

20.2.53.

REFERENCE FROM THE CYPRIOT BRANCH

(1) Report of Commission

1. A meeting of the Cypriot Branch Committee on January 4th referred certain questions to the District Committee. The District Secretariat appointed a Commission of George Bridges, Kay Beauchamp and John Mahon to prepare the question for the February D.P.C. meeting.

2. The Commission has examined the following documents:-
(a) Report of the meeting of 4th January; (b) Statement made by Cde. Doganis at this meeting; (c) Letter and statement dated 24th January from Cde. Joannides in reply to questions formulated by the Commission. The Commission also had a personal talk with Cde. Joannides.

3. We consider that the report of the meeting of January 4th raises two questions. One was the political attitude of Cde. Joannides, a leading member of the Branch and editor of the paper "Vema", to his Party responsibilities. The second was in connection with collective responsibility in various spheres of Cypriot work, including the Press.

We consider that the second issue is for the Cypriot Branch leadership to handle, and that the District Committee is not called upon to discuss it. We confine our report to the position of Cde. Joannides.

4. At the Cypriot Branch January meeting there was criticism of Cde. Joannides on a number of issues, including his failure to develop collective work and close association with the Cypriot comrades in London, his attitude to the leadership and policy of the Party in Cyprus, and his attitude as Editor of "Vema" in regard to publishing news and comment concerning the recent expulsions from the Party in Cyprus.

5. We take the view that the controversy is brought to a head on the question of the way in which "Vema", under the editorship of Cde. Joannides, handled the question of the expulsions from the Cypriot Party. This is the most serious question raised, and the one on which definite evidence in the form of the printed issues of "Vema" is available.

6. Recently the Executive Committee of the Party in Cyprus expelled a number of people occupying leading posts who opposed the policy of unity with Greece without conditions, and later were revealed as agents of British imperialism. The reasons for the expulsion and the concrete charges against the expelled were given in full in the documents of the Cyprus Party. This matter aroused great interest in public opinion in Cyprus and in the Cypriot community in London. The enemies of the Party developed an all-out campaign against the Party.

There can be no question that in such a situation it was an urgent political necessity that "Vema" carried not only the news of the expulsions but a full explanation, that it should give full publicity to the decisions of the Party in Cyprus, that it should become an organiser of the whole fight against the attempts of British imperialism to confuse and disrupt the ranks of the Cypriot movement.

How did "Vema" deal with this situation?

7. There appeared in "Vema" on 6th September a small news item, the material having been given to Cde. Joannides too late for a larger treatment. Not a single word appeared in the issue of 13th September. In that of 20th September Cde. Joannides wrote a short item, general, unsigned, and not mentioning the concrete charges against the expelled. "Vema" was completely silent on the matter in the issues of September 27th and October 4th. Only after Cde. Pefkos had raised the matter at the Branch Committee and written a detailed account of the expulsions did "Vema", on October 11th, give its readers the facts.

In his statement Cde. Joannides does not dispute this record of fact.

We can only characterise this situation in the following manner - that at a moment when our brother Party in Cyprus was carrying through a political operation of exceptional importance, when it was fighting to carry through decisions which had been approved by the Greek and British Parties, and when it was entitled to expect that "Vema" should lead the fight for these decisions against the efforts of the enemy to spread confusion, "Vema" completely failed to do its duty - in fact for several weeks "Vema" added to the confusion. This was a grave disservice to the Party and a service to the class enemy. This situation was not corrected by Cde. Joannides, but only by the intervention of Cde. Pefkos.

For this situation Cde. Joannides, as the editor of the paper and a responsible leading Communist, must bear full responsibility.

8. The question must be asked - "How was it possible for a comrade of the long-standing Party membership, varied experience and personal ability of Cde. Joannides to bring about such an impermissible situation?"

This question is not clearly answered by Cde. Joannides, who while admitting the facts, and denying that he was motivated by political sympathy with the expelled, fails to give any other explanation. A clear explanation is necessary, and the District Committee should demand it in the interests both of the Party and of Cde. Joannides' future as a Communist.

9. We must draw attention to certain facts which are relevant:

(a) For a considerable period Cde. Joannides had developed an isolation from other comrades, expressed in failure to organise collective work in the normal Communist manner. Instead of personally leading the fight to establish an Editorial Committee, he permitted this decision to be completely lost. He concentrated in his own hands all the responsible work in connection with the paper, writing the great majority of the material himself for a long period.

(b) There are a number of indications, such as lack of sufficient interest in the political use of the press and the failure to fully associate with the Cypriot groups and to use his undoubted abilities to develop new comrades, that he had lost political keenness and was working in a routine and formal manner.

Cde. Joannides pleads over-work and health difficulties leading to exhaustion and political staleness, but he does not explain why he did not raise this matter with the other comrades and with the District Committee.

(c) From Cde. Joannides' own statement of his relations with the leadership of the Party in Cyprus, it is clear that there were at least reservations instead of the full political support and comradesly and collective work which should have existed, yet again Cde. Joannides did not raise this question with the Party.

It is for Cde. Joannides to look back for the origin and development of these weaknesses and to ask himself whether he has not worked in an individualist and petit bourgeois manner rather than in the way a responsible comrade should work, and has therefore allowed his political work to degenerate, to the advantage of the enemy.

10. The fact that such an unsatisfactory situation was permitted to exist for so long with leading responsibilities in the hands of one comrade without any effective control by the leadership is one on which the Cypriot Branch must exercise serious self-criticism.

11. Members of the Cypriot Branch have raised the question as to whether Cde. Joannides has been motivated by political sympathy and has had any personal connections with the expelled. Cde. Joannides categorically denies the allegation of political sympathy, and states his unswerving agreement with the policy of union of Greece without reservations. He claims that his contact with the expelled was limited to normal incidents of Party Life in 1950 and 1951 and that since the expulsion in 1952 he has had no connection with them. He declares that certain people spread the rumour that he is an agent of British imperialism and demands the right to defend himself against this accusation. There is not evidence before us which would warrant us making any statement on these points.

12. We therefore recommend to the District Committee the adoption of the following decision and its communication to the Cypriot Branch leadership and to Cde. Joannides:-

(1) Having examined the treatment by "Vema" of the issue of the expulsion by our Party in Cyprus of a group of a fractional character which opposed the Party policy and has been revealed as an agency of British imperialism, we consider that the attitude of "Vema" from the 4th September up to 11th October was completely impermissible, failed to fight for the line of the Party, and helped the enemy in his attack on the Party.

(2) That Cde. Joannides bears the political responsibility for this very serious situation.

(3) That it is necessary to remove Cde. Joannides from all responsible positions in connection with and arising from the work of the Cypriot Branch and to inform the Party in Cyprus accordingly.

(4) Taking into account the long record of service to the Party and to the Cypriot people which Cde. Joannides has, the District Committee decides to limit its organisational measure to that of removal from responsible positions and severe censure, at the same time frankly warning Cde. Joannides that his whole future development as a Communist and a fighter for the Cypriot people requires self-criticism of the most serious character.

(5) That as these decisions mean the removal of Cde. Joannides from full time work for the Party, the District Committee will interest itself in the question of Cde. Joannides' future employment and livelihood and in the re-establishment of his health.

(6) The District Committee requests Cde. Joannides, as a matter of urgency, to make a statement explaining why from September 4th to October 11th he did not adequately deal with the expulsion issue in "Vema", and, when he has been able to settle his economic and personal questions, to submit as soon as possible, a further statement and to make proposals for working in some field for the Party in which he can demonstrate his determination and ability to correct the weaknesses he has shown.

(2) Letter from Cde. E. Joannides.

19.2.53.

Dear Cde. Mahon,

I have received the draft proposals of the Commission for which I thank you. As I expected different conclusions and I was under the impression that the opinions of other comrades were to be sought, your decisions came to me quite as a shock. I only hope that the future will straighten out this tangle and will reveal that I have acted always faithfully and loyally as a Party member and have scrupulously carried out decisions.

Perhaps, at this stage, you will allow me to correct one or two minor inaccuracies contained in the Draft and make a statement re the treatment of the expulsions in "Vema".

A. Re the meeting of the 4th January. Of the 16 comrades who spoke seven criticised me, one condemned the entire leadership and three made general criticisms and suggestions.

B. On page 3, the draft states, that I claim that my relations with those expelled were the normal relations before their expulsion and that since then I had no connection with them. As, this might give the impression that I was in contact with them I want to correct it.

Two of them - Adamantos and Nouris - I met for the first time in 1950 in England, the first when we served on the Peoples National Delegation, and the second when he came here to complete his studies. I met them in Cyprus in 1951, fifteen months before the expulsions - Adamantos in Famagusta and Nouris one evening when we had a meal together along with Cde. Papeioannou, his wife Cacoyiannis and his wife.

Servan, I met twice in London when he came here on delegations and saw him briefly in Cyprus in 1951 in the Party offices. Cacoyiannis I now quite well as he studied here, he was the secretary of our students organisation and a member of our Committee. I saw him twice in Cyprus in 1951, - once as mentioned above - and another time when he and his wife invited me to lunch. I had two letters from him since he returned to Cyprus in 1950 - I have enclosed them with my report - the second which came to me by hand via Cde. Pefkos, was dated February last year, six months before the expulsions, which I did not answer.

This is the contact I had with them.

With regard to the expulsions and their treatment in "Vema", I have thought the matter over very deeply. Here I want to say unreservedly, that in the light of subsequent developments the treatment in "Vema" was wrong, that I ought to have come out sharply immediately against those expelled and that consequently I bear the responsibility for that mistake. The reasons for the treatment were the following:-

a) As I stated in my report, basing ourselves on the decision approved by the International Committee we treated "Vema" not strictly as Party organ but as the broad patriotic organ of our community here, and very rarely dealt in it with inner Party questions. (As an example of how we viewed "Vema" I mention the fact that last November when we called a meeting to elect a delegate to the Vienna Congress, we called it under the auspices of "Vema" instead of the co-ordinating committee, in order to have wider appeal).

b) Following the guidance provided on similar issues by the Daily Worker, questions of that character were briefly mentioned in "Vema" and the Party issues involved were discussed in the groups. This is the policy we have pursued over a number of years.

c) From the report of the AKEL Congress given to us by Cde. Kerrigan we knew that an opposition fraction existed in AKEL and we naturally concluded that its expulsion would be inevitable. But whether there were serious political differences underlying that opposition - differences over the Party line - personally I was not clear about.

d) Reading the decisions of the AKEL C.C. re the expulsions I gathered the impression that those expelled were primarily accused of opportunism and of fractional activities against the Party leadership. Consequently I dealt with them in that way and wrote the comments from that angle.

e) That in no way was I intending to restrict publicity re the expulsions can be borne by the fact that when Cde. Pefkos phoned me to say that he had written an article about them I asked him to let me have it for immediate publication. He suggested, however, that it would be better if the article were read and approved by the co-ordinating committee as in that case it would be an official Party document and carry more weight. The article was read, approved and published in the name of the committee.

This of course does not excuse my failure to see clearly the political issues underlying the expulsions - instead of seeing them as an organisational measure - and deal with them accordingly. I happened at the time too, to be working on the translation and the proofs of "The British Road to Socialism" and to be involved in a lot of reading concerning the question of the Neguib dictatorship in Egypt over which there was disagreement on "the Middle East Committee" and that is an added reason I did not find time to delve more deeply with the above.

I reiterate that I never had and could not have had any sympathy with those expelled, that I have always supported our Party in Cyprus, that I stood always by the side of the Cypriots in their struggle for national freedom and economic advance and never failed as far as I could, as a Party member and Secretary of the Committee for Cyprus Affairs, to do my duty towards the Cyprus people.

I also want to say that I have always carried out our decisions faithfully, always strove to promote collective work and assist comrades in their development and whatever shortcomings may have appeared they were not due to lack of intention on my part but simply to physical factors and occasionally to the lack of co-operation by other leading comrades. I am sorry that I did not mention the difficulties I was faced with to the Party, but simply I find it exceedingly difficult to complain or plea - it is of course a mistake.

In conclusion comrades I say that though I feel in myself convinced that I have always worked loyally and to the maximum of my capacity as a Party member and I hope that eventually the whole of this situation will be clarified and rectified, I want to declare here that whatever the final Party decisions may be, they will be accepted by me and that whatever happens nothing can shake my faith in, or loyalty to the Party.

Yours fraternally,

E. Joannides.

P.S. As I feel really under terrific strain and thoroughly fatigued I would like to be given, if possible, two or three months rest from political work to rest, particularly mentally. I have been granted 4 weeks leave ending on February 21st. I want to say here that I got paid for one week (while I was ill in bed with 'flu) and am voluntarily foregoing the rest of the money as I have managed to do an odd job. Also that I have succeeded to secure employment for the immediate future and the Party should not feel any responsibility on that score. Once I have rested and feel fit again, I will submit to you the further statement asked for with proposals re my future work.

E.J.