

## **Between Nation and Class: The Left and the Cyprus Issue, 1920-1974**

**[Μεταξύ Έθνους και Τάξης: Αριστερές και Κυπριακό, 1920-1974]**

**Nikos Christofis (ed.)**

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During the 20<sup>th</sup> century most books on history attempted to deal with the past by interpreting it. This methodological resurrection of history as an academic field was based on the theoretical grounds of empirical determinism, positivism, and, to put it more in essence, Marxism. On the contrary, the postmodern world invents the scholar that can be found outside of his observations or subjects of study, merely by renouncing the analytical and interpreting dynamic of science. This trajectory is responsible for the creation of articles and books full of inquiries and questions, but without clear standpoints and analytical theses. The collective volume *Between Nation and Class: The Left and the Cyprus Issue, 1920-1974* manages to incorporate these distinct and sometimes unconsciously silent approaches on how history should be written. The book attempts to start a debate within the left -but also engage in a dialogue with it- analysing its role on the Cyprus Issue. The significant contribution of this collective volume lies on the intriguing attempt for a comparative approach to the Cyprus Issue, both between its interaction with the mother countries, Greece and Turkey, but also within Cyprus itself, namely between the two dominant communities, the Greek Cypriot and the Turkish Cypriot.

Nikos Christofis, in his introductory chapter as an editor, tries to set the context of the volume by highlighting the essential deficiencies of past attempts; most of all, the acknowledgement of the Cyprus Issue, as justified by the clash between two hostile nationalisms –the Greek and the Turkish- in their Cypriot versions. To put it differently, he implies that we focus on this matter as if the Cyprus Issue had -and still has- nothing to do with the social and political dynamics that arose in the island; as if the only prism of understanding or even interpreting the issue lies on the dominant

national narratives that emerged in Greece and Turkey. Furthermore, in a second important add-on of this volume, Christofis exceeds the limitations of an historicism approach, by focusing on the greater scenery of connotations, meanings, ideologies, such as colonialism, imperialism, and nationalism. Some chapters of this volume acknowledge that the distinction, as well as the exact sketching of these terms for each and every period of study, are of essential importance in order to examine the wider perspectives of a changing world, that affects and shapes the mother countries and the parallel inner-Cyprus level. The volume studies the 1920-1970 era, with extensive reference on past events as a prerequisite for understanding changes in views, party choices and strategies on the Cyprus Issue. In this era, the fading of colonialism on a global scale provides to the forces of the left the opportunity to embrace nationalistic narratives -concealed under the goal of national emancipation. Moreover, the dominance of the greater forces that reflects the imperialist status quo, provides the left with the opportunity of rebaptizing, in terms of radicalism, anti-west views and, most of all, anti-capitalist rhetoric, that in some cases espouses internationalism.

Alexis Alekou approaches the Cyprus Issue as forever pending issue, but with significant differences through time. He focuses on the Greek Cypriot left -the two dominant parties, the KKK and AKEL- and the formation of their views in favour of the so called 'union' of Cyprus with Greece. At the same time, this union demand, espoused and articulated by the mainstream left Greek Cypriot parties, incorporates the relations with the Turkish community and forms of anticolonial movements. Alekou points out that the demand of unifying Cyprus with Greece initially emerged as an ideological standpoint of the Cypriot bourgeoisie, not only for national reasons, but also as an anti-communist alternative. The Cypriot Communist Party (KKK, founded in 1926) originally claimed for independence and the formation of a labour-rural democratic state, as part of a broader socialist Balkan republic. KKK evolved to another formation, AKEL, in 1941, and since its first days the newborn party adopted the 'union' stance and, in its 1945 4<sup>th</sup> convention, the party clearly supported 'Union with Greece, against colonialism and pro-labour demands'. Yet the most interesting contribution of this chapter pertains to the relations between KKK/AKEL and the Greek Communist Party (KKE), especially during the Greek Civil War, and the potential formation of a broader socialist republic. In this context, for the Cypriot left the union with a socialist Greece offered an even deeper ideological legitimation. But how did this demand remain untouched since the defeat of the communist forces in Greece? Alekou implies that the pro-union stance provided the Cypriot left with

an opportunity to initially survive and politically/electorally grow within the Greek Cypriot society. In other words, the left accepted and resonated a pro-union profile in order to achieve legitimation and political success, even if this stance provoked ideological inner conflicts.

Christofis and Cavit shed light on the Turkish minority of Cyprus and the problems that arose between the forces of the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot left. They imply that, while the union demand as expressed by the Greek Cypriot side acted as a separating factor, everyday life unified the political parties of the left. They elaborate on the time lag of the Turkish Cypriot side regarding getting in touch with the revolutionary left ideas and ideologies. In addition, this chapter provides evidences of a unified Greek and Turkish Cypriot agenda until the 1940s and the turn of AKEL towards accepting -by any means- the demand of union with Greece. This rupture caused severe conflicts between Greek and Turkish Cypriots within trade unions and provided a strong alibi to the Turkish political framework for substantial critique to the communist ideology, as a de facto enemy of their national identity. Finally, the chapter analyses the political developments after the foundation of the Republic of Cyprus and the official conceptualisation of the island as a multinational state.

Spyros Sakellaropoulos focuses on Greece and the views of the Greek Communist Party (SEKE and KKE) from 1918 to 1959. These views shifted over time due to international developments, as well as inner party changes. At first, since the aftermath of the First World War, socialist parties such as SEKE espoused the direction of self-determination and independence. Hence, during the 1919-1935 period the Greek left asserted that the Cypriots themselves, both Greek and Turkish, should decide for themselves. Yet the year 1935 appears to be a turning point for KKE in Greece. For the first time, union of Cyprus with Greece is conceived as acceptable solution, in the context of an anticolonial rebellion. Until the 1950s, KKE persisted on the union stance, especially when aligned with the potential of a socialist Greece. Sakellaropoulos then notes that KKE intensively criticised AKEL (1955-1959) for a sectarian and slack anticolonial struggle, tolerance and compromise regarding the Greek Cypriot bourgeoisie and strong ties with the Cypriot Orthodox Church, especially under Makarios' leadership.

Antonis Antoniou intends to correlate the Cyprus Issue with the anticolonial movements that emerged during the post War era. In this context, the left found itself at a crossroads between international reality, domestic political developments and opposing social dynamics. Since the end of the War, Antoniou asserts that the revo-

lutionary liberation movements that emerged or regrouped had shared a strong national identity as a base of their ideological formation. Even if marxists within these movements differentiated themselves from nationalists, their revolutionary agenda that was aiming towards a proletarian revolution accepted patriotism on the basis of independence. The Cyprus Issue proved to be an ideal opportunity for the Greek left to become familiar with the foreign policy agenda and, at the same time, cultivate anti-west views. This is to say that the acceptance of the union goal by KKE could be perceived as an anti-west and, above all, an anti-NATO stance.

Christofis focuses on the Turkish left and attempts to interpret how the dominant progressive views on the Cyprus Issue emerged and evolved. Hence, for the Turkish forces of the left, the issue was used in order to shake up or reinterpret the dominant ideologies, especially Kemalism. The island proved to be a safe place for the left, both Greek and Turkish, to develop nationally accepted views and, at the same time, views that were anticolonial and anti-imperialist. The Turkish left stemmed out of two distinct entities: the first one, known as a radical Kemalist stream, transpired by a radical nationalism, and the second one, organised under a Marxist party that was founded in 1961 (Workers Party of Turkey, TIP) by trade unionists. TIP was a reformist party in terms of believing in socialism via parliamentary democracy. Regarding the Cypriot issue, TIP resorted to Kemalism, combining nationalism, anti-imperialism and antifeudalism as the defining ideological frame. The party accepts an essential connection between nationalism and socialism. TIP expressed its theses on the Cyprus Issue after the December 1963 crisis, differentiating its narrative from the official Turkish standpoint. TIP accused the imperialist forces of the west of dragging Turkey into redemptive politics, whereas the Cypriot inhabitants were fully satisfied with the 1960s Constitution and the independence of the Republic of Cyprus. The party attained a clear anti-union view, aimed at the cessation of hostilities among Greek and Turkish Cypriots and, above all, spoke of a demilitarised federal state island over time. Similar to the case of the Greek left (SEKE-KKE-EDA), the Turkish left instrumented the Cyprus Issue in order to develop a form of 'good' nationalism and therefore expand its electoral influence. The question that remains unanswered is whether there is such thing as a radical or 'good' nationalism and, moreover, if this narrative fits into the context of the left. This inquiry, yet intrinsic and pivotal for Cyprus, needs an extension of the study time frame, as the 1974 invasion gave to this broader discourse a new dynamic.

Nikos Trimikliniotis, with an intriguing addendum, focuses on the contributions

of the book, pointing out that even if it concerns the past, specifically the era 1920-1974, it also refers to the present and future. In other words, by illuminating unknown perspectives of the history of the left in Greece, Turkey and Cyprus, the book sets an important dialectical cognitive understanding regarding the Cyprus Issue that exceeds the study's time frame. He supports that the independence of Cyprus works as a pivotal historical landmark with no return to the status quo ante. Yet, the same is true for the 1974 invasion and a future collective work with the same inner-dynamics (studying the triangle of the left forces) seems necessary. Trimikliniotis intends to describe the framework of social cleavages in Cyprus, implying that, apart from the vertical axis of social stratification -thus the class cleavage-, a horizontal clash between two indigenous and politically independent classes also emerged. Needless to say, social cleavage theory requires data and extensive analysis in order to set the content of cross-cutting divisions. Finally, he discusses the chapters of the book with a critical view on historicism, opting for a more analytical and methodological approach for interpreting purposes.

Overall, the collective volume *Between Nation and Class: The left and the Cyprus Issue, 1920-1974* constitutes a great contribution to the understanding of how the progressive forces in Greece, Turkey and Cyprus elaborated their political views regarding independence, union with Greece and wider anticolonial views and actions. Based more on historical analysis and less on the field of political science, the book provides interpretations and theoretical explanations. Regarding my view, a special chapter should be needed, designed for describing the forces of marginal-extreme left -Trotskyists, anarchists, Maoists- and their views on the Cyprus Issue. Once all mainstream left forces in Greece, Turkey and Cyprus utilised the Issue in order to develop a positive national-patriotic narrative and establish themselves in parliamentary terms, marginal left forces might have worked as forts of the genuine internationalist approach, condemning union demands or agendas that did not accept social class as superior to national identities. Finally, the end of the study prior to the 1974 Turkish invasion defines a period of tensions and historical fluctuations, but also promises a sequel that would shed light on the left after the most important event of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Cyprus.

Costis Pierides