

Studies, Lectures, Speeches, Articles
[Άπαντα Κωνσταντίνου Σπυριδάκι:
Μελέται, Διαλέξεις, Λόγοι, Άρθρα]

CONSTANTINOS SPYRIDAKIS

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Introduction

The 3-volume publications of Constantinos Spyridakis highlight the educational policy in Cyprus during the last years of the British rule (1923-1960) and the first decade after the establishment of the Republic of Cyprus. They highlight the opposing trends between the Greek Cypriot educational policy, mainly formulated and expressed by the author, and the British Government’s plans for the control and disorientation of Greek primary and secondary education. In this context, *Studies, Lectures, Speeches, Articles* reflects the moral standards and the mindset of Greek Cypriots towards the foreign government and the rulers’ escalation of their strategy to thwart Greek Cypriots’ political plans for *Enosis* with Greece.

It is important to comprehend the historical background of *Studies, Lectures, Speeches, Articles* and the educational role of the author. Spyridakis was the Pan-cyprian Gymnasium Principal (1936-1950), President of the Educational Council (1959-1960), the first President of the Greek Cypriot Communal Chamber (1960-1965), and the first Minister of Education (1965-1970), a bright scholar in the fields of Greek civilisation and Greek literature, and an active supporter of the Hellenic orientation of education in Cyprus. He was responsible for the conceptualization and implementation of the educational policy during the years in which the Greek Cypriots’ aspiration for union with Greece had been growing. The aspiration had been frustrated several times until the October 1931 uprising and the 1950 referendum, in which 95,7% of the Greek Cypriots declared *Enosis* as a non-negotiable goal. The EOKA liberation struggle (1955-1959) expressed the culmination of the demand for *Enosis*.

Aiming at strengthening the ties that bind Greece and Cyprus and the consciousness of the Greek Cypriots’ Hellenic roots, Spyridakis is recognized as a prominent

scholar who enriched the cultural capital of Cyprus with his scientific studies and his philological and historical work, most of which is contained in the volumes under review.

What is the educational response to such political challenges? What is the author's contribution to the struggle against English colonialism and the educational plans the English had for Cyprus? What is the role of education and educational leadership during the national struggles of Greek Cypriots and the author's role against the rulers' plans? After reading Spyridakis' work, readers will be able to form their own answers and better appreciate the role attributed by the author to education.

Main Issues and Ideas

The review aims at presenting issues the book itself raises in the concrete time of its content writing. Volume 1 consists of three separate parts and it contains speeches and articles, with the majority having been written before Independence. The reader recognizes the author's deep knowledge of and reverence for the Greek cultural capital, the history, the sustainable value of the ancient Greek literary treasures, as well as the Greek humanitarian background. It is obvious that the publications and speeches aim to stimulate adherence and respect for the Greek tradition of Cyprus, which the author points out through studies on the Hellenic character of ancient Cyprus and with articles referring to the archeological findings that reveal the roots of Greek civilisation in Cyprus. This aim is also obvious in his speeches to the various 'national' associations where he was honourably invited –usually as their founder– and in which he urged the participants to work as a team and in collaboration for the continuity of the Greek tradition of Cyprus (Vol. 1, Part 3, p. 314).

The two Parts of Volume 2 contain studies on the education of Cyprus. In the prologue of the first part –written in 1972– the writer refers to his 37 years of contribution to the Greek education in Cyprus (1923-1960). Presenting his mission during those years, he states:

I considered the issue of the protection of Greek education in Cyprus as the main goal of my professional mission, because I believe that Greek education on the island was a very important factor for the national survival of its Greek population (p. xiii).

The Greek educational policy espoused by the author focused on the need for the Greek schools of Cyprus to persist as cultural centres of Greek ideals, and it was diametrically opposed to the colonial plans and efforts to change the political orientation of Cyprus, in order to safeguard the political interests of the British. The second

volume reveals the efforts to resist the alienation of the Greek character of the Cyprus educational system.

In the decade before the Independence, the author had the power to develop and defend educational policy by exercising his multiple roles as Headmaster, Advisor of the Cyprus Ethnarchy, Chairman of the Cyprus Greek Secondary School Teachers' Organisation, and President of the Organisation of the Greek Educators of the Secondary Education Community Schools. The chapter entitled 'The Educational Policy of the English Government in Cyprus (1878-1954)' is a critical chronological review (Vol. 2, Part 2, p. 119-158). In it, the author stresses the negative effects of the 1923 Law, which was described as a step for the subjection of elementary education to the government's control, and as an interference in Greek education that enacted the conflict between the rulers on the one hand and the Church and the people on the other. The conflict intensified with subsequent laws and especially the 1933 law that provided for the full control of elementary education by the British Director of Education.

The orientation of the Cyprus educational system during British rule had become the subject of great rivalry between the Greek educators and the colonial government. The correspondence exchanged between the author and the British Directors of Education, constitutes an important historical document highlighting the efforts to safeguard the national character of education and to resist the colonial policy. Government funding for schools was offered on the condition that the schools modify their programmes according to the government's instructions and recognise the rulers' control over teachers' qualifications, the subject matter of the curriculum, the textbooks, and the schools' operation in general. Since 1935, the conditions for funding had been implemented in elementary schools, resulting in the 'allegiance of the schools' to the Government, a situation that was not accepted when it came to secondary education, the bulwark against the government's plan to 'change the national character of secondary education schools'.

The 1957 memorandum of the Educational Council of the Cyprus Ethnarchy on the educational situation on the island, addressed to the United Nations Organization and UNESCO, aimed to shed light 'on the educational policy of the British Government, a policy dramatically opposed to the sentiments and wants of the Greek people of Cyprus' (Vol. 2, Part 1, p. 526).

The author highlights the risks Greek education encountered and acknowledges the intensification of efforts at the government's Office of Education to change the

Hellenic orientation of education, especially after 1935, and take full control of the elementary schools. He also argues that the government's changes in the curricula, the teaching methods, and teachers' education resulted in law achievements.

In a number of publications, the author points to the decline in the standards of elementary education and to graduates' 'poor results' in the secondary education entrance exams. In an article for the newspaper *Eleftheria*, dated 8.1.1946, he defended his dissent and contradicted the accusations against him by a number of elementary teachers:

The majority of the primary school students, when they come for the examination, do not know the alphabet or to write their names. [...] I am in the position to confirm that only 1/5 of the students coming for the examination are able to continue attending the Gymnasium without obstacles (Vol. 2, Part I, p. 430).

From 1936 onwards, the government stopped recognising graduates of the Greek Teachers' Training Schools and established the Teachers' Training Colleges attended by Greeks, Turks and other students, in the same classrooms with lectures in English. The encouragement of the Turkish minority, which constituted 17-18% of the population, to be actively involved and interested as an equal partner, hindered *Enosis* with Greece and preserved the interests of the British government in the area. British colonialism had long implemented the policy of introducing a third interested party in order to lessen the power of the principal opponent. In the above-mentioned memorandum, Spyridakis reports the differential treatment of the Turkish schools, which were supported by financial aid and the appointment of teachers from Turkey 'who propagate with fanaticism the slogan "Cyprus is Turkish"'.

During the first five years of the Independence, the author served as President of the Greek Communal Chamber and later as the first Minister of the Republic of Cyprus. During his service as the President of the Greek Communal Chamber, he pointed out the dividing provisions of the operation of the Chambers and the loose connection between the Greek and the Turkish one that enhanced the separatist economic and educational policy. He also commented on a report of the Council of Europe in 1963:

As long as the Turkish leaders are unwilling to abandon their separatist tendencies and continue to take advantage of the economic partition for political reasons, Cyprus will never, as Professor Heckscher remarks, achieve a satisfactory development programme (Vol. 2, Part 2, p. 470).

He also reported that the establishment of the Chambers was the result of the British intervention, which aimed, according to the British, to protect the Turkish minority from the Greek majority. The independence of the Chambers and their extended powers in financial matters and administration created 'a state within a state' that 'shatters the unity of the state and leads to financial separation between the Greek and Turkish communities' (p. 458).

The British principle of 'Divide and Rule' had been intensified in the colonial educational policy over the 30 years leading to the Independence, when the British Governor tried to distract the Greek Cypriot policy from union with Greece via measures aimed at controlling Greek-centered educational policy and upgrading the demands of the Turkish Cypriots.

The dividing seeds had been inserted in the foundation of the Republic of Cyprus, into the very fabric of its Constitution. In a number of interviews and publications, contained in Volume 3, Spyridakis accused the Turkish-Cypriot leaders of using the constitutional provisions 'not for the purpose of protecting their communal interests as a minority of only 18% of the population, but as a means to force the Greeks to yield to their demands by threatening to decide the future by partition of the island' (p. 408-409).

Publishing regularly in magazines and newspapers after the 1963 Turkish withdrawal, he explains why the constitution was 'unworkable' and why the submitted revisions of the Constitution by the President of the Republic, Archbishop Makarios, were both necessary and justified. He blamed the Turkish leaders once again for using the privileges of the Constitution for separatist purposes.

During his service as Minister of Education, Spyridakis' articles explicitly declared that the only final settlement of the Cyprus problem was *Enosis* with Greece after the withdrawal of the Turkish Cypriots from the government and that the President of the Republic of Cyprus and the Greek government both shared this policy. Despite the fact that the author unveiled the political plans of both the British and the Turkish leaders, as well as the dividing character of the Communal Chambers, he was not a politician. He was judged negatively for the declaration of *Enosis* after the 1963 Turkish Cypriots' withdrawal. The criticism was based on the argument that, as the most knowledgeable person on the British and Turkish efforts to prevent the union of Greece and Cyprus, he should not have returned, as Minister of Education, to the declaration of *Enosis*.

Epilogue

The three volumes under review constitute important documents, not only for the history of education, but also for the history of Cyprus, and the role of the British rulers in the dividing and unworkable character of the Constitution for the establishment of the Republic of Cyprus.

The reader should review the author's studies, lectures, speeches and articles taking into account the political and historical context of the era they were written, the last 37 years of the British rule and the ten years after the Independence. In this context, the volumes mirror the aspirations of the Greek Cypriots for *Enosis*, aspirations that remained an unfulfilled desire.

Spyridakis spared no effort to defend the Greek cultural heritage of Cyprus and to cultivate the national ideals in the Cyprus educational system, schools and society, maintaining a steady vision geared toward the ideal of *Enosis*. He used all the available means at his disposal, writing articles in newspapers and magazines, giving speeches in official and unofficial circles, creating memoranda and reports, issuing circulars at schools, and through his correspondence with the British rulers. He fought against the British policy and empowered students and teachers to remain committed to their Greek ideals and aspirations.

Reviewing the three volumes, my intention has not been to present or summarize their content, but to reveal the main argument and ideas that underlie the author's writing. It is obvious that the main idea of the author is that 'Cyprus is an integral part of the broader national space', with its national traditions having been maintained through the ages, and that it should continue cultivating the Greekness of its citizens. In 1963, in an article for *Cyprus Today*, which was republished in Vol. 2 (Part 2, p. 460), he refers to the publication 'Orientations', authored by Sir Ronald Storrs, the British Governor, in 1931, copying the following extract:

The Greekness of Cypriots is, in my opinion, indisputable. Nationalism is more, is other, is greater than pigmentations or cephalic indices. A man is of the race of which he passionately feels himself to be. No sensible person will deny that the Cypriots are Greek-speaking, Greek-thinking, Greek-feeling, Greek.

The above extract also reflects Spyridakis' beliefs, spread throughout his writings in the volumes *Studies, Lectures, Speeches, Articles* and communicated during his 47 years of service in the name of national ideals.

Mary Koutselini