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The Cypriot Communist Party and the Comintern*

1. Research Situation

The story of the first Communist Party of Cyprus (*Kommounistiko Komma Kyprou*; KKK) is still waiting for its historian. The only account published so far is a British government paper.¹ The historian² of the second CP of Cyprus, Progressive Party of the Working People (*Anorthotiko Komma tou Ergazomenou Laou*; AKEL), used it extensively³ and almost exclusively as the basic source for the early years of the party.

The source situation on the KKK is indeed desperate. The party did not publish any collection of documents except an album⁴ which contains a few reproductions. An accessible party archive does not exist. The former protagonists have not written any memoirs. Until very recently there was not even a major quarrel in the party which might have induced some of the purged comrades to wash the party's dirty linnen in public. The AKEL has for quite some time been promising to publish an official history of the party, but so far has apparently found no historian able to cope with the problem of presenting a party history which will not be in need of constant rewrites according to oscillations of party line. Though in the early years the Greek Communist Party (*Kommounistiko Komma Elladas*; KKE) and KKK/AKEL often cooperated and had close personal links, not even the Greek communist documentary collections contain noteworthy information on the KKK. The same is true of the reminiscences of former KKE protagonists. Apparently the early story of Cypriot communism is considered an embarrassing affair better skipped in the family saga.

In the face of this predicament, the author of this study can only supply the reader with an overview of the party's history containing sporadic pieces of research, point to certain special problems the Cypriot communists have been confronted with, and show where future researchers could do spade work. The history of the KKK is rather short: the party was founded in 1926. Right from the beginning it was kept under the tutelage of the Greek Communist Party, which often obliged the Cypriot party to steer a disadvantageous course. In 1931, the colonial authorities suppressed the KKK and forced it underground. During the Second World War the British lifted the ban and a new party, the AKEL, was founded. Right from the start the AKEL's character was very close to what we today call democratic socialism. Within a rather short period the AKEL absorbed the remnants of the KKK.

2. Economic and Social Conditions in a Colonial Society and the Founding of the Communist Party

If Greece, in British eyes, was considered a kind of protectorate,⁵ Cyprus since the mid-twenties was a crown colony. Though both countries had been part of the Ottoman Empire, only Greece inherited the specific political

* I feel very obliged to the former Secretary General of KKK, Ploutis Servas, who was friendly enough to grant me an interview and to read the first draft of this paper with a critical eye. Without his help this paper would have been rather barren.

¹ Colonial Government of Cyprus, *Communism in Cyprus* (Nicosia, s.d. [1955?]).

² T. W. Adams, *AKEL: The Communist Party of Cyprus* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1971).

³ Actually the first forty pages are scarcely more than a paraphrase of *Communism in Cyprus*. See as well George C. Fidas, "The Evolution of Cypriot Communism", *Studies in Comparative Communism*, 6:1/2 (Spring/Summer 1973), p. 438f.

⁴ AKEL, *AKEL, To Komma tou Ergazomenou Laou* (Nicosia, 1976); a shorter English edition which appeared in the same year has the title *AKEL. The Party of the Working People*.

⁵ See Heinz Richter, *British Intervention in Greece. From Varkiza to Civil War. February 1945 to August 1946* (London: Merlin Press, 1986), p. 91.

culture which is described in the paper on the KKE.⁶ In Cyprus, British influence since 1878 has greatly overshadowed Ottoman heritage. Indeed, today one might conclude that the political culture in Cyprus is more European than oriental. On the other hand, however, Cyprus was a colony, a fact which eventually would make national liberation as important for the Cypriot communists as their primary struggle for social change.

At the turn of the century, Cyprus was an agrarian society.⁷ Less than 20% of the population lived in the various small towns, of which Limassol was the most prosperous. There were a few oil mills, cheese dairies, small plants drying fruit and vegetables, and wine and cigarette producing units, but all this could hardly be characterized as industry. There were two main factors which obstructed industrial development: the heavy tax burden and the depredatory character of the Cypriot usurer capital.

When the Ottoman Empire ceded Cyprus to Britain, the Turkish diplomats apparently managed to inflate the alleged net tax revenue so that London committed herself to an annual payment of £ 93.000. In reality, the average gross revenue before the cessation had scarcely exceeded £ 130.000 *per annum*. When London took over the island, the truth was soon found out. Consequently, as London did not intend to spend the British taxpayer's money for this purpose, there remained only one solution: squeeze more tax out of the island and keep expenses there low. Very soon, an efficient new British tax collecting system managed to collect revenues which amounted to £ 160.000 and £ 180.000 annually. Roughly half of this was paid to Turkey, and with the rest the British administration was kept running. No wonder that investment in the infrastructure and the cost for education remained below 3% of the gross income. The main burden of this system was carried by the peasantry, since taxes on income or profit were unknown.

Due to the lack of any banking system, the peasants' need for credit was met by usurers. Thus, the colonial administration and the usurers became competitors in the exploitation of the peasantry, making it impossible for the latter to accumulate enough capital to invest in any industrial enterprises before 1914.

The First World War, however, changed the situation. The price increase for agricultural products induced the Cypriot peasants to increase their production. This, however, necessitated investment capital which was supplied by the usurers. By the end of the First World War, the Cypriot peasants were more in debt than before, and the usurers, who were traders at the same time, had absorbed all profits. When the war was over, prices for agricultural products fell again, and many of the indebted peasants lost their properties to the usurers.

The dispossessed peasants moved to the towns and to the mines to find work. Mining had started in 1914, when copper pyrite was discovered, and foreign companies (Canadian and American) invested in the island. The mining companies found ideal conditions in Cyprus. The British administration granted them extraterritorial rights, so that they had a free hand to exploit their workers at random. As there were many more workers than jobs, the entrepreneurs in the towns and the mines exploited them pitilessly. Though in the meantime, Great Britain had annexed Cyprus and made it a crown colony, the tax burden was not reduced, that is, the indirect taxes were not. 63% of the island's revenue came from indirect and only 12% from direct taxation, i. e. the rich were almost taxfree. The mining companies' profits were enormous: in 1922 the Amiantos paid 40% dividend.

During those early years a few intellectuals, apparently influenced by Christian social thinking, published a journal called *Nazoraïos* which, however, did not gain any importance. Soon after the Russian revolution, news about this went round the island. Thus in 1919, the first signs of opposition by the working class against this exploitative system became visible: the construction workers of Limassol founded a first union. Cigarette makers and tobacco workers followed a little later. In 1920 the shoemakers organized. A parallel process was initiated in the countryside by the foundation of a coop-movement which tried to free the peasants from the claws of the usurers. The main center of the early union movement became Limassol. Indeed, for many years this town on the south coast was not only the most important harbor of Cyprus but the most progressive township of the island. It was here that the first socialist ideas found their way into Cyprus, and that the first moves to organize the communist party of Cyprus took place.

But besides these special economic conditions of an exploited colony, the situation in Cyprus differed radically from the circumstances in Greece in another respect. Whereas the Greek party was confronted with a relatively homogenous ethnic population except for the slavophone and moslem minorities in Northern Greece,

⁶ See ...

⁷ In the following I follow mainly Nearchos Ioannou, *Die Akkumulation des Kapitals auf Zypern. Eine historisch-ökonomische Studie über den Prozeß der sogenannten "ursprünglichen" Kapitalakkumulation während der Kolonialzeit und der kapitalistischen Kapitalakkumulation in der Periode zwischen 1950 und 1987* (Frankfurt, Bern, New York: Peter Lang, 1989).

in Cyprus there were a Greek majority and a strong Turkish minority, as well as small Armenian and Maronite groups.

Since Greek independence, the Cypriot bourgeois establishment, under the leadership of the Orthodox Church, had propagated union (*enosis*) with Greece. Though in schools, the teachers taught Greek history out of books printed in Greece, and thus promoted the case of union with Greece, the early workers' movement was far more interested in improving everyday life than in dreaming of *enosis*. But very soon after the foundation of the party, the Cypriot left was confronted with the ethnic problem.

The Cypriot Communists wanted *enosis* too, in principle, but there were the minorities whose rights had to be taken into consideration as well. Thus, the KKK was obliged to steer a cautious course on this question. It could propagate an anti-colonial struggle, but could not come out with the *enosis* slogan, because this would repel the Turkish Cypriots. In face of this dilemma, the KKK came out with an ambiguous autonomy slogan which could imply *enosis* but also the creation of an independent state. With this slogan it could hope to become the vanguard of the anti-colonial struggle and not offend the feelings of the Cypriot minorities. Had the KKK been left alone on this course, it might have succeeded, but there were forces (KKE, Comintern) which at times obliged the KKK to take a clearer stand, landing the party in a major imbroglio. Only during the Second World War, when these foreign factors lost their influence, could the Cypriot communists develop an identity of their own.

The story⁸ of Cypriot communism began in the early 1920s in Limassol. There was a book store called *I Ellas* (Greece) where books from Greece could be found. It was there that a few young idealistic intellectuals (about ten) found the first news about the October Revolution and began to study Marxism/Leninism to find answers to the social problems of this British colony. Among them were a young retail clerk, Leonidas Stringos, and a bank employee, Christodoulos Christodoulidis. Both soon left Cyprus for Moscow to be trained there and became members of the KKE, where their careers led them into the Politbureau of the KKE in the 1940s.⁹ Another member of the group who later became famous was Aimilios Chourmouziotis from Limassol. He left Cyprus to study law in Athens, but soon took up journalism.¹⁰ This group published a small newspaper, *Pysos* (Torch). In it, they attacked the colonial government and accused the British as responsible for the calamity of the Cypriot people.

In 1923 a few Cypriot workers, inspired by the revolution in the Soviet Union, formed the first tiny communist circles. A real group formed around the physician Dr. N. Giavopoulos and his son-in-law Dr. Vasos Vassiliou (the father of the present President of Cyprus) in Limassol in 1924. During his studies at Athens University from 1919 to 1924, Giavopoulos had become a member of the KKE. When he returned to his native Limassol, he established a Labourers' Club, which quickly became a center for the more class-conscious workers. Soon this club also attracted members of peasant unions from the area, which had been set up by peasants who had been dispossessed of their land by the usurers. The group published a fortnightly *Neos Anthropos* (New Man) which declared itself the organ of the communist party of Cyprus. Dr. Giavopoulos kept in touch with the KKE and Moscow.

In July 1925 the colonial authorities deported Dr. Giavopoulos to Greece because he was "threatening the island's peace". The doctor was later expelled from the party and became a non-person.¹¹ His place in the Limassol group was taken over first by Kostas Christodoulidis (Skeleas) and then by the Moscow-(KUTV¹²)-trained Charalambos Vatiliotis (Vatis) after his return to Cyprus.

⁸ In describing the development of the Cypriot party I mainly follow *Communism in Cyprus*.

⁹ Christodoulos Christodoulidis became known under his party pseudonym Alexis.

¹⁰ In 1945 Chourmouziotis became editor of the Athens conservative daily *Kathimerini*. In the 1950s he won some fame as an author.

¹¹ He is not included in the album published by AKEL in 1984. AKEL, *AKEL. The Party of the Working Class* (Nicosia, 1984).

¹² Communist University of the Workers of the East (*Kommunisticheskij Universitet Trudyashchaya Vostoka*; KUTV; 1921 -1952). At the end of the 1920s Cypriot communists were sent to the Communist University of the Workers of the West. Apparently the Soviets considered the Cypriot Communists more European than their Greek counterparts who continued to be sent to the KUTV.

In August 1926, twenty Cypriot Communists (all Greek Cypriots) held their founding congress in Limassol. The new party called itself Communist Party of Cyprus (*Kommounistiko Komma Kyprou*; KKK). Kostas Skeleas was elected Secretary General of the KKK. According to its charter, the KKK struggled for three aims: the organisation of unions among workers and peasants, independence from Britain, and development of solidarity between the various ethnic groups in Cyprus.¹³

3. On the Horns of a Dilemma: Autonomy or Enosis

This ambitious program obliged the party to fight on various fronts. In comparison with the second and third, the first aim was a relatively simple task. In the ensuing three years, the KKK succeeded in organizing unions and strikes. In 1927 a strike of thousand asbestos miners ended successfully: their working hours were reduced from ten to nine hours per day. In 1929 six thousand miners went on strike. The British mining company invoked the help of the colonial authorities, who crushed the strike by force. Though many workers were fired and their communist leaders jailed or exiled, this strike strengthened the KKK. It had proven itself a political factor to be taken seriously.

The other two aims brought the KKK into conflict with the Church and the nationalist leaders who were dreaming of *enosis*. The congress had stated: "In the present phase of the political situation in Cyprus, the right practical and tactical line for the KKK is the united anti-British front for obtaining self-government and self-determination."¹⁴ In other words, the KKK was following a popular-front-from-below-course by propagating the fight for autonomy, but it did not define the ultimate meaning of autonomy. It is not fully clear whether it was at this time, or later in 1928, that the Comintern-slogan for the integration of an autonomous Cyprus into the Socialist Balkan Federation was taken over by the KKK.¹⁵ However this may have been, the Cypriot communist leadership apparently understood that the propagation of this slogan in public would have similar disastrous consequences for the KKK as the slogan for Macedonian autonomy had had for the KKE. It therefore did not launch the slogan, but, in January 1927, came out with a cautiously worded anti-colonial program: "Not until we obtain our freedom and cease to be the slaves of British imperialism shall we be able to breathe economically. All parties that recognize the need for saving Cyprus from the foreign yoke as the first condition for economic and national restoration should direct their endeavors in that direction. But, in order that such endeavors 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 cooperate in the struggle against foreign rule. All views meet 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."¹⁶

Obviously, the KKK tried to include Greek, Turkish, Armenian and Maronite Cypriots alike in the struggle for self-determination, thus making an effort to overcome the incipient ethnic split of the island. This precluded, of course, the solution aimed at by the Church and the Greek nationalists: *enosis*. Though during this period the KKK never took a stand against *enosis* in public, it was clear that union with Greece was not its course.

¹³ A brief account of the founding congress may be found in "To idrytiko Synedrio tou KKK-AKEL", *Neos Dimokratias*, 74 (July/August 1983), p. 57f.

¹⁴ Andreas Fantis, "To KKK - AKEL Symaioforos ston Antiimperialistiko Agona", *Neos Dimokratias*, 91 (1986), p. 14.

¹⁵ Ploutis Servas, "Kypriaki Aristera", *Anti*, 40 (11 January 1975), p. 26; Ploutis Servas, *Kypriako. Efhines* (2nd edition, Athens: Grammi, 1985), p. 116.

¹⁶ *Neos Anthropos*, 8 January 1927 quoted in *Communism in Cyprus*, p. 4.

4. Under the Tutelage of the KKE

In 1928, when the British celebrated the 50th anniversary of their rule over Cyprus, the KKK published a manifesto which bitterly attacked the colonial administration and ended: "Forward then to a united anti-British front. Onward with the struggle against the occupiers and the struggle for autonomy."¹⁷ In the same year, the Comintern apparently established its first contacts with the KKK, but at the same time directed the Cypriot party to report its activities to the KKE. Obviously, the Comintern considered the KKK a section of the KKE. To what degree this subordination went and in which form control was exercised at that time is unclear. There is not the slightest documentary clue as to how the internal quarrels in the KKE during this period influenced the KKK's course. But from events in the ensuing two years it may be concluded that the KKE was probably authorized to give directives to the KKK. Whatever the details, the KKK-KKE connection linked the Cypriot party to the political line followed by the Greek party. Thus, the KKK became an object of the political game played in Athens, and the KKE players did not pay much attention to the specific interests of their Cypriot counterpart as long as it served their aims.

In 1929 Prime Minister Venizelos enacted the *idionymo* law, which threatened agitators against the existing social order with imprisonment. Venizelos's anti-communist measure triggered a mechanism which became a consistent feature of the policy of the Cypriot communists: the KKK's interest in *enosis* cooled considerably, since *enosis* would have brought the anti-communist repression to Cyprus as well. This reaction became a constant in the KKE/AKEL policy from then on. Whenever anti-communism was predominant in Greece, the Cypriot communists' interest in *enosis* dwindled. Nevertheless, for the time being the KKK did not come out openly against *enosis*.

The developments of the following two years are rather obscure, and there is an almost total lack of sources. Since 1929, when Venizelos had created trouble for the KKE by enacting the *idionymo* law, the communists had been looking for revenge. In 1929 Venizelos had received hints from Labour politicians that if they won the elections, *enosis* would not be excluded. Venizelos thereupon advised the Cypriots to refrain from provocations. But the Greek consul in Nicosia, Alexis Kyrou, disobeyed his instructions and furthered the Cypriot *enosis* movement. Thus the impression was apparently created in Athens that Venizelos was actively promoting *enosis*. This caused the KKE to instruct the KKK to follow an opposite course. They advised the KKK to start a propaganda campaign against the Church and the Cypriot capitalists (middle-class traders, usurers), who under the leadership of the Church propagated *enosis*: the Cypriot nationalist leaders were only aiming at replacing the British capitalists so that they could exploit the workers. Cypriot communists should work for the liberation of the island from imperialism and for the establishment of a free Soviet Democracy of workers and peasants in Cyprus.¹⁸

To what extent these instructions were obeyed and propagated by the KKK has not been researched. However, ensuing developments suggest that the KKK reacted reservedly. Indeed, in October 1931, the KKK followed an opposite course: the KKK, after some initial hesitation, joined the 1931 anti-British pro-*enosis*-riots, which had been launched by the Church and the nationalists on 20 October 1931. Obviously, the KKK did not want to leave the anti-colonial struggle to the nationalists and the Church.

Vatiliotis was arrested in Nicosia on 25 October, when he was delivering a pro-*enosis* speech; Skeleas was arrested a day later in Limassol with pamphlets demanding autonomy. Obviously, the KKK leaders had their own thoughts about the right course. The colonial authorities deported the two KKK leaders to Britain.

5. Comintern Intervention and Illegality

This unauthorized move brought about an intervention by the Comintern. At the beginning of the year 1931 the 11th Plenum of the Executive Committee of the Comintern had accepted the KKK as a member. It is not clear if the KKK's subordination to the KKE was abrogated at that point, but later developments suggest that this was

¹⁷ AKEL, AKEL. *To Komma tou Ergazomenou Laou* (Nicosia, 1976), p. 61; according to *Internationale Presse-Korrespondenz* the manifesto appealed to the workers and peasants to boycott the festivities, to rise against the imperialist oppressors and the local betrayers of their classes and to fight for a workers' and peasants' government. *Inprekorr*, Nr.93 (1928), p. 1736.

¹⁸ *Communism in Cyprus*, p. 5

not the case. Whether the Comintern intervention after the October events took place in connection with its intervention during the 4th Plenum of the KKE in December 1931, or whether there was a parallel intervention in Cyprus, is unknown.¹⁹ The fact is that from then on the KKK was placed under the supervision of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), and on 17 December 1931, *Inprekorr* published the following statement by Vasiliotis and Skeleas in London: "The Communist Party will struggle for the fulfillment of the immediate economic demands of the workers and peasants, for the exposure of the betrayal of the 'National-Unionist' leaders and their counter-revolutionary slogan [*enosis*], for the united front against imperialism of the toiling Turks and Greeks, for the Free Workers' and Peasants' Soviet Republic of Cyprus."²⁰ In other words, the Comintern and the CPGB were forcing a course upon the KKK, that was so contrary to Cypriot public opinion, that it would have been ruinous for the party, had it been made public. Fortunately for the KKK, however, the British suppressed the party and thus spared it from self-destruction.

After the disturbances, the colonial authorities introduced repressive measures on the island. Trade unions and associations of any kind were prohibited. The KKK, as well as seven front organizations, were proscribed in August 1933. For the next ten years Cypriot communists had to work underground. During the ensuing months, twenty-eight leading communists were brought to court on charges of seditious conspiracy and sentenced to terms of up to four years imprisonment. Vatis and Skeleas were exiled. Only a handful of those who had gone underground remained free. Many left Cyprus and took refuge in London. After the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, sixty of them joined the International Brigades and fought in the ranks of the British Battalion. Among them was the later Secretary General of the AKEL, Ezekias Papaioannou. Fourteen Cypriot communists paid for their participation with their lives.

In 1935, the KKK, which at that time counted less than sixty members, came under the energetic leadership of Ploutis Servas. Servas was born in Limassol. During his grammar school days he came into contact with communist ideas, and in 1924, at the age of 16, he organized the first communist pupils' group of Cyprus at the Limassol grammar school. He took part in the first party congress as one of the representatives of the party's youth movement. In 1928 he was among the leading figures of the party. A year later, he went to Greece and from there to Moscow. Between 1931 and 1934 he was editor of a Greek newspaper in Marioupolis (Mariupol; after 1948 Shdanov) in the Ukraine. In 1934 he returned to Greece to do illegal work in Kokkinia in Athens. In September 1935, the right-wing Greek government deported him to Cyprus. The colonial authorities allowed him to return, despite the fact that under the 1931 Defense Regulations he had been banned from Cyprus. They made him sign an undertaking that from then on he would refrain from communist and political propaganda and activities. Servas signed and went to work.²¹

In 1936, the colonial government of Cyprus reduced the repression and allowed the formation of unions. The KKK General Secretary Servas used this chance and ordered his comrades to organize crypto-communist unions. He instructed them to keep a low political profile, but make every effort to promote the union movement. Up to the beginning of the Second World War, he managed to organize almost four thousand workers in various unions. In August 1939, the unions held their first Pan-Cypriot Union Congress.²² In 1940 the unions united in the Pan-Cypriot Trades Union Committee (*Pankypria Syntechniaki Epitropi*; PSE). During the same period the Cypriot communists also managed to build up peasant organization in the villages.

In spite of the progression of the union movement, the party remained an outlawed sectarian group. In June 1937, the colonial authorities got hold of the first issue of a clandestine bulletin of the KKK, containing information about efforts to revive the party. In 1938 the CPGB claimed that the KKK had been reorganized and was being given every assistance. Later in the same year, Servas was prosecuted and convicted for having in his possession a printing machine without an official permit. Shortly before the war, the KKK counted sixty members. Servas understood that the KKK could not be revitalized. The British would not allow its legalization.

¹⁹ *Inprekorr* which contains substantial information about the KKE is rather silent about the KKK.

²⁰ *Inprekorr*, Nr. 118 (December 1931), p. 2712.

²¹ This undertaking should not be confused with the *diloseis* which Greek communists were forced to sign under the Metaxas dictatorship, whereby they had to denounce communism. Servas at first refused to sign, but when he was kept aboard the ship, sailing on for twenty days, he contacted the KKK. It was under the explicit advice of the Central Committee that he signed the undertaking.

²² "Diakiryxi tis K.E. gia ta 60 Chronia tou KKK-AKEL", *Neos Dimokratias*, 91 (1986), p. 6f.

Since 1931 its image had been bad, and it became even worse in 1939 and 1940, when it was evident that the KKK were slavishly following the swaying Comintern course.

6. Towards Democratic Socialism: the Founding of the AKEL

When the Second World War began, the British repression relaxed. The colonial authorities announced municipal elections for the year 1943, which implicitly meant that political parties would be recognized. The message was understood immediately among the various political groups. In a conversation between Servas and Georgios Vasiliadis, a lawyer who was close to the Church/Ethnarchy, the latter came up with the idea to create a new party. It was clear that such a party could not fight for the independence of Cyprus or for *enosis*, but it could contend for the improvement of the life of the people of the island.

This disclosure caused Servas to act. Since his appointment as Secretary General of the KKK in 1935, it had been his task to fight for the legalization of the Communist Party, an assignment which under the prevailing conditions was simply illusory. Even after the British announcement, it was fairly clear that the colonial authorities would not accept parties which followed a course contrary to British aims, let alone a communist party. Servas was convinced that the very idea of legalizing the KKK had to be dropped. He appreciated Vasiliadis's proposal and merged it with his own concepts.

For some time he had endorsed the opinion that only a new party, with a broad basis yet secretly under communist control, could possibly play a leading role in the future and compete with the Church/Ethnarchy in the anti-colonial struggle. It is not known when Servas had presented his ideas to the CC of the KKK, but as he had previously assured himself of the support of the KKE and CPGB, he succeeded in extracting a CC-resolution to found a new party.

This, however, provoked the hardliners in the KKK, who had been watching Servas' union policy with misgivings. They now suspected Servas of right-wing deviationism and were determined to keep control over the new party from the beginning. The more liberal-minded wing of the KKK, which mostly consisted of intellectuals, appreciated Servas's ideas and wanted to prevent the known hard-core members from participating in the launching congress at all. Servas was an intellectual himself and shared their views. However, he knew the strength of the orthodox wing, and, not wanting to provoke their total opposition, decided to include some of the hardliners.

On April 14, 1941, with the permission of the colonial authorities, he called a meeting in the village of Skarinou. Servas had invited lawyers, doctors, and other prestigious personalities who had studied abroad. Of the thirty-six persons present, twenty-two were communists of either trend. The rest were progressive intellectuals and even former nationalists. Among them were Georgios Vassiliadis, Zenon Rossidis and Lefkios Zenon, who would later hold eminent government posts.²³ After the discussions, the participants ratified the charter (Memorandum of Association) of the new party (AKEL) and elected a Pan-Cypriot Organizing Committee as well as local committees for the biggest towns. It was decided that the principles governing the new party would be published later. It was regretted that no Turkish Cypriot had been able to attend the meeting and that only a small number of peasants had participated. The assembly decided that the AKEL as a party should not take part in the next municipal elections. Finally, it was stated that the AKEL had a democratic, anti-fascist and anti-hitlerite character, and that it was in full accord with the ongoing struggle against violence and despotism.²⁴ By clever manoeuvring Servas succeeded in having only candidates of his liking elected to the various committees. This, of course, infuriated the KKK veterans. The Cypriot right-wing press reacted against the new political force ridicule and denouncements. This induced the more cautious bourgeois intellectuals to withdraw from the AKEL.

After Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union and the establishment of an alliance between Great Britain and the USSR, Servas decided to exploit the new situation. On October 5, 1941, - again with the permission of the colonial authorities - the AKEL held its first congress in Limassol. Apparently the congress adopted the statutes and the program. In the program it was stated that the AKEL believed in democratic centralism, party discipline

²³ Vasiliadis became Chief Justice of the Cyprus High Court; Zenon served as a judge; and Rossidis was Cypriot ambassador to Washington.

²⁴ AKEL, *AKEL*, p. 48.

and unity, and detested factionalism and fractionalism.²⁵ In other words, the AKEL became the second Leninist party of Cyprus. Servas was once again elected General Secretary.

Thus installed, he went to work. Years later, after he had been ousted from the AKEL, the criticism of the new orthodox leaders was devastating. They claimed that he had shown respect for neither Politbureau resolutions, Central Committee, nor congresses. He allowed the emergence of factions and had even formed a faction for himself. The anti-Servas faction stated: "Instead of educating the members properly by example, for an entire period he has proved to be the demon of the party: undisciplined, and an underminer of the unity of the party." Finally they denounced Servas for having introduced the so-called democratic revolution into the party, i.e. the rebellion of the rank and file against the leadership.²⁶ Servas had obviously practiced a democratic style of leadership which was alien to the veterans. It is unclear, however, which resolutions Servas did not obey, most probably those of the still existing KKK-structures.

The strength of Servas's position in the AKEL became evident during the second AKEL congress in 1942, when he was able to make *enosis* one of the aims of the party. Shortly after the foundation of the AKEL, the hard-core members had tried to bring the party under their control by a Politbureau resolution ordering the removal of the party's headquarters from Limassol to Nicosia, where the KKK had its seat. Their efforts had little effect, however.

In 1943 he violated one of the resolutions of the founding congress, by deciding that the AKEL should participate in the municipal elections. Following his lead, the party put up candidates everywhere, and he allowed himself to be nominated as candidate for the mayor's seat of Limassol. Servas was elected, as was the AKEL candidate in Famagusta. In other towns, the AKEL missed election victories by a narrow margin. Servas's enemies in the KKK and the AKEL fumed.

Later in 1943 he propelled the AKEL even further into national affairs. Before the Italian attack on Greece, the KKK had made propaganda against the recruitment of Cypriots into the British forces.²⁷ When the Greek army fought successfully against the invaders, however, the Cypriot public reacted enthusiastically, and thousands enlisted in the British army. Six thousand Cypriots are said to have fought in the British expeditionary force to Greece, and the KKK had no part in it.

For a variety of reasons, Servas regretted the abstention of the party. First of all, he believed it to be the duty of the AKEL to participate in the struggle against Fascism. Secondly, he sought to ingratiate the AKEL with the British. If the Cypriots participated in the war, Britain would be obliged to make concessions afterwards. Third, enlistment in the army might free him of some of his opponents. Fourth, the enlisted AKEL members might indoctrinate their future comrades and win them for the party's cause. Fifth, it was intended as a kind of antidote against Axis propaganda, which was propagating *enosis*. Thus, on 16 June 1943, the Central Committee of the AKEL published a resolution which asked its members to volunteer for the British army, to strengthen the struggle for the liberation of Greece, for the liberation of other countries, and for the national, political and social future of the island. Indeed, eleven of the seventeen members of the Central Committee and seven hundred of the rank and file of the AKEL volunteered.

During the same period, the AKEL considerably increased its influence on the workers. By 1943, the PSE controlled unions with a total membership of 13,000. In the same year, Andreas Ziartidis was elected General Secretary of the PSE, and the AKEL voted him onto its Central Committee, making the well-organized unions the basis of the AKEL. The AKEL did not stop here, but organized the peasants (Union of Cypriot Farmers, *Enosi Agrotou Kyprou*; EAK) as well, and even managed to attract shopkeepers and other middle-class Cypriots. Cultural and sports organizations completed the picture.

The successful development of the resistance movement in Greece seemed to corroborate Servas's course. By 1944, he considered his position strong enough to reshuffle the Central Committee. He appointed more moderates and ousted some of the hardliners. Thereupon he proposed the dissolution of the KKK. This step brought the old guard to the brink of rage. Grinding their teeth, the KKK veterans had no choice but to accept the compromise offered by Servas: the admittance of some of the KKK-Central Committee members to the Central Committee of the AKEL and the merging of the two parties. Thus in the autumn of 1944, the AKEL could come to the fore as the communist party of Cyprus.

²⁵ Andreas Fantis, "I Pali tou AKEL gia tin Epikratisi kai ton Sevasko ton Organotikon Archon tou Kommatos Neou Typou", *Neos Dimokratis*, 30 (July/August 1984), p. 8f.

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

²⁷ *Communism in Cyprus*, p. 10.

7. Towards a Mass Party

The resolution to dissolve the KKK and integrate its members into the AKEL proved to be the right decision. It freed the new party from the bonds of orthodoxy within and outside the party. The development was precisely the opposite of what took place in Greece. There, the KKE was outlawed in 1947, and after the KKE had lost the Civil War in 1949, its leaders fled to eastern Europe. When it became clear that the KKE would not be readmitted to political life for many years, it was decided in 1951 to set up the United Democratic Left (*Enomeni Dimokratiki Aristera*; EDA), in imitation of the Cypriots. However, unlike Servas, the EDA leadership never managed to free itself from the grip of the communist leadership. The members of the KKE joined the EDA, but never did give up their loyalty to the exiled KKE leaders. The latter soon lost touch with the post Civil War situation in Greece. Thus the EDA leaders, who were obliged to listen to orders from abroad could never steer a course of their own, one which corresponded to Greek reality. The long-standing EDA-leader Ilias Iliou could be heard complaining that the non-Stalinists within the EDA had never had the clarity of mind of the Cypriots, who had absorbed the communist party.

Indeed, under the successful leadership of Ploutis Servas, the AKEL had, through the unions, developed a mass basis previously unknown to the KKK. Despite lip-service to Leninist principles the AKEL was in reality steering a reformist course. It was developing rapidly into a popular democratic socialist party. It can be said that the AKEL, freed from the influence of the Comintern, underwent a development similar to that of the KKE in Greece during the occupation.

During the war years, the hard-liners had been made to yield. But they did not forget. When the Cold War broke out, they took revenge. Servas was purged and the mandatory process of bolshevization which had been interrupted in the early 1930s was carried through. The AKEL was led back to the path of orthodoxy and thereby came again for many years under the control of forces outside of Cyprus.