

Left in Modern Cypriot History
[Η Αριστερά στη Σύγχρονη Κυπριακή Ιστορία:
Από την Ίδρυση του ΚΚΚ-ΑΚΕΛ μέχρι
την Έναρξη του Αγώνα της ΕΟΚΑ,
τ. Α΄, Β΄ Έκδοση (Βελτιωμένη)]

Giorgos Camelaris
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Από την Έναρξη του Αγώνα της ΕΟΚΑ
μέχρι και το Σχέδιο Ανάν, τ. Β΄]

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The two-volume book by Giorgos Camelaris is an ambitious endeavour that he hopes will be ‘a humble contribution’ to a systematic scientific analysis of the Left in Cyprus. The term ‘Left’ is reserved only for the *Κομμουνιστικό Κόμμα Κύπρου* (Cyprus Communist Party-KKK) and its successor *Ανορθωτικό Κόμμα Εργαζόμενου Λαού* (Progressive Party of the Working People-AKEL). Although very reluctant to accept this exclusivity on the term, I will use it in the present article as a means for the reader to follow the author’s thoughts and arguments. As noted in the book’s introduction, the scope of the author’s work is specific. It is to examine the extent to which the Left ‘has benefited or caused harm to Cyprus’ course and struggles for freedom’ and whether things would have been different had Cyprus’ leadership acted in unity for the common interest of the people. Thus, what is under scrutiny are the positions and policies of KKK and AKEL on the Cyprus Problem, significant aspects and major events that marked its long history.

The first volume, which covers the period from the first appearance of communist groups in Cyprus during the 1920s up to the start of the EOKA struggle against the British rule in 1955, is divided into eight chapters. It starts with the formation of

the first communist cells, the foundation of the Cyprus Communist Party, in August 1926, and the creation of AKEL, in April 1941. The presentation of the protagonists, the key features and ideological positions, and the main activities of the communist movement is completed with an overview of the situation in the conservative camp. The relations of the Greek Cypriots with Greece from the late 18th to the early 20th century, and the demand for *Enosis* (Union of Cyprus with Greece) are reviewed in the second chapter. The participation of Cypriots in the struggles of the Greek people, the revival of Cypriot hopes for union with Greece following the start of British rule, and the aborted offer by the British of *Enosis* in exchange for Greece's siding with the allies in WWI are described in detail. The communists' choice of independence, as a step to joining a project of Balkan Soviet Socialist Federation, anti-religious views, enmity with the Church and opposition to the mainstream demand for *Enosis*, are examined in Chapter 3. They are viewed as the starting point of a division among Greek Cypriots. The chapter that follows is about the popular uprising of October 1931, labelled *Oktovriana*. The initial negative stance of the KKK towards the events was not sufficient enough to be spared by the British, and the party was outlawed, with its leadership banned or expelled from the island. WWII was another issue where KKK was found to adopt contradictory positions, described in Chapter 5. From an 'indifferent' stance of the KKK for an 'imperialist' war, AKEL adopted a position to 'fight against fascism', and, in 1943, decided to have its cadres and members enlist in the army, to join the allied forces. Next come the end of the war and British offers for a constitution, instead of *Enosis*. Chapters 6 and 7 examine AKEL's new course, which was a solitary one, against the positions of the Church and the conservative forces; beyond the fact that it accepted the invitation to participate in the Consultative Assembly in 1947-48, it also set a new goal, self-government and independence. According to testimonies, there had been, within the party, thoughts about an armed struggle against the British. The aborted effort of the Consultative Assembly led the party to re-engage itself on the track of *Enosis* in stronger terms, under the slogan '*Enosis, only Enosis*'. This was also a period of internal conflicts and changes in leadership. The Chapter on the referendum for *Enosis*, organised by the Church on 15 January 1950, is presented as the only period of cooperation between the Left and the conservative forces, which the author labels throughout the book 'the *Enosist* front'. According to the author, the general view that the initial idea for a referendum belonged to AKEL is not correct, as this idea preexisted in the ranks of the Church and the conservative forces.

In his second volume, Giorgos Camelaris covers the period from the start of the EOKA struggle against the British rule, in 1955, to the vote for the Annan Plan, in 2004. Chapter 1, about the EOKA struggle and AKEL's absence from and opposition to it, is followed by another 12 chapters: The party was outlawed in December 1955 and its leadership held in custody. This did not constitute an obstacle to finding ways to remain active (Chapter 2) and take positions on developments, the constitutional proposals by Lord Radcliffe and the Macmillan Plan (Chapter 3). Representatives of the Left were also present with Makarios in London, in February 1959, and were among the few persons who disagreed with the signing of the London and Zürich agreements (Chapter 4). During the period until the declaration of Independence, AKEL, which was allowed to operate again, supported Yiannis Clerides, who opposed Makarios in the December 1959 presidential elections. Soon after, it had to settle for only five out of 35 seats in parliament (Chapter 5) and became a staunch Makarios supporter until his death in 1977. The party backed the President's attempt to amend the Constitution (the 13-point proposal) as a way of lifting obstacles to the smooth functioning of the State (Chapter 6), while it attributed the ensuing intercommunal conflict to problems inherent to the Constitution, 'a by-product of imperialism' (Chapter 7). Throughout the period that followed the signing of the agreements in London, AKEL sustained its support and voted for the parliament's resolution for *Enosis*, in June 1967, under the weight of threats and pressures against the Cypriot leadership from the Athens junta. It followed Makarios' shift to a 'feasible solution', i.e. independence, in January 1968 (Chapter 8). In the following chapters, the author examines the positions of AKEL towards aspects of a possible solution to the Cyprus Problem in the light of the invasion and occupation of part of the island by the Turkish Army; the issue of the return of displaced Greek Cypriots (Chapter 9), the acceptance of federation as the solution to the Problem (Chapter 10), bizonality as a feature of a federal solution (Chapter 11) and its presence in proposed settlement plans and ideas (Chapter 12). The last chapter of the book is on the Annan Plan, its main provisions, the rejection of the Plan by the late President Tassos Papadopoulos, and the so-called 'soft No' by AKEL, to 'consolidate the Yes' in the referendum.

No theoretical framework is presented by Giorgos Camelaris. His methodology mainly consists of confronting views and policies of AKEL with what the author considers as fundamental positions of the Greeks of Cyprus on the Cyprus Problem, aspects of it and notable historical events. He makes use of an impressive number of citations from a variety of sources and comments on them. The main sources of

these citations come from official AKEL documents, books, party activity accounts and other documents written by party officials; a wealth of press excerpts comes from newspapers published by the first communist groups, and the mouthpieces of KKK and AKEL. The majority of citations in the second volume come from the newspaper *Xapavyή* (Haravgi), founded in early 1956. In this respect, the narrative in parts of the second volume appears as a timeline of views and positions published in Haravgi. For earlier periods, mainly after the founding of AKEL, citations, mainly criticism, and critical views, come from books and documents that party officials at the time wrote after having been expelled from the party or after leaving it.

The main narrative of the author on the Cyprus Problem and notable events is that of mainstream groups and officials, mostly adopted or implied as *the* truth, the correct views and positions that all those involved should have adopted. This approach accommodates the Greek Cypriot writing of history by either presenting facts and their interpretation uncritically or keeping silent on others. For example, while adopting the Greek Cypriot version of events about the Christmas 1963 events and the breakout of violence under the term *Tourkantarsia* (Turkish rebellion), with a focus on Turkish Cypriot arming policies (which is a fact), Giorgos Camelaris did not present any critical account of Greek Cypriot plans to change fundamental provisions of the Constitution unilaterally. The main tool to this change-by-force, the Akritas Plan (and, consequently, the arming of Greek Cypriot paramilitary groups under the leadership of State officials) is labelled a defensive plan, ‘not aiming to extinguish Turkish Cypriots’. Not to mention that the escalation of tensions and the armed confrontation that erupted on Christmas 1963 had been preceded by activities and actions by both sides, both in every day politics and everyday life, with violent incidents at a citizen level.

With respect to the above example and the question of the Left’s positions and policies since the 1920s, the author’s major argument is a valid one; when dealing with the Cyprus Problem, KKK and AKEL adopted a course of political action and policies that lacked consistency, and, most importantly, were not convincing, either as supportive to mainstream policies or in deviating from them. I dare say, the Left’s major problem is not that it has not aligned them convincingly with the goals and means of action of the mainstream forces, the Church and the conservative front, but that KKK and AKEL failed to critically assess the situation, the broader environment in the region and the world, and to make genuine proposals and a plan of action of

their own. The absence of strategic planning is what Greek Cypriots have consistently been lacking, endlessly losing battles and ground.

Giorgos Camelaris has comprised a remarkable collection of citations by offering an overview of significant events and reviewing aspects of the Cyprus Problem that spread over a very long period of time. They are very useful as a source of knowledge, as well as a timeline of the evolution of the Cyprus Question. A critical reading of positions and policies of all sides, and, more importantly, contextualising them in the broader environment, not only that of narratives, would have greatly benefited the relevant literature. What was exactly the role of the broader environment and conditions (social, political, economic) that prevailed each time, how these affected Cyprus, what were the positions of other agents and what was the picture of political and other forces' dynamics affecting decisions and action of the protagonists?

As it is presented, the book provides a timeline and arguments that are useful to parties in their exchanges of blame. The long narrative and critical views about the Left would have gained in substance had it been an effort for synthesis and analysis. Such an effort would have greatly assisted the reader to have a deeper understanding of the Left and a critical appraisal of its policies, but also of the policies of Greek Cypriots, and of the substance of the Cyprus Problem as well.

Correction: The lift of the ban on AKEL took effect on 4 December 1959, not on 1 December. This has its own meaning, as this followed the submission of candidacies for the presidential election on the same day.

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