

The History of the Communist Party in Cyprus: Colonialism, Class and the Cypriot Left

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The History of the Communist Party in Cyprus is the first attempt to offer a comprehensive account on the appearance, the activities and the evolution of a party that laid down the foundations of party life and influenced the political and social order in Cyprus. This book is one of the very rare publications that detail the history and evolution of a Cypriot party – the others being Adam’s controversial account on AKEL (1972) and Stamatou’s book on pre-1974 EDEK, in Greek (2013). In this respect, this is a valuable contribution to the study of the Communist Party of Cyprus (KKK) and as such, it fills a gap in research related to the history and evolution of parties and party politics in the island; it enriches the existing (limited) literature on the island’s parties and politics. More importantly, it helps in tracing and understanding key factors and processes that shaped the left-right cleavage in the 1940s and are extended into our era despite significant social, political and economic changes that have taken place in the meantime. It also assists the reader to comprehend Cyprus society and politics provided that their course is seen in a continuum; social divisions prompted by the appearance of the KKK led to consolidation of the left-right cleavage in the mid-1940s and have persisted in daily life until today.

The author, Yiannos Katsourides, in conducting his work, draws on the theories of Stein Rokkan and Seymour Lipset on state formation and the social and other conditions that influenced party formation in Europe. Even though Cyprus forms a separate case than the continent, comparisons provide useful and sufficient explanations on the specific characteristics and the divergent paradigm of the KKK. The author also examines the party’s creation, organisational and programmatic features in the light of the Marxist-Leninist theory on society and classes, and in particular Lenin’s views on the relation between the party and the working class, processes of organisation and work, and other relevant matters. Katsourides shows that the Cypriot communists followed and employed theory in a conscious and scrupulous manner, and put into practice basic Marxist principles in the setting up and operation of the KKK.

In the absence of previous literature on the subject, the author searched primary relevant sources, in particular the Greek Cypriot press, the British Archives, the very valuable Archives of Contemporary Social History [Αρχείο Σύγχρονης Κοινωνικής

Ιστορίας – ASKI] in Athens and, of course, documents held by the Progressive Party of the Working People [Ανορθωτικό Κόμμα Εργαζόμενου Λαού – AKEL] and the Pancyprian Labour Federation [Παγκύπρια Εργατική Ομοσπονδία – PEO]. The KKK, AKEL and PEO have, during various periods of time, been the targets of monitoring and persecution by the authorities, resulting in the outlaw of the two parties – the KKK and AKEL – and valuable sections of their archives being lost. Copies of documents and reports found in ASKI, though not compensating for the lost archives, may fill somewhat the gaps. The author's access to AKEL and PEO archives, until now not open to researchers, is of significant value as it sheds new light on history such as the programmed and planned creation of AKEL by the outlawed KKK.

The book is divided into seven chapters, with four directly focusing on the KKK, including also an extensive introduction and conclusions.

The introduction presents the scope of the book and the main themes examined, the theoretical and methodological framework employed by the author, and the outline. Marxist theory and Rokkan-Lipset's theories on the people's mobilisation and the formation of class cleavages, the emergence of left parties and the way they connect with social class, as well as the link between the citizen, class consciousness and the collectivity are set as the study's guidelines. Their association with Cyprus shows the extent to which its case fits well with or diverges from the general paradigm.

In chapter 1, the focus is on the context and the peculiar conditions of Cyprus in the period that preceded the emergence of communist ideas and of a small working class. Its colonial status is a decisive factor affecting the path to development and nation formation. The constraints of colonial rule, taxes and the exploitation by local elites of an almost exclusively agrarian society constitute the main components that enforced upon it a belated course to modern life. They are combined with the politics of *enosis* – union with Greece that monopolises the interests of elites in their search for power. Even so, slow progress is noticed as well as the emergence of a working class.

Although some of the above concerns are presented over an extensive period of time, with leaps back and forth, sometimes extending to more than one century, other assertions remain undocumented. For example, the reader cannot be sure as to whether conditions described in connection with tax collection (p. 18) were also in force in the mid-nineteenth century and the late Ottoman rule. Furthermore, assertions such as the one that claims 'The majority of small owners lost their land ...' (p. 26) appear grossly exaggerated.

Chapter 2 deals with politics as well as the conditions and dynamics that had maintained political activity at very low levels, in both size and quality. It examines the limited role of the Legislative Council, the status and other features of the political elites and the exclusion of the large majority from franchise. These traits led to a deficient

system that served only to legitimate the regime, mainly through the inclusion of local elites in the administration of the island by Great Britain.

The political formations, social and other phenomena that preceded the communist party KKK and paved its path are studied in chapter 3. The attempts to organise parties – the Agrarian, the Popular, and the Cypriot Labour Party – failed as such because they were mostly person-centred, in the service of their founders. In this respect they were profoundly different from the communist party norm. However, some of their ideas along with other forms of organisation such as guilds and labour clubs, and ideas linked to social unrest and questioning the system had opened the road to a new party.

Chapter 4 narrates the slow progression from the emergence of the communist ideology in Cyprus to the founding congress of the KKK in August 1926 and its main attributes. It stresses the choice of a programmatic plan to challenging the existing order, defending and promoting the interests of the working class. This was sought through (failed) alliances for a united front, by following ‘known’ modes of communist activism, on the basis of a political programme that tackled social issues such as the question of *enosis*, the pursuance of civil rights and liberties, and the defiance of religious order. Opposition to *enosis* and to the Church are assessed as a mistake by the party not corresponding to the public’s mainstream stance and beliefs and impeding KKK’s expansion.

The party’s organisational model and relational network, examined in chapter 5, demonstrate how its leadership promoted a different culture among its members and created a ‘society within society’. These practices diverged radically from the elite model of the conservative forces and the Church, as were other topics examined in the chapter such as KKK’s organisational structure and internal relations, the significant role of the party press to promote communist ideas, and attempts to approach and organise the Turkish Cypriot community and relations on an international level with other communist parties and organisations. A most significant ingredient that determined the future of the left in Cyprus was the KKK’s role in setting up the bases and organising the trade union movement that to date constitutes the left’s backbone.

Chapter 6 projects the aspects that led to the party’s failure to integrate within the system and record a sizable electoral score. It was repression by the colonial regime but also the reaction of local elites and the Church, as well as the KKK’s negative positions on *enosis* and the Church, at a time when society was not ready to endorse such radical choices linked to the national claims. Internal dissensions and tensions with the labour movement, and the exclusion of the larger section of the lower strata have also proved obstacles to electoral success.

The final chapter 7 shows that the party’s years in illegality, following the popular unrest of October 1931, have not been able to hinder its development. After a period of

severe crisis due to the arrest and ban of its leadership from Cyprus, some of its cadres managed to re-assemble its forces and re-organise the KKK. Its underground activity combined with a shifting focus in the organisation and tutelage of the rapidly expanding working class gave a new impetus towards its expansion. In 1941, KKK's outlawed leadership inaugurated a new course for communism in Cyprus with the creation of AKEL. The new party's moderate ideological foundations, its support for *enosis* and reconciliation with the Church are proposed as the decisive factors of the left's broad influence that is maintained to the present day.

The latter argument, where the party focus is on more moderate positions appears the most significant or sole factor of the left's success. It ignores conjectural elements and social and other circumstances during the period 1939 to 1944; the years when AKEL laid down strong foundations and established itself as a major political force. It also holds fast to the argument that de-peasants formed the working class. The influences upon which AKEL founded its expansion seem to be ignored; for instance the conditions of extensive social mobility and urbanisation created by WWII, such as widespread employment in military/defensive works in addition to deployment in large numbers to the side of the allies which created a need for defending the interests of and protecting new groups outside of their traditional environment. The ideal protector was AKEL, for both ideological but also for reasons connected to the reality: With the Church and the conservative camp remaining leaderless and largely unorganised after 1931, resistance to the rapid expansion of the left was initially very weak or non-existent.

There is a discrepancy in the book with regard to the nomenclature. The Communist Party of Cyprus (Κομμουνιστικό Κόμμα Κύπρου) and other organisations are labelled in accordance with their English name (CPC, LLC, AP, PP etc.), while AKEL, PEO and others are named following the abbreviation of their name in Greek, which is the literature standard. Noted also are some translation problems and/or typos (e.g. Panebianco's theory on '*a party's generic factors*' (p. 202) instead of '*a party's genetic traits/features*'), missing or wrong references (e.g. endnotes 90 to 106 on pages 88 to 91). Copy-editing needed some more attention.

That said, Katsourides' book is a valuable contribution to the study of party politics, class and labour movements and politics under colonial rule. Academics, researchers, students, and political actors, those that study and want to understand party and politics in Cyprus, the Middle East as well as Europe and elsewhere, in a comparative perspective, will benefit from reading the book. It offers a detailed account of a party's history, processes of work and development under peculiar circumstances and colonial rule. It is richly documented and referenced. While reading it, new questions emerge and invite new research; for example, what exactly were the links, if any, between the underground/outlawed KKK and the very active left-wing group of Cypriots in London, including the

future Secretary General of AKEL, Ezekias Papaioannou? Was the group's activity limited to the promotion of the 'national cause' in the UK or has it in any way influenced the work and course of the KKK in Cyprus? A further question relates to the creation by the KKK of the Peasant-Educational clubs (Αγροτο-μορφωτικοί Σύλλογοι) in the 1920s and 1930s and their role in AKEL's penetration in rural areas. Little is said in the book about the background to these clubs, but given that electoral mobilisation (1943) was limited to towns and townships, we gather that by the time AKEL was founded only a sizeable number of already existing clubs could explain the spreading of communist ideas among the peasantry. Without such an organised network of clubs and influences, AKEL's expansion in rural areas might have been slow and difficult, particularly given that peasantry is generally highly conservative. But what role exactly did the KKK play in creating these clubs, what was the size of this movement, and what other issues facilitated their expansion (e.g. mining sites and labour concentration)?

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