

Articles

The Politics of the Cypriot Left in the Inter-War Period,**1918-1940****Yiorghos Leventis
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The principal objective of this article is to explore the origins of the Communist Party of Cyprus (Κομμουνιστικ Κόμμα Κύπρου-ΚΚΚ) and forerunner of the Progressive Party of the Working People (Ανορθώτικό Κόμμα Εργαζομένου —ΑΚΕΛ), to account for the shifts in its policy regarding the Cypriot national question. A secondary objective is to consider the way in which the British administration on the island reacted to the emergence of communism as a factor in local politics. To these ends, the article begins by tracing the ΚΚΚ's first hesitant steps into the local political arena, which had been dominated by the higher Greek Orthodox clergy and other enosist politicians. It also discusses the inability of the ΚΚΚ to achieve an organisation on an island-wide basis and explains the dramatic shifts in its policy.

Origins of the communist movement in Cyprus

The victory of the Russian Bolsheviks in 1917 inspired the emergence of communist parties across much of the world. Cyprus, which had been annexed by the United Kingdom in 1914 and became a British Crown Colony in 1925, was not immune to this trend. The dire economic and social conditions prevailing on the island in 1920s were conducive to the emergence and development of Marxist circles. As Χαραυγή (Haravghi) newspaper, the mouthpiece of ΑΚΕΛ, recalled in a commemorative issue published in 1966:

... living standards were low, poverty was widespread, and education was poor. Peasant sons were leaving the farms to seek work in the cities, only to find frustration. Wages for a twelve-to fourteen-hour work day amounted to one or two shillings, and one shilling could buy only two and a half okes of bread at the time. In the government printing office, children were working nine and a half hours a day, with a mandatory night shift, six days a week, for four to eight shillings. The mines were owned primarily by British and Canadian capital and the best workers received two and a half shillings for a twelve hour day. Through extraterritorial rights granted by the British government, these companies maintained virtual 'states within a state' and had complete control over all their employees.²

The driving force behind the emergence of communism in Cyprus was Dr Nikolas Othon Yiavopoulos. Though born in Limassol in 1898, he was a Greek citizen by virtue of the nationality of his parents. Yiavopoulos studied medicine in Athens (1919-24). During

¹ See also 'A Note on Methodology' at the end of the article.

² Quoted in T.W. Adams, ΑΚΕΛ: *The Communist Party of Cyprus* (Stanford University, California: Hoover Institution Press, 1971), p.12.

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this period, he was clearly impressed by the Marxist doctrine and became a member of the KKE (Κομμουνιστικό Κόμμα Ελλάδος — *Communist Party of Greece*). Returning to Cyprus in 1924, Yiavopoulos opened a medical practice as a venereologist in his home town of Limassol and founded the 'Labourers' Club' which soon metamorphosed into a nucleus of agitation directed by newly-converted Cypriot Marxists. Shortly thereafter, the Limassol Labour Centre started to receive communist literature free of charge from Greece and other places while Yiavopoulos exchanged correspondence with communists in Athens and Moscow. These contacts apparently helped him and his associates to shape their outlook on Cypriot politics during their formative years.³ However, the colonial authorities deported Yiavopoulos in July 1925,⁴ his followers continued his work.

T. W. Adams recites that the pioneers of the early Cypriot Marxist movement were 'three restless young men': Christodoulos Christodoulides, a bank employee, Leonidas Stringos, a retail clerk; and Demetrios Chrisostomides, an accountant and journalist. Based in Limassol, they were avid students of Marxist literature which was being sent from Greece since 1921. They soon initiated an eclectic group which, within a year, mustered some thirty men and women including the following: Yiannis Papaggelou (Letkis), a mail line company employee; Aimilios Hourmousios, an aspiring journalist and author; Kostas Christodoulou, a carpenter, nicknamed Skeleas (courtesy of his long legs) and a brother of Christodoulos Christodoulou; Christos Savvides, a merchant tailor, brother of the later General Secretary of AKEA Ploutis Servas⁵ who was, also present, and Charalambos Solomonides, a barber.⁶ In addition to initiating this group, an early achievement of the three pioneers was the publication of the island's first communist newspaper Πνρσος (Pyrsos). This newspaper was scathing in its systematic criticism of the colonial administration which it held responsible for the plight of the people of Cyprus.⁷

Significantly, Πνρσος also provided the predecessor of the Communist Party, the Κυπριακός Εργατικό Κόμμα (Cypriot Labour Party), with a platform from which it could articulate its views and communicate with like-minded Cypriots. The first edition of Πνρσος which became its mouthpiece, came out on 6/19 December 1922. The primary task propagated by Πνρσος was the political organisation of the labouring and peasant classes.

³ Cyprus Government, *Communism in Cyprus* (pamphlet, 15pp.) (Nicosia: Government Printing Office, 1955), p.3. The document was prepared by the Cyprus Intelligence Committee: CIC (55) - TEN (Final), 3 August 1955. It can be found in the U.K. at the: i) PRO (Public Record Office): CO 926/526 ii) Royal Commonwealth Society's Library, University Library Cambridge iii) British Library of Political and Economic Science. Quoted also in T.W. Adams, 1971, op.cit., In note 1, p.13 and Fifis Ioannou: 'Έτσι Αρχισε το Κυπριακό (in the footprints of a decade 1940-1950: This is How the Cyprus Problem Started); Instalment 1 (136 in total). Απογευματινή (Apoyevmatini) 26 March 1976. The late Fifis Ioannou; General Secretary of AKEA in 1945-49, called Adams 'one of the worst falsifiers of modern Cypriot political'. Nevertheless he quoted him regarding Yiavopoulos' activities.

⁴ PRO: CO 537/701: R. Popham Lobb, Officer Administering the 'Government, to Leo Amery, Secretary of State for the Colonies, 3 November 1926, p.1. Governor's secret dispatch dated 11.6.1925 and Secretary of State's 2.7.1925.

⁵ Born in Limassol in 1907. Ploutis Servas represented the youth in the first congress of the KKK (1926) being the founder and first general secretary of the Μαθητική Κομμουνιστική Νεολαία Γυμνασίου (High-School Students' Communist Youth Group) 1924-6. He was elected to the three-member secretariat of the KKK's central committee and contributed articles to *Νεός Ανθρωπος* (Neos Anthropos) (1926-29). He left for Greece in 1929 and from there went to Moscow where he was the first Cypriot who studied Economic and Social Studies at the Soviet Communist Party's, 'University for Western Ethnic Minorities'. On his return to Greece he was deported by the Greek government in September 1935 (Source: personal interviews conducted in 1995).

⁶ Achilleas Lymourides, 'Η Πορεία του Εργατικού Κινήματος στην Κύπρο' (The Course of the Labour Movement in Cyprus), *Ο Φιλέλεφθερος* (O Phileleftheros), 6 August 1996.

⁷ See T.W. Adams, 1971, op.cit., in note 2, p.12.

Indeed, the editor of the newspaper, Panos Fasouliotis, coined the party's slogan 'Cypriot peasants and workers unite', which he featured as the subtitle on the front page. In fact, in his first editorial, Fasouliotis put forward the idea of developing a party organised along the lines of the British Labour Party to which he believed the Cypriot party should be organically linked. He wrote:

Δια να εχιτυχωμεν του ακοπου μας, θ' ακολουθηαονμε πιατα τα διεθνη Σοσιαλιατικα προλγραμματα και ιδιως του Αγγλικου εργατικου Κομματος εις το οποιον το ιδικου μας κσμμα υπαγεται...

(In order to achieve our aim, we will follow faithfully the international Socialist programmes and in particular [the one of] the English labour Party to which our party is answerable to ...)⁸

In 1923, the party continued its search for an identity and an orientation and therefore changed its name twice. In June it recast itself as Κνπριακσ Εργατικσ και Αγροτικς Κσμμα (Cypriot Labour and Agricultural Party) and in November, it settled on the name Communist, and became commonly known as KKK. By the summer of 1924, Fasouliotis disappeared from the political scene, although it is unclear whether he voluntarily abandoned the initial group or he was expelled. Consequently, his newspaper, Πυρσδς, ceased to be the organ of the party and folded.⁹ However, Minos Perdios gives the following explanation as to the demise of both the newspaper and its editor:

Πυρσδς the newspaper of the KKK became the first victim of joint attacks against the party and the Limassol labour Centre. It was sued for libel and its editor sentenced to three months imprisonment and fined.

During the trial, P. Fasouliotis denounced his ideology. KKK considered his statement a betrayal and publicly disavowed him and suspended the publication of Πυρσδς.¹⁰

The formation of the first ever British Labour government under Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald in January 1924 generated a degree of optimism within Cypriot leftist circles. For example, Chrisostomides sent a 'message of greetings to the British Labour Party' in the hope that its new government would improve living conditions in Cyprus. As was to happen many times in the future, Cypriot expectations that a Labour government would treat them more favourably were left unfulfilled. In 1924, the government of R. MacDonald was politically weak, short lived and unable to pay any attention to Cyprus. Indeed, it fell in October and, following a general election, it was replaced by a Conservative government led by Stanley Baldwin. Disappointed by what it considered to be the inaction of the Labour government, the nascent leftist movement acquired a more radical form.¹¹ With respect to the Cypriot communists' expectations that the British working class movement would come to their assistance, the unpublished official party history criticised the early communists for 'overrating the role of the British proletariat in the struggle to liberate Cyprus.'¹²

Another newspaper entitled Νεος Ανθρωπος (Neos Anthropos) appeared on 1

⁸ Πυρσδς (Pyrsos), 6/19 December 1922, front page editorial.

⁹ Ibid. See also Ιστορια ΠΣΕ-ΠΕΟ 1941-1991 (History of PSE-PEO 1941-1991) (Nicosia: ΠΕΟ, 1991), p.19.

¹⁰ See Δοκιμιο του ΚΚΚ και του ΑΚΕΛ (Essay on History of ΚΚΚ-ΑΚΕΛ), Part I, p.24. This is an unpublished document in three parts, 340 typescript pages. It was written by Minos Perdios, an ΑΚΕΛ Central Committee member, under the former's instructions. It was discussed in this body in 1968 but no decision was taken at the time nor at any subsequent stage to publish it. I am grateful to Yiannalds Kolokassides, currently member of the party's Central Committee for granting me access to this material.

¹¹ See T.W. Adams, 1971, op.cit., in note 2, p.12

¹² See Δοκιμιο Ιστοριας του ΑΚΕΛ, op.cit., In note 10, Part I, p. 44.

January 1925. It immediately declared itself to be the fortnightly 'Organ of the Labourer, Peasant and Poor Bread-winners'; 'under the political control of the Communist Party of Cyprus'.¹³ Driven by the Marxist doctrine of internationalism, the paper declared that its first concern was the eradication of any racial hatred among the natives of the island and:

... to educate the masses that the people are not any more separated into Greeks and Turks eliminating each other for the sake of the grandeur of their respective motherlands, but into poor and plutocrats; we will be the champions of love and union between all the poor for the collective pursuance of their interests.¹⁴

Νεος Ανθρωπος pledged to work 'always within the bounds of the laws in force' for the organisational unity of the peasant and labour unions under the leadership of the Communist Party and for the introduction of civil liberties. However, peasant destitution was the most immediate problem during the 1920s. Given that peasants constituted more than seventy per cent of the island's population, considerable emphasis was given to building a common front between the island's poor Greeks and poor Turks. The KKK engaged in a systematic effort to organise the peasants into unions.¹⁵ During the first half of 1925 those peasants who had been recently dispossessed of their lands by money lenders formed three unions in the villages of Yermasoyia, Kilani and Episkopi. These Limassol district peasant unions were to become the agricultural satellites of the town's 'Labour Club'.¹⁶

As to the question of the political future of the island, the communist newspaper stated the KKK's conviction that happiness comes along with the true liberty of the land. Thus it pledged to stand against 'each flag-waving jingoist petty politician' and work for the independence of Cyprus under a worker-peasant government with full civil liberties guaranteed, detached from any outside influence or patronage.¹⁷

In its formative months, Νεος Ανθρωπος was faced with a number of libel proceedings and, on several occasions, court orders were issued to suspend its publication. More severely, in 1926, Charalambos Solomonides, its editor, was sentenced to two months' imprisonment following a private action brought against him for libel. Although the Cyprus government denied any involvement in the private action,¹⁸ it is a measure of the austerity of the British legal system on the island and the harshness of its political climate that an individual could be imprisoned for libel.

As has already been noted, Nikolas Yiavopoulos was deported in July 1925. The court cases of 1926 compounded the problems which were confronting the communist movement by this time. It is of no surprise therefore that the first pancyprian meeting of the KKK, held in Limassol on 20-21 August 1926, instructed the central committee to lodge a formal protest against what it regarded as the severe measures directed against the handful of pioneer communists. Accordingly, Kostas Skeleas, the Secretary to the Central Committee, wrote to the Governor, Sir Malcolm Stevenson. In his letter, dated 19 October 1926, Skeleas enclosed the resolution of protest passed by the party delegates two

¹³ Νεος Ανθρωπος, 1 January 1925, front page. T.W. Adams, 1971, op.cit., in note 2, p.13, associates the newspaper with Yiavopoulos and his son-in-law Vassos Vassiliou. This claim does not seem to be true. On the second page of the first issue of Νεος Ανθρωπος it is explicitly stated that the responsible editor was Charalambos Solomonides. Also the front subtitle stated: Γρῶσφεται ἀχς Συναχτικῆ Εχίτριχη (Edited by an Editorial Committee). See the discussion on action against the newspaper's editor further on.

¹⁴ Νεος Ανθρωπος, 1 January 1925, front page editorial.

¹⁵ See Δοκίμιο Ιστορίας του ΚΚΚ και του ΑΚΕΛ, op.cit., In note 10, Part I, pp.33-34.

¹⁶ See Communism In Cyprus, op.cit. in note 3, p.3.

¹⁷ Νεος Ανθρωπος, 1 January 1925, front page editorial.

¹⁸ PRO: CO 537/701: op.cit., in note 4.

months earlier. The resolution asserted that ‘the excessive zeal of certain local organs in Limassol renders these measures entirely rude and offensive towards the personal liberty of our party and its organs.’ Furthermore, a clarification was sought whether such a hostile attitude was due to a local initiative or whether it was in pursuance of a declared Colonial Office policy. Finally, Skeleas referred to his appeal to all the fraternal parties of the world and in particular to the British Labour party to give publicity to the Cypriot communist cause.¹⁹

For its part, the colonial administration was unrepentant. R. P. Lobb, the officer administering the government of Cyprus, informed Leo Amery, the Conservative Secretary of State for the Colonies, in November 1926, that he was only too pleased to curb the growth of the leftist movement. While denying any involvement in the conviction of Solomonides, Lobb told Amery that:

It is no doubt true that the communist movement in Cyprus received a set back as a result of the two events... and it seems that the close and continuous watch exercised by the Government over all persons suspected of designs dangerous to peace and good order has shaken the confidence both of the leading communists and their few serious adherents. I am glad to report that so far the movement has met with but little response from the labouring class and it has aroused outspoken opposition in other sections of the community.²⁰

Although the deportation of Yiavopoulos to Greece was a blow to the communist movement, his eighteen month spell at its forefront was especially fruitful. Through the establishment of the Limassol Labour Centre, he had laid the foundations of the island’s first class-conscious trade unions and nurtured their early development. A year after his deportation, Νεος Ανθρωπος paid an eloquent tribute to the energy and conscientiousness of Yiavopoulos and his contribution to the communist cause. More recently, Minos Perdios has described him as ‘the inspiration and soul of the first class-oriented trade unions’.²¹

On the other hand the traditional and entrenched ‘nationally-minded’ sections of society welcomed the colonial administration’s endeavour to clamp down on the spread of communism. For example, the local conservative paper Αληθεια (Alitheia) commented upon the deportation of Yiavopoulos (10 July 1925) as follows:

We do not hesitate to announce that we absolutely approve of the decision taken in spite of the repressive nature of the measure ... [It is] with the same feeling moreover that the entire sane [sic] social organisation of the town viewed this decision ... [T]hey saw with satisfaction a rotten and sickly member being cut with these thoughts shared by ninety per cent of the citizenship we find the austere government measure justified, a measure of last resort, and we hope that this vigilance shall continue for every manifestation of the communist ideology that may come in the future because it is likely that new reformers may appear tomorrow, jealous of the doubtful kudos of the justly deported Comrade.²²

The First KKK Congress (August 1926): The Cyprus-Soviet Republic Project

Notwithstanding the deportation of Yiavopoulos in 1925 and the British perception

¹⁹ Ibid., enclosure: Communist Party of Cyprus: Protest, Limassol, 19 October 1926. A Colonial Office official noted ironically: I notice that these people cheaply identify the English ‘Labour Party’ with Communists. (16/11/1926).

²⁰ See PRO: CO 537/701, op.cit., in note 4.

²¹ See Δοκίμιο Ιστορίας του ΚΚΚ και του ΑΚΕΛ, op.cit, in note 10, Part 1, p.26

²² Ibid, p.27

that they were subversives, Cypriot communists continued to operate in defiance of police surveillance and a year later, as already mentioned, the Communist party managed to organise its founding congress in Limassol. The KKK held its first Pancyprian Congress in the strictest possible secrecy in the midst of a public holiday in August 1926. In this way, the delegates in Limassol appear to have escaped the attention of the police. The man assigned the task of organising this first congress was a Cypriot member of the Central Committee of the KKE (Greek Communist Party). Charalambos Vatiliotis, an educated multilingual and enlightened man with rich international communist activity arrived from Athens for this purpose.²³ Shortly thereafter, he submitted for approval his proposals on organisational matters.²⁴ *Νεος Ανθρωπος* published the resolutions in its issue of 18 September 1926, confirming under the slogan 'Proletarians of all the world unite', that it was the official organ of the KKK.

The congress published a manifesto that dealt with socio-economic issues which were linked with the national problem. The most pressing question related to the destitute peasants. Apart from the extensive church-owned lands, the Cypriot countryside was made up of an extensive patchwork of small-holdings. The poor peasants were 'preyed upon' by some usurers (money-lenders) who expropriated them from their mini-plots of land. The communists argued that the final and satisfactory solution of the peasant question could only be achieved through the island's independence. Having said that, the Cypriot communist manifesto stressed the need for an intermediate struggle to alleviate the agricultural crisis, which had repercussions on other sectors of the economy. Thus, it railed against those it called petty politicians (πολιτικόντηδες) who continued to 'harp on the string of enosis' without addressing the problem of increasing poverty experienced by peasants and workers. The congress called on all workers and peasants to join the ranks of the party in order to exact some concessions as a first step and subsequently to fight for the long term goal of independence. It emphasised that this could be achieved only through an intensive struggle under the leadership of the KKK. The manifesto concluded by providing a list of primarily economic demands designed to improve the living conditions of the peasant and worker masses. Nevertheless, the main item called for the grant of extensive self-administration (αυτοδιοικησις) under an accountable government elected by universal suffrage.²⁵

The first congress also adopted the party's constitution. The Articles of Association declared the KKK's aims as follows:

- a) The struggle for the organisation and the economic improvement of the circumstances of the classes fettered by the present day capitalists of Cyprus.
- b) The struggle for the political independence of Cyprus from the imperialistic yoke of the United British [sic] Kingdom.
- c) The development in Cyprus of the international solidarity of the labour movement and the unification of the struggle of the labourers and peasants of Cyprus with that of their colleagues in other countries.²⁶

However, the handwritten version in Greek kept at the State Archive, Lefkosia (Nicosia), has four articles as follows:

²³ For a brief biographical note see Aristeidis L. Koudounaris, *Βιογραφικόν Λεξικόν Κυπρίων 1800/1920* (Biographical Dictionary of Cypriots 1800-1920), (Nicosia, 1995), p.36.

²⁴ See *Δοκίμιο Ιστορίας του ΚΚΚ και του ΑΚΕΛ*, op.cit., in note 10, Part I, p.29.

²⁵ For a comprehensive exposition of the positions adopted at the first congress see *ibid.* pp.29-44.

²⁶ See *Communism In Cyprus*, op.cit., in note 3, pp.3-4.

α)

α) Ο αγώνας για την οργάνωση και την οικονομική καλλιτέρευση της θέσης των καταπιεζομένων τάξεων (εργατών και αγροτών) της σημερινής καπιταλιστικής κοινωνίας στην Κύπρο.

β) Ο αγώνας για την πολιτική ανεξαρτησία της Κύπρου από τον ιμπεριαλιστικό ζυγό του ενωμένου Βρετανικού Βασιλείου.

γ) Ο αγώνας για την εγκαθίδρυση της Εργατο-Αγροτικής Σοβιετικής Δημοκρατίας Κύπρου.

δ) Η ανάπτυξη στην Κύπρο της Διεθνούς αλληλεγγύης του εργατικού κινήματος και ο συντονισμός του αγώνα των Κυπρίων εργατών και χωρικών με τον αγώνα των συναδέλφων των στις άλλες χώρες και ιδίως στην Βρετανική Αυτοκρατορία.²⁷

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The first aim is self-explanatory. From its inception, the KKK sought to organise the workers and peasants into unions under its political leadership and guidance. The second and third aim, regarding the national question, were more controversial. Despite the fact that from the beginning the party realised that the unification of all anti-colonial elements was a prerequisite to staging a serious liberation struggle, the KKK's uncertainty about the ultimate aim of such a struggle did nothing to allay the mistrust of the old right wing politicians. The early rhetoric of the KKK on the idea of a 'Cyprus Soviet Republic' as part of an envisaged Balkan Socialist Federation in fact eliminated any prospect of reaching an agreement on the formation of a united front with other patriotic forces. This slogan was both out of place and out of context in the 1925. The traditional nature of Cypriot society was characterised by an unswerving and deep-rooted loyalty of the peasant masses to the autocephalous Greek Orthodox Church of Cyprus, whilst the backward economic conditions prevailing on the island made communist discourse sound distinctly irrelevant. Much later, the leaders of AKEΛ admitted that the slogan in favour of independence was inappropriate at the time. The following two examples bear testimony to this. With the benefit of half a century's hindsight, Fifis Ioannou —then a youth party activist, and later General Secretary of AKEΛ from 1945 to 1949— passed the following judgement on the early policy of the KKK on the national question:

The slogan for a 'Cyprus Soviet Republic' in conditions of an underdeveloped economy and a social formation in which traces of the 'proletariat' barely made their appearance for the first time or the atheist preachings of historical materialism in an atmosphere of deeply religious, feudal or be it petty bourgeois but above all peasant society, could not but lead to isolationism.²⁸

Fifis Ioannou described the early course of the KKK as 'sectarian', not only

²⁷ SA1/1678/1926. Spelling as appears in the original.

²⁸ See Ioannou, 1976, op.cit, in note 3, Instalment no. 2.

organisationally but also ideologically, because of the 'childhood illness' of leftist extremism experienced by most newly-born communist parties in Europe.²⁹ In a similar vein, Minos Perdios praised the KKK's evaluation of the character of the struggle as 'anti-imperialist' but dismissed its perception of the final aim:

Though it saw so clearly the anti-imperialist liberation struggle and armed it with the irresistible and effective weapon of the united front, the KKK could not see with clarity the end of this struggle. It supported the liberation of Cyprus, the self-determination of the Cypriot people and was fighting consistently for this aim, but it had as a final aim the full independence through the establishment of a worker-peasant republic in Cyprus and its accession to the Balkan Federation and not enosis of the island with Greece.³⁰

In its first issues, Νεος Ανθρωπος published slogans and articles favouring the idea of setting up a united front. In addition, the relevant paragraph in the Theses on the Economic and Political Situation of the first party congress stipulated that the KKK was the only party that could help organise a united anti-imperialist front encompassing all those prepared to fight for the liberation of Cyprus, irrespective of their class or ethnic origin. It was further suggested that the KKK could lead such a front if the party established its base in the peasantry by embracing and promoting its demands, as well as by uniting Greeks and Turks under its leadership. The latter task was one the KKK was most capable of accomplishing by virtue of its internationalist character and outlook.³¹

It is fair to argue that by January 1927 the party had developed a clearer idea of the significance of a united front, a coalition of all parties opposed to British colonial rule. Such a front came to be perceived as the 'only effective weapon in the struggle to shake off the foreign yoke'.³² As time passed, the rhetoric of the KKK on the project of a common front became more forceful. During that January, Νεος Ανθρωπος toned down its leftist revolutionary phraseology and called for a united front of all anti-colonial forces:

All parties that recognise the need of saving Cyprus from the foreign yoke as the first condition for economic and national restoration should direct their endeavours in that direction. But, in order that such endeavours should bear fruit, they should be united. All the anti-British elements, whether they be townspeople or of the proletariat, whether they be Greeks or Turks, and whether they want Greece or autonomy, must co-operate in the struggle against foreign rule. All views agree on this point. The Communist Party which was the first to suggest the idea of a united front calls everybody to battle against British Imperialism at this critical moment when the British threat looms as a dark cloud over the Cyprian horizon [...] The united anti-British front must be our answer to the British threat. This front must include all Cypriots, all classes and all parties which for one reason or another, do not want British rule.³³

The United Front Policy

The KKK's shift towards a policy of supporting a united front was confirmed by an extraordinary pan-cyprian congress held on 20-21 August 1927. This resolved that the party's main task was to struggle more strenuously and systematically 'to form the united anti-British front with the sole aim of throwing out British imperialism from our land'.³⁴

This shift came about after a dispassionate analysis of the realities on the island.

²⁹ Loc.cit.

³⁰ See Δοκίμιο Ιστορίας του ΚΚΚ και ΑΚΕΛ, op.cit., in note 10, Part I, p.43.

³¹ Ibid. p.41.

³² Ibid. p.42.

³³ See Communism in Cyprus, op.cit., In note 3, p.4.

³⁴ See Δοκίμιο Ιστορίας του ΚΚΚ και ΑΚΕΛ op.cit., in note 10, Part I, p.42.

The early day revolutionary outbursts articulating untimely slogans for a peasant-worker administration were brushed aside. The combinations of inter-related and deep-rooted features of the inherently traditional society of Cyprus were too obvious and too costly to be by-passed light-heartedly. During the late 1920s the strong influence of the enosist Orthodox clergy on the backward and deeply devout rural masses, which formed the overwhelming majority of the Cypriot population, stifled the growth of the nascent communist party.

On the other hand, the growth of the leftist movement was equally hindered by an orchestrated official campaign against the propagation of communist ideas. The colonial government intensified its attempts to bear down on the communists in 1927-28. The Seditious Publications Law enacted in 1921 was more rigorously employed than in the past. Classic Marxist literature such the *State and Revolution* and the *Red First of May* were banned. Indeed, by the end of 1928 fifteen such publications were put on the censorship list. Eventually, the KKK was outlawed on new year's day 1929. Its mouthpiece was also forced to shut down; however, *Νεος Ανθρωπος* was replaced by *Ο Νεος Εργατης* (*O Neos Erghatis*), a new fortnightly publication.

In respect of the immediate goals of the projected united front, the KKK campaigned for the implementation of certain rights and measures designed to lead to self-administration (αυτοδιοίκησης). These were:

- i) Application of universal suffrage i.e., to all men and women above the age of eighteen.
- ii) Reform of the Legislative Council so that it became a true parliament incorporating the delegates of the ethnic minorities under a system of proportional representation.
- iii) Formation of a government accountable to parliament.
- iv) Abolition of the Cypriot share in the repayment of the Ottoman loan; thus alleviating the tax burden.
- v) Reinvestment of the budget surpluses kept in Britain in the island's economy. Evacuation of the foreign military personnel from the island and establishment of a local civil guard to take care of internal security.³⁵

In order to promote the goal of self-administration, the KKK's leadership set as its primary task the convocation of a pancyprian bicomunal congress. Such a congress envisaged the coming together of Greek and Turkish delegates who would elect a representative 'popular' delegation to visit London to lobby for the grant of self-government.³⁶

Unfortunately for the Communists, the KKK was unable to extend its activities beyond Limassol, the coastal town most closely connected to its origins. Both the central committee and the party organ *Νεος Ανθρωπος* were based there. Being the island's main port, the town offered a solid working class recruitment base to start with but the island's capital Nicosia remained the most obvious place for the headquarters of a party aspiring to develop an island-wide following. Nicosia had a substantial working class population which was under the spell of bourgeois politicians, mainly lawyers and other professionals, who successfully played the role of workers' patrons. The hostile environment inhibited the profusion of the new revolutionary ideas in Nicosia and accounted for the absence of organisational expansion by the young revolutionary party. The failure of the party organ *Νεος Ανθρωπος* to become a national, as opposed to a local (Limassol) newspaper, as seen in its inefficient use for 'serious political campaigns'. where it was expected to be

³⁵ See Δοκίμιο Ιστορίας του ΚΚΚ και ΑΚΕΛ, op.cit., in note 10, Part I, p.43.

³⁶ Ibid.

'embracing the popular movement and becoming its exponent and educator', was acknowledged in the first party congress where a three-member committee was assigned the task of improving its publication.³⁷

As for the reputation of the few pioneer communists living in Nicosia, Fifis Ioannou claims that such was the isolation they were subjected to that they had to think twice before deciding to future out for fear of being lynched! A characteristic and recurrent scene was that of the goldsmiths in the central marketplace who started ringing bells to signal that a communist was passing by and encourage the crowds to jeer.³⁸

The 1931 Disturbances act as a catalyst for the KKK's shift to Enosis

Three important developments within one year forced the leadership of the KKK to radically transform its approach to the national question, in Cyprus. First, the KKK was recognised by Comintern, the Moscow-based world communist organisation. This meant that the Communist Party of Cyprus was accepted as an independent section of the Communist International by the XI Plenum of its Executive Committee which met in Moscow at the beginning of April 1931. The decision noted that 'the Communist Party of Cyprus has been in existence for several years'.³⁹

Second, ironically, later in the year, the Comintern austere rebuked the KKK for its initial, adverse reaction to the anti-colonial and pro-enosis disturbances in the island in October 1931. Ploutis Servas, then studying Marxism in Moscow on a party scholarship, reflects that the Comintern's Balkan Office held a meeting to discuss the October events in relation to the tasks of the Cypriot communists. This third event, a meeting chaired by Bella Kun, the Hungarian chairman of the Balkan Office, was attended by Servas, Charalambos Yatiliolis, General Secretary of the KKK, and his deputy Kostas Skeleas (the fate of whom is discussed below). The last two had been deported from the island due to their role in encouraging the protests. Bella Kun criticised the two Cypriot communist leaders. He told them:

The 1931 uprising was a genuine national liberation movement, where two opposing camps lined up against each other. On one side, there was the people's camp (consisting mainly of townspeople) and grass-root communists under the leadership of the nationalists, and the Church. On the other side, there was the imperialist camp allied with the leadership of the KKK.⁴⁰

It is clear that in the first five years of party life (1926-1931), the leadership of the KKK underestimated the strength of nationalist feeling among Greek Cypriots. Consequently, it failed to acknowledge the dynamism of the enosis movement. In an assessment of the political situation, ten months before the eruption of violence in 1931, the KKK's central committee spoke of 'a big crisis that the national movement is going through' and of an 'anglophile current which for a moment started to creep into the Greek population'. Thus it exposed the degree to which it was detached from the political realities

³⁷ See Δοκίμιο Ιστορίας του ΚΚΚ και ΑΚΕΛ, op.cit., in note 10, Part I. pp.28,40.

³⁸ See Ioannou, 1976, op.cit., in note 3.

³⁹ Marx Memorial Library, London: *Notification regarding the XI Plenum of the Communist International*, (London: Modern Books, Publishers of Workers' Books, 1931). Adams, 1971, op.cit., in note I, claims that on accession to the Comintern the KKK was placed under the guardianship of the KKE (Communist Party of Greece). He cites reference to Jane Degras (ed.) *The Communist International Documents*, Vol III: 1919-1943, (London: O.U.P.-R.I.I.A., 1965), p.150. However, neither *The Communist International Documents* nor the *Notification* report such a decision.

⁴⁰ Cited from memory by Servas who took part in the meeting. Ploutis Servas, *Κυπριακό Ένθυες* (The Cyprus Problem: Responsibilities), 2nd ed. (Athens: Grammi, 1985), pp.117-118.

of the day. It continued:

This [national] movement confines itself to romantic hot air. It cannot be otherwise just as the bourgeois class depends politically and to a certain extent economically upon the bourgeois class of Greece which has become fascist and reactionary. [The national movement] has one exclusive aim: to lull the masses and prevent them from organising a truly revolutionary struggle against imperialism. Objectively the enosis movement promotes imperialism and indirectly becomes its prop.⁴¹

After the burning down of the Government House., the KKK was forced, under the pressure of events, to reconsider its initial aloof position. Its central committee issued a communiqué on 23 October 1931, arguing that the differences between the nationalists, who wanted union with Greece, and the communists, who were campaigning for a soviet republic in Cyprus, should not be an obstacle to the formation of a common anti-imperialist front. It was explained that the disagreement could be resolved after the retreat of imperialism from the Cypriot political scene. The statement proceeded to reappraise the previous policy of abstention implemented by the *local party cells* during the days of mass popular protest. The central committee, amidst a spate of self-criticism, concluded that the policy of non-involvement had to be condemned. Neutrality was found to be 'harmful' to the anti-imperialist cause. It went on to call upon the party members to correct their mistake by placing themselves at the vanguard of the working masses in their anti-imperialistic struggle. Further, the central committee of the KKK dismissed the nationalist leadership 'e.g. the Archbishop and ex-members of the Legislative Council' as faint-hearted and bankrupt. It accused them of endeavouring to make the nationalist workers hostile to their communist counterparts. Therefore it invited the rank and file of the nationalist camp to desert their leadership and join forces with the communists in a united front. In order to achieve such a front the communist communiqué called for the establishment of action committees in both urban and rural areas. Having repeated the demand for the withdrawal of imperialism the communiqué ended by reiterating the communists socio-economic targets for eight-hour day, better wages, social insurance, exemption of the poor farmers from the payment of taxes, moratorium on rural debts, reduction in rents and trade rates.⁴²

The earlier detachment of the KKK from the nationalist fray had damaged the party politically. It gave the nationalists, in association with the Church hierarchy, a free rein to lead the anti-colonial struggle as it would later be called. Nevertheless, Charalambos Yatiliotis, the KKK General Secretary, went out of his way to bring the Cypriot communists back into play. In pursuance of the central committee's resolution referred to above, he visited the archbishopric on the following day paying his respects to Archbishop Kyrillos. He also took part in a meeting convened by the Archbishop in order to discuss anti-government measures designed to force the Governor to release the detainees arrested during the disturbances. The communist leader addressed the protesting crowd which gathered in the precinct of the archbishopric and offered the prelates his party's support in the common anti-imperialist struggle.⁴³

Two months earlier, in August, the Acting Governor informed London that:

⁴¹ Η Τρέχουσα Οικονομία και Παλιική Κατάσταση στην Κύπρο. Λχόψαση της Κ.Ε. του Κομμουνιστικος Κόμματος; Κύχρου χου ψηφίστηκε στη όυνεδρίαση της 19/1/1931. (The Current Economic and Political Situation in Cyprus. Resolution passed by the Central Committee meeting of the Communist Party of Cyprus at 19/1/1931): British Library: 8 Pamphlets: Cyprus: KKK.

⁴² PRO: CO 67/240/15, pp. 118-9, Sir Ronald Storrs to Sir Cunliffe Lister, Secretary of State for the Colonies, 20 November 1931, encl. 8: *Communiqué of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cyprus*.

⁴³ Ibid. Storrs to Cunliffe Lister, 20/11/1931, p. 93. See also O.S. Georghallides, 'The Cyprus Revolt and the British Deportation Policy Oct. 1931-Dec. 1932', *Κυπριακά Σπουδαί* (Cyprus Studies) (Vols.57-8, 1995), p. 59.

the activities of the communists in Cyprus and the opposition and ill-feeling engendered by them have (since June) so markedly increased as to give rise to apprehension that they may result in serious disorder involving loss of life.⁴⁴

On the basis of this information, it could be argued that the colonial authorities had already been waiting for the right moment to incriminate and prosecute the communist leadership of the island in order to forestall the growth of the communist movement. The October disturbances offered this opportunity. Charalambos Vatiliotis was arrested in Nicosia on 25 October 'whilst addressing a mob'; Kostas Skeleas, his deputy, was detained in Limassol the following day accused of carrying 'pamphlets announcing the communist party's decision to join the nationalists'.⁴⁵ Within days, the two leaders were deported from Cyprus on the grounds that they were among the ringleaders. They ended up in Moscow where, to add insult to injury, they were punished by the Comintern for their earlier reluctance to join in the mass protests. Both were apparently stripped of their office and reduced to rank and tile workers in the USSR. In fact, as explained by Servas they were never allowed to return home. They passed away in disgrace whilst Russia was still under the Stalinist regime.⁴⁶ One imagines that while mulling over their fate in exile, the two would have appreciated that it was heavily laden with irony. On the one hand, the British had deported them for their role in the disturbances, while the Comintern punished them for displaying a reluctance to take the lead in mobilising the masses in true communist fashion.

The 1931 deportations of the two communist leaders proved to be the prelude to an orchestrated attack by the colonial government upon the island's communist movement. The efforts to eliminate its leadership culminated in 1933-34. The Cyprus Intelligence Committee report of 1955 states this explicitly:

On 15 August, 1933, the Criminal Code was amended with the main object of enabling the authorities to deal effectively with the communist menace and with any other unlawful associations. The following day the Communist Party of Cyprus (KKK) and seven associate communist organisations were proscribed. During 1933-1934, *after years of patient work*, twenty-eight of the leading Cypriot communists were convicted on charges of seditious conspiracy and received sentences ranging up to 4 years' imprisonment. The movement had by that time suffered a severe blow...⁴⁷

Thus, for the next seven years the communist movement of the island was forced to operate underground. A landmark development in this period was the return of Ploutis Servas from Greece in 1935. Servas was allowed back into the island—four years after being deported under the 1931 Defence Regulations—on condition that he signed an undertaking that he would 'abstain from communistic and political propaganda and activities during his stay'. The return of Servas brought new life into the communist movement. Politically astute, articulate and enthusiastic, Servas became the central figure of the Cypriot communists. As such, he played a crucial role in reviving the spirits of his comrades and injecting a refreshing dose of vitality into a party that had become bedraggled, fragmented and demoralised in the years following the clampdown of 1931. Based in Limassol, counting on his considerable organisational skills and drawing upon his earlier experiences of operating underground in Athens, Servas, in collaboration with Christos Savvides his brother in Famagusta, began funnelling workers into trade unions. The object was obvious enough: to create a mass base for the revival of the communist party. In June

⁴⁴ See Communism In Cyprus, op.cit. in note 3, p.5.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Interview with Ploutis Servas 1994; also in Servas, 1985, op.cit., in note 40, p.118.

⁴⁷ See Communism in Cyprus, op.cit., in note 3, p.5.

1937 the colonial police captured a clandestine bulletin, the contents of which related to issues on the reorganisation of the party. Indeed, the following year the central committee of the CPGB (Communist Party of Great Britain) announced that the Cypriot fraternal party had been revived and was being given every assistance. Later in 1937, Servas was convicted of being in possession of prohibited communist literature.⁴⁸

In 1941 the Governor hinted at relaxing the repressive laws by allowing the private meeting at Skarinou, which established AKEL to take place (14 April). After a period of co-existence and co-operation between the two parties, the KKK suspended *sine die* its activities. Instead, its members and cadres were instructed to join en masse the ranks of the new party of the Cypriot Left AKEA-the Progressive Party of the Working People (AVOpOCLIfIKO Koppa Epyo.(opi:vou Aaou - AKEA).

It is important to stress the fact that no strong links among the KKK and the Greek mainland KKE existed in this pre-1941 period. Some Cypriots who became members of the KKE, for example Vatiliotis and Chourmouziotis, helped organise the first pancyprian congress, Vatiliotis stayed on guiding the Cypriot party until his deportation in 1931. For the next decade, there seems to be no evidence to suggest that the KKE played a paternalistic role. Neither is there any indication that it provided assistance or that it had any serious contacts with the Cypriot party on a regular and organised basis.

Equally, there was no sign of any Turkish Cypriot participation in the leadership of the KKK. For sure, there was certainly co-operation between Greek and Turkish Cypriot workers in the trade union movement, and possibly at the grass-roots level. One may be able, making use of the tools of oral history, to track down Turkish Cypriot membership of the KKK party cells. But one thing is definite; at no time during the history of the KKK was a Turkish Cypriot elected to the leadership of the party.⁴⁹

Concluding Remarks

It should be noted that in its short life span, the KKK devoted the greater part of its efforts to bettering the circumstances of the labouring poor and the expropriated peasants. This was its primary aim. However, this paper has illustrated that during its formative years (1926-31), the KKK not only attacked the entrenched economic interests of the new bourgeois class and the biggest landowner, the Church, but it also challenged their identification with enosis, the union of the island with Greece. Instead it sought to rally support through an emphasis on intercommunal understanding aimed at a socialist independent regime for Cyprus under the umbrella of an anticipated Balkan Socialist Federation. Soon the KKK's leadership realised that such a project was an utopian reality. Within one year of its coming into being the KKK shifted the focus of its national policy to the creation of a united front of all anti-colonial forces, relegating the question of the future regime of Cyprus to a secondary position. Gradually but firmly, the KKK leadership recognised the strength of the enosis sentiment shared by the Greek majority of the island. The 1931 island-wide anti-colonial and pro-enosis mass protests found the leadership of the party unprepared. Nevertheless they found the courage to catch up with developments and joined the nationalists in an anti-British, national liberation front.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 6

⁴⁹ Ploutis Servas repeatedly emphasised that the omission of Turkish Cypriots from the party's leadership in the long history of the KKK-AKEA was a grave mistake. (Interviews with Ploutis Servas, conducted in 1994, 1995 and 1996.)

A Note on Methodology

Data on the KKK is relatively sparse and the data that does exist is dispersed among various archives in Cyprus and London. This article is based as far as possible on primary material, i.e. on documents written at the time when the developments were actually taking place. Press releases and comments which made the policies of the KKK known to the general public fall into this category as well as reports sent to London by the colonial administration. Where such sources are unavailable, secondary works and recently taken personal interviews were used. I attempted to avoid this type of source as much as possible without losing information. Reconstruction from memory⁵⁰ unavoidably tends to be intentionally or unintentionally partial for a variety of reasons, not least because memory lapses with the passing of time. Moreover, partiality tends to be questionable. It has often been repeated, and is perhaps justified, that the memoirs or writings of public figures tend to be a 'cover up' of actual historical events.

⁵⁰ Such a collection of personal memoirs about the first years of communist activity in Cyprus is the book by Yiannis Lelkis, *01 Pi(c, (77/e Roots)*, (Limassol, 1984).