol

founded a first union. Cigarette makers and tobacco workers followed a little later and in 1920 the shoemakers organised. A parallel process was initiated in the countryside by the foundation of a credit society movement which tried to free the peasants from the claws of the usurers.¹⁷ The main centre of the beginning union movement became Limassol. Indeed, for many years this town on the south coast was not only the most important harbour of Cyprus but the most progressive township of the island. It was through this inlet that the first socialist ideas found their way into Cyprus and where the first moves to organise the communist party of Cyprus took place.

But besides these special economic conditions of an exploited colony the situation in Cyprus differed radically from the circumstances in Greece in another respect. Whereas the Greek party was confronted with a relatively homogenous ethnic population except for the slavophone and Moslem minorities in Northern Greece, in Cyprus there existed a Greek majority, a strong Turkish minority as well as small Armenian and Maronite groups.

Since Greek independence the Cypriot bourgeois establishment under the leadership of the Orthodox Church had propagated union (*enosis*) with Greece. Though in schools the teachers taught Greek history out of books printed in Greece and thus promoted the case of union with Greece, the early workers' movement was by far more interested in improving everyday life than in dreaming of *enosis*. But very soon after the foundation of the party the Cypriot Left was confronted with the ethnic problem.

The Cypriot Communists in principle wanted *enosis* too, but there were the minorities whose rights had to be taken into consideration as well, though the Turkish Cypriots during the interwar years were still indifferent on this question. Thus KKK was confronted with a dilemma. On the one hand it had the chance to bridge the gap between the majority and minority on the basis of the struggle for social change, but on the other hand any move for *enosis* might alienate the supporters KKK had won on the ethnic battlefield. Thus KKK was obliged to steer a cautious oscillating course on this question. It could propagate an anti-colonial struggle but could not come out with the *enosis* slogan because this would repel the Turkish Cypriots. In the face of this dilemma KKK came out with the ambiguous autonomy slogan which could imply *enosis* but also the creation of an independent state. With this slogan it could hope to become the vanguard of the anti-colonial struggle and not to offend the feelings of the Cypriot minorities. Had KKK been left alone on this course it might have succeeded but there were forces (KKE, Comintern) which at times obliged KKK to take a clearer stand and landed the party in a major imbroglio. Only during the Second World War, when these foreign factors lost their influence, could the Cypriot communists develop an identity of their own.

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The story¹⁸ of Cypriot communism began in the early 1920s in Limassol. There was a book store called *I Ellas* where books from Greece could be found. It was there that a few (about 10) young idealistic intellectuals found the first news about the October Revolution and began to study Marxism/Leninism to find answers to the social problems of this British colony. Among them was a young retail clerk, Leonidas Stringos, a bank employee, Christodoulos Christodoulides and Dimitrios Chrytomides an accountant. The first two soon left Cyprus for Moscow to be trained there and became members of KKE where their careers led them in the 1940s into the Politbureau of KKE.¹⁹ Another member of the group who became famous later on was Aimilios Chourmouzos from Limassol. He left Cyprus to study law in Athens but soon took up journalism.²⁰ Other members of the group were the mail line company employee Giannis Papangelou (Lefkis), the carpenter Kostas Christodoulou (Skeleas), the barber Charalambos Solomonides and the merchant tailor Christos Savvides.²¹ In October-November 1922 they decided to organise themselves into a party, called *Kypriako Ergatiko Komma*. They got in contact with the socialist P. Fasouliotes and together they began publishing a bimonthly small newspaper, *Pyrsos* (Torch).²² Its first number called for the political organisation of the workers and peasants. It attacked the colonial government and accused the British as being responsible for the calamity of the Cypriot people. At the same time it praised the British Labour Party as a shining example to be emulated, i.e. the character of the party was not yet committed.

This wavering course continued in 1923 and in June the party changed its name into *Kypriako Ergatiko kai Agrotiko Komma* but in November it changed again, calling itself now *Kommounistiko Komma Kyprou*. This provoked the first governmental counter-measures: *Pyrsos* was sued for libelling and Fasouliotes was jailed for three months. During the trial in March 1924 Fasouliotes dissociated himself from his comrades' communist leanings, broke with the party and ended the publication of *Pyrsos*.²³

But soon the Limassol communists found a new leader: Dr Nikolas Othon Gianopoulos. Gianopoulos was born in Limassol in 1898 from Greek parents. During his studies at Athens University from 1919 to 1924, Gianopoulos had become a member of KKE. When he returned to his native Limassol he established a Labourers' Club which quickly became a centre for the more class conscious workers. This club soon attracted members from peasant unions in the area which had been set up by those peasants dispossessed of their land by the usurers. At the same time he took over the lead of the communist group, which by now counted about thirty-five members.

Gianopoulos was assisted by his brother-in-law²⁴ the ophthalmologist Dr. Vassos Vassiliou (father of Georgios Vassiliou, later President of Cyprus, born in

Famagusta in 1931).²⁵ In January 1925 the group began to publish a fortnightly journal entitled *Neos Anthropos* (New Man), which declared itself to be the organ of the communist party of Cyprus. In the following months the journal attacked all kinds of social problems and the authorities retaliated by issuing fines and terms of imprisonment for libelling. On the 1st May Gianopoulos dared to invite the District Commissioner of Limassol to the May Day celebrations at the Labourers' club. The Commissioner showed up but warned those present that the authorities would tolerate only their labour, not their communist, activities. This warning led to the withdrawal of many union members from the club.²⁶

Throughout the whole time Gianopoulos kept in contact with KKE and Moscow. In July 1925 when the colonial authorities deported Dr. Gianopoulos to Greece because he was "threatening the island's peace", the conservative newspaper *Alitheia* hailed this repressive act of the colonial government. The doctor later was expelled from the party and became a non-person.²⁷ His place in the Limassol group was taken over first by Kostas Christodoulides (Skeleas) and then by the Moscow-(KUTV)²⁰ trained Charalambos Vatiliotis (Vatis) after his return to Cyprus.

During the following months KKK and its newspaper was under strain. In November 1925 the police raided the Labourers' Club and the homes of the leading members, confiscating their books and papers. The Colonial Secretary Reginald Popham Lobb did his best to unleash the anticommunist energies of the police and private citizens who sued *Neos Anthropos* for libelling. Its editor Charalambos Solomonides was sentenced to two months' imprisonment. It was a kind of private war against the communists of which the Colonial Office in London knew little.²⁹

In spite of these persecutions the communists continued and learned to work clandestinely. In August 1926 twenty Cypriot Communists (all of them Greek Cypriots) held their First Congress in Limassol in absolute secrecy during a public holiday. The organiser was the Cypriot, Charalambos Vatiliotis, who was a member of the Central Committee of KKE and had come over from Greece to guide the Cypriot comrades through their congress.³⁰ His presence showed the interest of the Greek party in its Cypriot offspring. Kostas Skeleas was elected Secretary General of KKK.

According to the Congress' manifesto the problem of the poor peasants was the most pressing. They were preyed upon by the usurers who expropriated them. Their ordeal could only be ended through the island's independence. The manifesto then denounced the petty politicians (politikandidates) who were propagating enosis ("harp on the string of enosis") but did not care about the poverty of the peasants and workers and called on all workers and peasants to join the ranks of the party in order to exact some concessions. The manifesto listed some concrete reforms

leading to improved living conditions and added two main political demands: extensive self-administration (aftodioikisis) and accountable government based on universal suffrage. The final aim, however, was independence.³¹

Additionally the Congress adopted a charter of KKK. According to this document published in *Neas Anthropos* on 24 December 1926 the party struggled for three aims:

- "(i) the struggle for the organisation and the economic improvement of the circumstances of the classes fettered by the present day capitalists of Cyprus;*
- (ii) the struggle for the political independence of Cyprus from the imperialistic yoke of the United Kingdom;*
- (iii) the development in Cyprus of the international solidarity of the labour movement and the unification of the struggle of the labourers and peasants of Cyprus with that of their colleagues in other countries."*³²

The first aim was the traditional one of organising unions among workers and peasants. The formulation of the second aim was a little vague when it called for political independence from Britain but obviously excluded enosis. The third aim, however, contained besides the formula "development of international solidarity" an explicit call for solidarity between the various ethnic groups in Cyprus.

All this was pretty conventional and not breathtaking. George Leventis, however, found the handwritten original of the charter in the Cypriot State Archive in Nicosia. In this document there is another paragraph between (ii) and (iii) which reads: "The struggle for the establishment of a Soviet Republic of workers and peasants in Cyprus."³³ The explanation as to why the leadership of KKK preferred not to print this paragraph may be found in the field of communist tactics, as was admitted by Fifi Ioannou (Secretary General of AKEL from 1945 to 1949) self-critically in 1976 when he wrote: "*The slogan for a 'Cyprus Soviet Republic' in conditions of an underdeveloped economy and a social formation in which traces of the 'proletariat' barely made their appearance for the first time or the atheist preachings of historical materialism in an atmosphere of deeply religious, feudal or petty bourgeois but above all peasant society, could not but lead to isolationism.*"³⁴ In his eyes the course of the KKK could be characterised as sectarian, displaying leftist extremism, the typical childhood illness of a newborn communist party.

On the Horns of a Dilemma: Autonomy or Enosis

This ambitious programme obliged the party to fight on various fronts. In comparison with the second and third, the first aim was a relatively simple task. In the ensuing three years KKK succeeded in organising unions and strikes. In 1927 a strike of 1,000 asbestos miners ended successfully: their working hours were

reduced from ten to nine hours per day. In 1929, six thousand miners went on strike. The British mining company invoked the help of the colonial authorities which crushed the strike by force. Though many workers were fired and their communist leaders were jailed or exiled this strike strengthened KKK. It had proved to be a political factor which had to be taken seriously.

The other two aims brought KKK into conflict with the Church and the nationalist leaders who were dreaming of union with Greece (*Enosis*). The congress had stated: "In the present phase of the political situation in Cyprus the correct practical and tactical line for KKK is the united anti-British front for obtaining self-government and self-determination."³⁵ The unpublished party history evaluated the 'end' of the anti-imperialist course rather critically: *'Though it saw so clearly the anti-imperialist liberation struggle and armed it with the irresistible and effective weapon of the united front, the KKK could not see with clarity the end of this struggle. It supported the liberation of Cyprus, the self-determination of the Cypriot people and was fighting consistently for this aim, but it had as a final aim the full independence through the establishment of a worker-peasant republic in Cyprus and its accession to the Balkan Federation and not enosis of the island with Greece.'*³⁶

In other words, KKK was following a popular-front-from-below-course by propagating the fight for autonomy but it did not correctly define the ultimate meaning of autonomy. It is not fully clear whether it was at this time or later in 1928 that the Comintern-slogan for the integration of an autonomous Cyprus into the Socialist Balkan Federation was taken over by KKK.³⁷ However, this may have been, the Cypriot communist leadership apparently understood that the propagation of this slogan in public would have similar disastrous consequences for KKK as the slogan for Macedonian autonomy had had for KKE³⁸ and therefore did not launch the slogan but in January 1927 came out with a cautiously worded anti-colonial programme: *"Not until we obtain our freedom and cease to be the slaves of British imperialism shall we be able to breathe economically. All parties that recognise the need for saving Cyprus from the foreign yoke as the first condition for economic and national restoration should direct their endeavours in that direction. But, in order that such endeavours should bear fruit, they should be united. All the anti-British elements, whether they be townspeople [bourgeois] or of the proletariat, whether they be Greeks or Turks, and whether they want Greece or autonomy, must cooperate in the struggle against foreign rule. All views meet on this point. The Communist Party which was the first to suggest the idea of a united front calls everybody to battle against British Imperialism at this critical moment when the British threat looms as a dark cloud over the Cyprian horizon. [...] The united anti-British front must be our answer to the British threat. This front must include all Cypriots, all classes and all parties which, for one reason or another, do not want British rule."*³⁹

Obviously KKK tried to include Greek, Turkish, Armenian and Maronite Cypriots alike in the struggle for self-determination thus making an effort to overcome the incipient ethnic split of the island. This precluded, of course, the solution aimed at by the Church and the Greek nationalists: *Enosis*. Though during this period KKK never took a stand against *Enosis* in public, it was clear that union with Greece was not its course.

The main aims of KKK's internal policy were similar to those of its bourgeois competitors: universal suffrage to all men and women above the age of eighteen; transformation of the Legislative Council into a real Parliament with proportional representation of the ethnic minorities; accountability of the government to parliament; abolition of the Tribute and a respective reduction of taxes; reinvestment of the surplus Tribute payment in Cyprus; removal of the British armed forces and their replacement by a local civil guard. All this was to be put before the British Government by a representative Delegation elected by a bi-communal congress and sent to London to lobby for the granting of self-determination.⁴⁰ This concept differed only in one point from the recipes applied by the bourgeois politicians: their delegations used to ask for *enosis*.

Under the Tutelage of KKE

In 1928 when the British celebrated the 50th anniversary of their rule over Cyprus, KKK published a manifesto which bitterly attacked the colonial administration and ended: "*Forward then to a united anti-British front. Onward with the struggle against the occupiers and the struggle for autonomy.*"⁴¹ In the same year the Comintern apparently established its first contacts with KKK but at the same time directed the Cypriot party to report its activities to KKE. Obviously the Comintern considered KKK a section of KKE. To what degree this subordination went and in which form control was exercised at that time is unclear. There is not the slightest documentary clue of how the internal quarrels in KKE during this period influenced KKK's course. But from events in the ensuing two years it may be concluded that KKE was probably authorised to give directives to KKK. Whatever the details, the KKK-KKE connection linked the Cypriot party to the political line followed by the Greek party. Thus KKK became an object of the political game played in Athens and the KKE players did not pay much attention to the specific interests of their Cypriot counterpart as long as it served their aims. This relationship reminds one of the notorious relationship of the mother-country and Cyprus which was characterised by submission to the "national centre".

In 1929 Prime Minister Venizelos enacted the *idionymo* law which threatened agitation against the existing social order with imprisonment. Venizelos' anti-communist measure triggered a mechanism which became a consistent feature of the policy of the Cypriot communists: KKK's interest in *enosis* cooled considerably,

since *enosis* would have brought the anti-communist repression practised in Greece to Cyprus as well. From this moment on this reaction became a constant in KKK/AKEL's policy. Whenever anti-communism was predominant in Greece the Cypriot communists' interest in *enosis* dwindled. But for the time being KKK did not come out openly against *enosis*.

The developments of the following two years are rather obscure and there is an almost total lack of sources. Thus we can only reconstruct the outlines of the development.

In 1929 Venizelos, who wanted to have good relations with the protective power of Greece and Great Britain, advised the Cypriots in an interview with the newspaper *Eleftheria* to refrain from provocations, and the leader of the Anti-Venizelists, Panagiotis Tsaldaris told the Cypriots the same thing. The Cypriots, however, did not heed the advice and in September 1929 they sent a delegation headed by the Bishop Nikodimos of Kition to London.

Bishop Nikodimos knew that *enosis* was excluded but he hoped that he might achieve a greater degree of autonomy. The communists quickly grasped their chance and came out publicly for autonomy and against *enosis*.⁴² And when the bishop's delegation returned rather frustrated by British intransigence the communists saw a chance to unite their forces with those of the bourgeois camp and create a united front against British imperialism. But soon quarrelling started so strongly between these two strange bedfellows that the British authorities feared that this might "result in serious disorder involving loss of life".⁴³

The Greek consul in Nicosia, Alexis Kyrou, disobeying his instructions, furthered the Cypriot *enosis* movement. Thus in Cyprus the impression was created that Venizelos was actively promoting *enosis*. This impression triggered KKE, which since 1929 had been looking for a chance for revenge, into action. They instructed KKK to follow an opposite course. KKK was to start a propaganda campaign against the Church and the Cypriot capitalists (middle-class traders, usurers) who under the leadership of the Church propagated *enosis*, insinuating that the Cypriot nationalist leaders were only aiming at replacing the British capitalists so that they themselves could exploit the workers. Cypriot communists should work for the liberation of the island from imperialism and for the establishment of a free Soviet Democracy of workers and peasants in Cyprus.⁴⁴

In June 1931 Governor Storrs reported on their activities: "*The first overl action of the communist party, composed almost entirely of Greeks, was to inaugurate counter demonstrations on the 25th of March, the 'National Independence Day'. At Limassol they tore down the Greek and substituted a Bolshevik flag; both there and*

at Nicosia they endeavoured to break up meetings for union. They presumably looked for Government indifference, but a number were arrested by the police and sentenced to imprisonment for terms up to two months. As one of the main subjects of their attacks is the Church, the Synod is doing what lies in its power to suppress the movement. On the whole their attacks are far more bitter against their fellow-countrymen than against the Government at present. The movement has spread rapidly; the number of communists registered by the police having increased from 181 to 365 in the last six months: the meetings held are well attended by potential supporters. The effect of their activities is to increase the general unrest and to render still more imperative the necessity for strengthening the position of the Legislature".⁴⁵

To what extent these instructions were obeyed and propagated by KKK has not been researched. But ensuing developments suggest that KKK reacted reservedly. Indeed, in the October 1931 unrests KKK followed an opposite course: after some initial hesitation the Party joined the 1931 anti-British *pro-enosis-riots* after they had been launched by the Church and the nationalists on 20 October 1931. Obviously KKK did not want to leave the anti-colonial struggle to the nationalists and the Church. Vatiliotis was arrested in Nicosia on 25 October when he was delivering a *pro-enosis* speech and Skeleas one day later in Limassol with pamphlets demanding autonomy. Obviously KKK-leaders had their own thoughts about the right course. The colonial authorities deported the two KKK leaders to Britain.

After the disturbances the colonial government suspended the civil liberties of all Cypriots but the communists were hit mercilessly. Trade unions and associations of whatever kind were prohibited. In August 1933 the Criminal Code was amended so that the authorities could "deal effectively with the communist menace". On 16 August, 1933 KKK and seven sub-organisations were proscribed. Proudly the British report stated in 1955: "*During 1933-1934, after years of patient work, twenty-eight of the leading Cypriot communists were convicted on charges of seditious conspiracy and received sentences ranging up to four years' imprisonment. The movement had by that time suffered a severe blow.*"⁴⁵ For the next ten years Cypriot communists had to work in illegality. Only a handful of them remained free in illegality. Many left Cyprus and took refuge in London. After the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936 sixty joined the International Brigades and fought in the ranks of the British Battalion. Among them was the later Secretary General of AKEL, Ezekias Papaioannou. Fourteen Cypriot communists paid for their participation with their lives.

Comintern Intervention and Illegality

This unauthorised move in October 1931 brought about an intervention by the Comintern. At the beginning of the year 1931 the 11th Plenum of the Executive

Committee of the Comintern had accepted KKK as a member.⁴⁷ It is not clear if KKK's subordination to KKE was abrogated at that point, but later developments suggest that this was not so. Whether the Comintern intervention after the October events took place in connection with its intervention during the 4th Plenum of KKE in December 1931 or whether there was a parallel intervention in Cyprus is unknown.⁴⁸ The fact is that from then on KKK was placed under the supervision of the Communist Party of Great Britain and on 17 December 1931 the Comintern organ *Internationale Pressekorrespondenz* (Imprekorr) published the following statement by Vatiliotis and Skeleas in London: "*The Communist Party will struggle for the fulfilment of the immediate economic demands of the workers and peasants, for the exposure of the betrayal of the 'National-Unionist' leaders and their counter-revolutionary slogan [enosis], for the united front against imperialism of the toiling Turks and Greeks, for the Free Workers' and Peasants' Soviet Republic of Cyprus.*"⁴⁹ In other words: The Comintern and the CP of Great Britain forced a course upon KKK which would have been ruinous for the party if it had become known to the public since it obliged KKK to steer a course which was against Cypriot public opinion. Fortunately for KKK the British had suppressed the party and thus spared it self-destruction.

In 1935 KKK which at that time counted less than sixty members came under the energetic leadership of Ploutis Servas. Servas (really Ploutarchos Loizou Savvides, brother of Christos Savvides) was born in Limassol in 1907. During his grammar school days he came in contact with communist ideas and in 1924 at the age of seventeen he organised the first communist pupils' group of Cyprus at the Limassol grammar school. At the First Party Congress he took part as one of the representatives of the party's youth movement. In 1928 he was amongst the leading figures of the party. One year later he went to Greece and from there to Moscow to study social sciences. Between 1931 and 1934 he was editor of a Greek newspaper in Marioupolis [Mariupol; after 1948 Shdanov] in Ukraine. In 1934 he returned to Greece to carry out illegal work in Kokkinia in Athens, and in September 1935 the right-wing Greek government deported him to Cyprus. The colonial authorities allowed him to return despite the fact that under the 1931 Defence Regulations he had been banned from Cyprus, but they made him sign an undertaking that from then on he would refrain from communistic and political propaganda and activities. Servas signed and – went to work.⁵⁰

In 1936 the colonial government of Cyprus reduced the repression and allowed the formation of unions. Sarvas used this chance and ordered his comrades to organise crypto-communist unions. He told them to keep a low political profile but make every effort to promote the union movement. Up to the beginning of the Second World War he managed to organise almost 4,000 workers in various unions. Following the British example the unions were formulated according to

trades. In August 1939 the unions held their first Pan-Cypriot Union Congress.⁵¹ In 1940 the unions united in the Pan-Cypriot Trades Union Committee (*Pankypria Syntechniaki Epitropi* – PSE). Typically for the time, the unions struggled for an eight-hour working day, higher wages, improvement of working conditions, social security, etc. In 1943 the entrepreneurs and the British reacted and sponsored the formation of conservative unions which united in SEK (Synomospondia Ergaton Kyprou – Federation of Cypriot Workers). In 1946 the British prohibited PSE because of alleged anti-British propaganda and jailed some of its leaders. The unions reorganised themselves under the name PEO (Pankypria Ergatiki Omospondia). The story of the left unions is well documented.⁵²

During the same period the Cypriot communists managed to build up a peasant organisation in the villages. Towards the end of the 1930s district organisations were set up and after WWII, in the summer of 1946 the first demonstrations against the miserable life of the peasants were organised and in October of that year EAK (Enosis Agroton Kyprou – Organisation of Cypriot Peasants) was founded. But let us return to developments before the war.

Though the union movement progressed the party remained an outlawed sectarian group. In June 1937 the colonial authorities got hold of the first issue of a clandestine bulletin of KKK which contained information about efforts to *revive* the party. In 1938 the Communist Party of Great Britain claimed that KKK had been reorganised and was given *every* assistance. Later in the same year Servas was prosecuted and convicted for having in his possession a printing machine without an official permit. Shortly before the war KKK counted sixty members. Servas understood that KKK could not be revitalised. The British would not allow its legalisation and since 1931 its image had been simply too bad. This became even worse when KKK slavishly followed the swaying Comintern course in 1939 and 1940 (Hitler-Stalin Pact).

Towards Democratic Socialism: The Founding of AKEL

When World War II began the British repression relaxed. The colonial authorities announced municipal elections for the year 1943 which implicitly meant that political parties would be recognised. The message was understood immediately in all political directions of Cypriot society. In a conversation between Ploutis Servas and Georgios Vassiliades, a lawyer who was close to the Church/Ethnarchy, the latter developed the idea to create a new party of the left. It was pretty clear that such a party could not fight for the independence of Cyprus or for *enosis* but it could contend for the improvement of the life of the people of the island.

This disclosure caused Servas to act. Since he had become Secretary General

of KKK in 1935 it had been his task to fight for the legalisation of the Communist Party, an assignment which under the prevailing conditions was simply illusory. But even after the British announcement it was fairly clear that the colonial authorities would not accept parties which would follow a course contrary to British aims let alone a communist party. Thus any idea of legalisation of KKK had to be dropped. Servas understood this and appreciated the Vassiliades' proposal and merged it with his own concepts.

For some time he had endorsed the opinion that only a new party with a broad popular basis, but secretly under communist control had the chance to play a leading role in the future and to compete with the Church/Ethnarchy in the anti-colonial struggle. It is not known when Servas brought his ideas before the CC of KKK but as he had previously assured himself of the consent of KKE and CPGB he succeeded in extracting a CC resolution to found a new party.

This decision, of course, provoked the hardliners in KKK who had watched Servas' union policy with misgivings. Now they suspected Servas of right-wing deviationism and wanted to keep the new party under their control from the beginning. The more liberal-minded wing of KKK, mostly intellectuals, appreciated Servas' ideas and were of the opinion that the known hard core members should not participate at all in the launching congress. Despite the fact that Servas was an intellectual himself and sympathised with them he knew that the orthodox wing was too strong and therefore he decided to include some of the hardliners so as not to provoke their total opposition.

On 14 April, 1941 with the permission of the colonial authorities he called a meeting in the village of Skarinou. Servas had invited prestigious personalities such as advocates and doctors who had studied abroad. Among those thirty-six persons present twenty-two were communists of both trends. The rest were progressive intellectuals and even former nationalists. Among them were Georgios Vassiliades, Zenon Rossides and Lefkios Zenon who later held eminent government posts.⁵³ But in 1941 they simply hoped to start a political career by joining the new party. After discussions the participants voted the charter (Memorandum of Association) of the new party (AKEL) and elected a Pan-Cypriot Organising Committee and local committees for the biggest towns. It was decided that the principles governing the new party would be published later. It was regretted that no Turkish Cypriot had been able to attend the meeting and that only a small number of peasants participated. The assembly decided that AKEL as a party should not take part in the next municipal elections. Finally it was stated that AKEL had a democratic, anti-fascist and anti-hitlerite character and that it was in full accord with the ongoing struggle against violence and despotism.⁵⁴ By clever manoeuvring Servas succeeded in having the assembly elect only candidates of his liking to the various

committees. This, of course, infuriated the KKK veterans. The Cypriot right wing press reacted strongly against the new political force by ridiculing or denouncing it. This induced the more cautious bourgeois intellectuals to withdraw from AKEL.

After Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union and the conclusion of the alliance between Great Britain and the USSR Servas decided to exploit the new situation. On 5 October 1941 – again with the permission of the colonial authorities – AKEL held its First Congress in Limassol. Apparently the Congress adopted the statutes and the programme of the Party. In the latter it was stated that AKEL believed in democratic centralism, party discipline and unity and detested factionalism and fractionalism.⁵⁵ In other words, AKEL became the second Leninist party of Cyprus. Ploutis Servas was elected General Secretary of AKEL as well.

Thus confirmed, he went to work. Years later after he had been ousted from AKEL the orthodox leadership criticised him in a most massive way. According to his critics he had shown respect neither for Politbureau resolutions, nor for the Central Committee, nor of Congresses. He allowed the building of fractions and had even formed one for himself. The anti-Servas fraction stated: *"Instead of educating the members by his example in the right way; for a whole period he proved to be the bad demon of the party, an example of undiscipline and undermine, of the unity of the party."* Finally they denounced Servas for having introduced the so-called democratic revolution into the party, the rebellion of the rank and file against the leadership.⁵⁶ Servas obviously practiced a democratic style of leadership which was alien to the veterans. It is unclear, however, which resolutions Servas did not obey, most probably those of the still existing KKK-structures.

How strong Servas' position in AKEL was became visible when in 1942 during the 2nd AKEL Congress he was able to make *enosis* one of the aims of the party. Shortly after the foundation of AKEL the hard-core members tried by a Politbureau resolution to bring the party under their control by ordering the removal of the party's headquarters from Limassol to Nicosia where KKK had its seat. With this step the hard-liners intended to control Servas more closely. Servas refused to yield.

In 1943 he violated even the resolution of the founding congress when he decided that AKEL should participate in the municipal elections. Under his lead the party put up candidates everywhere and he allowed himself to be nominated as candidate for the mayor's seat of Limassol. Servas was elected and so was the AKEL candidate in Famagusta. In other towns AKEL missed election victories by a narrow margin. Servas' enemies in KKK and AKEL fumed.

Later in 1943 he pushed AKEL even further along the national course. Before the Italian attack on Greece KKK had made propaganda against recruitment of

Cypriots into the British forces.⁵⁷ When the Greek army fought successfully against the invaders the Cypriot public reacted enthusiastically and thousands enlisted in the British army. Six thousand Cypriots are said to have fought in the British expeditionary force to Greece. KKK had taken no part in this.

For a variety of reasons Servas considered this abstention as negative for the party. First of all he believed that it was the duty of AKEL to participate in the struggle against Fascism. Secondly, he sought to ingratiate AKEL with the British. If the Cypriots participated in the war, Britain would be obliged to make concessions after the war. Third, enlistment in the army might free him from some of his opponents. Fourth, the enlisted AKEL members might indoctrinate their future comrades and win them for the party's case. Fifth, it was intended as a kind of antidote against Axis propaganda which was propagating *enosis*. Thus on 16 June 1943 the Central Committee of AKEL published a resolution which asked its members to volunteer for the British army in order to strengthen the struggle for the liberation of Greece, for the liberation of other countries, for the national, political and social future of the island. Indeed, eleven of the seventeen members of the Central Committee and seven hundred of the rank and file of AKEL volunteered.

During the same time AKEL considerably increased its influence on the workers. By 1943 PSE controlled unions with a total membership of 13,000. In the same year Andreas Ziartides was elected General Secretary of PSE and AKEL voted him onto its Central Committee. The well-organised unions became the basis of AKEL. Parallel AKEL did its best helping the peasants (EAK) and even managed to attract shop-owners and other middle-class Cypriots. Cultural and sports organisations completed the picture. In 1944 the CYC (Communist Youth of Cyprus) was replaced by AON (Anorthotiki Organosis Neolaias – Progressive Organisation of the Youth) and in 1946 the Coop-Organisation was added.⁵⁰

The successful development of the resistance movement in Greece seemed to confirm Servas' course. In 1944 Servas considered his position strong enough to reshuffle the Central Committee and to include more moderates and oust some of the hardliners. Then he suggested dissolving KKK. This step brought the old guard to the brink of rage. Grinding their teeth the KKK veterans had to accept the compromise offered by Servas: the admittance of some KKK-Central Committee members to the Central Committee of AKEL and the merging of their party into AKEL. Thus in the autumn of 1944 AKEL could come to the fore as the communist party of Cyprus.

Towards a Mass Party

The resolution to dissolve KKK and integrate its members into AKEL proved to be the right decision. It freed the new party from the bonds of orthodoxy within and

outside the party. It was precisely the opposite development from Greece. There in 1947 KKE was outlawed and after KKE had lost the Civil War in 1949 its leadership fled to eastern Europe. When it became clear that for many years KKE would not be readmitted to political life, in 1951 it was decided to imitate the Cypriots by setting up EDA (*Enomeni Dimokratiki Aristera*, United Democratic Left). But unlike Ploutis Servas the EDA leadership never managed to get rid of the grip of the communist leadership. The members of KKE joined EDA but did never give up their loyalty to the exiled KKE leadership. The exiled communist leaders, however, soon lost contact with the post Civil War reality of Greece. Thus the EDA leadership could never steer a course of its own, a course which corresponded to Greek reality but was obliged to listen to orders from abroad. The long-standing EDA-leader Ilias Iliou could be heard complaining that the non-Stalinists within EDA had never had the clearheadedness of the Cypriots who absorbed the communist party.

Indeed, under the successful leadership of Ploutis Servas, AKEL developed a mass basis in the unions previously unknown to KKK. Despite lip-service to Leninist principles AKEL in reality was steering a reformist course. It was developing rapidly towards a popular democratic socialist party. Obviously AKEL freed from the influence of the Comintern underwent a process similar to what happened with KKE in Greece during the occupation.

During the war years the hard-liners had to give in. But they did not forget. When the Cold War broke out they took revenge. Servas was purged and the mandatory process of bolshevisation which had been interrupted in the early 1930s was carried through. AKEL was led back to the path of orthodoxy and for a long time to come, came thereby (again) under the control of the forces outside Cyprus,⁵⁹ but this is another story.

Notes

1. I feel very obliged to the former Secretary General of KKK, Ploutis Servas, who was friendly enough to grant me an interview and to read the first draft of this paper with a critical eye. Without his help this paper would have been rather barren.

2. Colonial Government of Cyprus, *Communism in Cyprus* (Nicosia, 1955); This paper was prepared by the Cyprus Intelligence Committee; Heinz A. Richter, 'Die Kommunistische Partei Zyperns 1926 - 1944' *THETIS* 3 (1996), pp. 207-216; Yiorghos Leventis, 'The Politics of the Cypriot Left in the Inter-War Period,' *Synthesis: Review of Modern Greek Studies*, 2:1 (1997), pp. 1-15.

3. T. W. Adams, *AKEL: The Communist Party of Cyprus* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1971).
4. Actually the first forty pages are scarcely more than a paraphrase of *Communism in Cyprus*. See as well George C. Fidas, 'The Evolution of Cypriot Communism', *Studies in Comparative Communism*, 6:1/2 (Spring/Summer 1973), p. 438f.
5. AKEL, *AKEL, To Komma tou Ergazomenou Laou* (Nicosia, 1976); a shorter English edition which appeared in the same year has the title *AKEL, The Party of the Working People*.
6. Giannis Lefkis, *Oi Rizis. Istoriki Meleti* (Lemesos:1984) and the memoirs of Ploutis Servas which will be quoted in this paper.
7. According to G. Leventis, *op. cit.*, p. 3 footnote 10, AKEL asked the CC member Minos Perdios in the 1960s to write a story of the party. Perdios wrote a 340 page long piece with the working title *Dokimio Istorias tou KKK kai tou AKEL* [Essay on the History of KKK-AKEL]. In 1968 the CC discussed the manuscript but no decision for its publication was taken. With the exception of Leventis no one outside AKEL ever obtained the permission to study the manuscript.
8. See Heinz Richter, *British Intervention in Greece. From Varkiza to Civil War, February 1945 to August 1946* (London: Merlin Press, 1986), p. 91.
9. Heinz A. Richter, 'The Greek Communist Party and the Communist International' *Jahrbuch für Historische Kommunismusforschung 2002*, (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 2002), pp. 111-140.
10. Heinz A. Richter, 'Gehört Zypern überhaupt zu Europa? Anmerkungen zur politischen Kultur Zyperns' *POLIS 5* (September 1996), pp. 8-10; idem, *Gedanken zur Politischen Kultur in Griechenland und der TORkei unter Berücksichtigung Zyperns* (München: Hans Seidel Stiftung, 1999); Hubert Faustmann, 'Klientelismus in der griechisch-zyprischen Volksgruppe während der britischen Kolonialherrschaft', *Thetis 4* (1997), pp.211-231.
11. In the following I follow mainly Nearchos Ioannou, *Die Akkumulation des Kapitals auf Zypern. Eine historisch-ökonomische Studie über den Prozeß der sogenannten 'ursprünglichen' Kapitalakkumulation während der Kolonialzeit und der kapitalistischen Kapitalakkumulation in der Periode zwischen 1950 und 1987* (Frankfurt, Bern, New York: Peter Lang, 1989); for earlier developments see Rolandos Katsiaounis, *Labour, Society and Politics in Cyprus During the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century* (Nicosia: Cyprus Research Centre, 1996).
12. Harry Luke, *Cyprus Under the Turks 1571-1878* (London: Hurst, 1989), p. 260f.
13. Freiherr v. Lichtenberg-Gotha, *Cypern und die Engländer. Ein Beispiel britischer kolonialer Willkür*(Leipzig: Veit, 1915), p. 7 The real net tax revenue was a little over £66,000.

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14. On the Tribute see George Georghallides, 'Cyprus and Winston Churchill's 1907 Visit, Part 1' *Thetis* 2 (1995), p.149-159.
15. A description of the system is found in C. W. Orr, *Cyprus under British Rule* (London: Zeno, 1972), p. 149.
16. G. S. Georghallides, *A Political and Administrative History of Cyprus 1918 - 1926, with a Survey of the Foundations of British Rule* (Nicosia: Cyprus Research Centre, 1979), p. 317.
17. *Ibidem*, p. 332-334.
18. In describing the development of the Cypriot party I mainly follow *Communism in Cyprus*.
19. Christodoulos Christodoulides became known under his party pseudonym Alexis.
20. In 1945 Chourmouzos became editor of the Athens conservative daily *Kathimerini*. In the 1950s he won some fame as an author.
21. Leventis, *op. cit.*, p.2.
22. Georghallides, *op. cit.*, p. 309.
23. *Ibidem*, p. 309.
24. Adams, *op. cit.*, p. 13 erroneously made him a son-in-law.
25. After the disturbances in October 1931 the family left for Athens because the situation was rather difficult in Cyprus for left wing people. In 1936 Dr. Vassos left Athens and settled in Mytilini due to difficulties he was facing with the dictatorship of Metaxas. In 1941 before the occupation of Greece by Germany he was tipped by the local Police Head to flee the country since he was to be arrested. The family left for Aivali, Turkey and then for Smyrna (Izmir) where they stayed for a month before returning to Cyprus. Dr. Vassos remained in Famagusta for a month before proceeding to Cambos tis Tsakistras, his native village. There he helped the foresters to set up their Union (*Syntechnia ton Ergaton tou Dasous*). In September 1941 the family settled in Paphos. I am quoting on this from an interview with G. Vassiliou 'I Zoi Mou Se Proto Prosopo' in *Se/ides* Magazine (19 May 2002), p. 24. I am indebted to Ambassador Nicolas Macris who was kind enough to send me this information.
26. *Ibidem*, p. 347 footnote 3.
27. He is not included in the album published by AKEL in 1984. AKEL, *AKEL, The Party of the Working Class* (Nicosia, 1984).
28. Communist University of the Workers of the East (*Kommunisticheskij Universitet Trudyashchaya Vostoka*; KUTV; 1921 -1952). At the end of the 1920s Cypriot communists were sent to the Communist University of the Workers of the West. Apparently the Soviets

considered the Cypriot Communists more European than their Greek counterparts who continued to be sent to KUTV.

29. Georghallides, *op. cit.*, p. 353 footnote 1.

30. George S. Georghallides, *Cyprus and the Governorship of Sir Ronald Storrs: The Causes of the 1931 Crisis*. (Nicosia: Cyprus Research Centre, 1985), p. 106 footnote 2; Leventis, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

31. *Ibidem*, p. 7 on the basis of *Dokimio Istorias*, pp. 29-44.

32. A brief account of the founding congress may be found in 'To idrytiko Synedrio tau KKK-AKEL' *Neos Dimokratias*, 74 (July/August 1983), p. 57f.

33. SA1/1678/1926 in Leventis, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

34. Fifis Ioannou, 'St'achnaria mias dekaetias 1940-1950: Etsi archise to Kypriako' this paragraph in their paper is less easy to explain. A possible explanation could be that the original was handwritten in Greek and the civil servant who prepared the report 'Communism in Cyprus' could not read Greek handwriting.

35. Andreas Fantis, 'To KKK - AKEL Symaioforos ston Antiimperialistiko Agona', *Neos Dimokratias*, 91 (1986), p. 14.

36. *Dokimio Istorias* quoted after Leventis, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

37. Ploutis Servas, 'Kypriaki Aristera', *Anti*, 40 (11 January 1975), p. 26; Ploutis Servas, *Kypriako. Efthines* (Athens: Grammi, 1985), p.116.

38. Literature on this topic can be found in Richter, *Communist Party*, p. 122f footnotes **39-42**.

39. *Neos Anthropos*, 8 January 1927, quoted in *Communism in Cyprus*, p. 4.

40. *Dokimio Istorias* quoted by Leventis, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

41. AKEL, *AKEL, To Komma tou Ergazomenou Laou* (Nicosia, 1976), p. 61; according to Internationale-Presse-Korrespondenz the manifesto appealed to the workers and peasants to boycott the festivities, to rise against the imperialist oppressors and against the local betrayers of their classes and to fight for a workers' and peasants' government. *Inprekorr*, No. 93 (1928), p. 1736.

42. Georghallides, *Storrs*, p. 201.

43. *Communism in Cyprus*, p. 5.

44. *Ibidem*, p. 5
45. Storrs to Passfield, 4 June 1931 quoted by Georghallides, *Storrs*, p. 651; the Synod excommunicated members of KKK.
46. *Ibidem*, p. 5f.
47. *Inprekorr*, No. 38 (1931), p. 955.
48. *Inprekorr* which contains substantial information about KKE is rather silent about KKK. On the Comintern intervention in KKE affairs see Richter, *Greek Communist Party*, p. 129.
49. *Inprekorr*, No. 118 (December, 1931), p. 2.712.
50. This undertaking should not be confused with the *diloseis* the Greek communists were forced to sign under the Metaxas dictatorship whereby they had to denounce communism. Servas at first refused to sign but when he was kept aboard the ship which continued its journey for twenty days he contacted KKK. It was under the explicit *advice* of the CC that he signed the undertaking. More information on Servas may be found in O *Fileleftheros tis Kyriakis - Istoría* 18 (6 April, 2003) *passim*.
51. 'Diakiryxi tis K. E. gia ta 60 Chronia tau KKK-AKEL', *Neas Dimokratias*, 91 (1986), p. 6f.
52. PEO (ed.), *Istoría PSE-PEO 1941-1991* (Nicosia, 1991); *PEO 50 Chronia* (Nicosia, 1991); personal reminiscences of union members may be found in: PEO (ed.), *Ta emmistha stelechi tis PSE-PEO kai ton syntechnion tis (1940-1974)* (Nicosia, 1995).
53. Vassiliades became Chief Justice of the Cyprus High Court; Zenon served as a judge; and Rossides was Cypriot ambassador to Washington.
54. AKEL, *AKEL*, p. 48.
55. Andreas Fantis, 'I Pali tou AKEL gia tin Epikratasi kai ton Sevasmo ton Organotikon Archon tou Kommatos Neou Typou', *Neos Dimokratias*, 80 (July/August 1984), p. 8f.
56. *Ibidem*.
57. *Communism in Cyprus*, p. 10.
58. Kypros Kourtellaris, *50 Chronia Synergatikes Epavlis 'Onisia Ltd* (Lefkosia: Pankyprios Synergatiki Synomospondia, 1996).
59. On AKEL see Heinz A. Richter, 'AKEL - Kommunistische Partei Zyperns' *THETIS* 9 (2002), pp. 219-238; Rolandos Katsiaounis, *I disakeptiki 1946-194B* (Nicosia: KEEK, 2000).