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The Greek Communist Party and the Communist International

1. Economic and social conditions of the development of the Greek Communist movement

As in all other countries, the specific features of the Greek social system and the conditions of the country's economy had a distinctive influence on the beginnings of the Labour movement. The following table gives an idea of the economic conditions prevailing in Greece.

	1861	1870	1879	1907	1920	1928
Primary sector						
agriculture	74.0	74.8	69.9	66.3	70.0	68.3
Secondary sector						
industry/craft	10.0	10.3	11.8	12.8	13.1	14.7
Tertiary sector	16.0	14.9	18.3	20.9	16.0	17.0
trade/banking/traffic	6.1	6.3	7.3	11.1	9.2	10.7
private services	3.9	3.8	5.2	3.4	2.2	1.9
army & public service	4.4	3.4	3.9	3.2	2.0	1.5
professions	1.6	1.4	1.9	3.2	2.6	2.9

Source: Marios Nikolinakos, "Materialien zur kapitalistischen Entwicklung Griechenlands. Teil 1", *Das Argument*, 12:2/3 (1970), p. 213.¹

It must be noted that this table is misleading to a certain degree, because the secondary sector includes people working in the tiniest shops. In 1920 there were 34,892 industrial enterprises, of which 31,987 had less than five workers. Of the remaining 2,905 "factories", only 492 employed more than twenty-six workers. According to West European standards, this could hardly be called industry. Greece was in fact an agricultural country with some trade.²

Migration from the countryside resulted in a rapid growth of the towns. The living conditions in Athens and Piraeus became intolerable. In 1920 five to six people shared one room. And this was idyllic compared with catastrophic conditions two years later when 1.5 million refugees from Asia Minor poured into the country. Within a very short time the population of Athen/Piraeus almost doubled (1920: 453,042; 1928: 802,000). Almost needless to say that the infrastructure of the capital could not keep pace with this development. In 1928 39% of the refugees were without a job. A totally unjust tax system hit the poor especially hard: 42% of the income of a peasant or worker family was appropriated by indirect taxes. In 1939 the yearly per capita income of a Greek amounted to \$ 75; in Great Britain the comparative figure was \$ 469. Between the wars, Greece was one of the poorest countries of Europe.

Greece was also politically unstable. In 1909 the old political system had become so thoroughly rotten that a kind of Young Turk rebellion took place in the armed forces. This rebellion is known as the Revolution of Goudi. The officers, wise enough not to try to run the country themselves, called the liberal politician Eleftherios Venizelos to the fore. In 1910 and 1911 Venizelos reformed the Greek state, i.e. he modernized outdated structures and updated the constitution. Beginning social unrest was channeled by creating paternalistic unions and bringing these under the tutelage of the liberal party.

During the First World War the country was deeply split. The King wanted to side with the Central Powers, while Venizelos strongly believed in the ultimate victory of the *Entente*. Venizelos was right, and in the peace treaty of Sèvres he won a big portion of Asia Minor for Greece. Unfortunately, his royalist successor

¹ Parts of this table are reproduced in Panagiotis Noutsos, "Greece", in Marcel van Linden and Jürgen Rojahn (eds.), *The Formation of Labour Movements 1870-1914. An International Perspective*, 2 vols. (Leiden, etc.: E. J. Brill, 1990), 1, p. 440.

² The general setback of the trends noticed in all three sectors after 1907 was caused by the Balkan Wars, by which Greece's national territory increased by 68% and the population by 67%. These gains were agrarian. Consequently, they diminished the growth of the industrial sector.

gambled away the gains: he started a war against Kemal Atatürk's resurgent Turkey, and, being without allies, lost it. The price was paid by the Greeks of Asia Minor: 1.5 million of them were driven out of land.

Greece now became a republic. But this republic was even more unstable than the Weimar Republic. Governments rarely stayed in power longer than a few months. There were coups and short-lived dictatorships. The electorate were called to the polls seven times between 1924 and 1936. At each election, the electoral system was changed. During the same period, there were two plebiscites on the form of government. In 1935 the monarchy was restored by a fraudulent plebiscite, and in 1936 a Fascist dictatorship³ was erected by King Georg II and General Ioannis Metaxas. The most astonishing feature of this period, however, was that not even the Asia Minor Catastrophe was able to destroy the old two-party system which had emerged during the First World War. Even the refugees kept voting for the bourgeois parties which had created the disaster. A majority of them continued to support Venizelos.

This brings us to a specific feature of the Greek political system. When the modern Greek state was created in 1832, it developed political structures and a political culture alien to Europe.⁴ In the context of this study, one of the multi-faceted features of this political culture is of major interest: Greece's clientelistic system. Its roots reach back into the time of the Ottoman Empire. During the 400 years of Turkish rule it had become "customary" for the local notable to intercede with the authorities on behalf of his fellow citizens. This role gave added prestige, power, and wealth; the villagers gained a sponsor and security. There was some reciprocity, since it was recognized that the notable had a right to call on the service or loyalty of those for whom he did favors. Conversely, the notable had an obligation to protect the interests of those who entered into this relationship [...].⁵ In the final analysis, this system served to protect the individual and his family against extra-community forces, i.e. against infringements by Ottoman power bearers.

However, after 1821 this system's character changed radically. From then on clientelism was used to tie the individual to the political system. The previous "patron-protectors" began to involve themselves in politics as party leaders and soon found that their clientelistic networks could be used for exerting political power. The client's original desire for physical security gave way to aspirations for social protection or promotion. The patrons soon discovered that in return for favours granted to their clients, they would gain their votes. Thus, in the 19th century a highly sophisticated system of favoritism, nepotism, patronage, and favors or *rousfetia* (fulfillment of voters' wishes by legal or illegal means) was created, which kept the clientèle together. At the same time many patrons discovered that there were others who were even more powerful. They subordinated themselves to these and became part of their clientelistic network. At the beginning of the 20th century, two rivaling clientelistic pyramids existed which vaguely resembled European conservatives and liberals.

The state machinery became the object of the patrons' exploitative greed and its various branches were ruined by job haggling, corruption, and a spoils system. The parties which resulted from this system of "political procuring", as it was characterized by a deputy towards the end of the 19th century, had no party program, organization or congresses, let alone internal democracy. The party bosses were the absolute overlords of their organizations. Conflicts within a party led to the splitting of whole clientelistic networks and, finally, to factionalism. The Greek voter did not vote for the policy of a party, but against the party which had not done him the expected favour (*rousfeti*). Accordingly, a party leader's clientèle grew or shrank according to his success or failure.

The population growth which slowly led to urbanization had almost no effect on this system. Not even when the process of industrialization accompanied by capitalist exploitation showed the first flaws was the system noticeably shaken. In fact, the exploited sought remedy from their patrons. The idea of turning against them never occurred to them. The Great Depression and the political crisis towards the end of the (Venizelist) republic were needed to deliver a first blow to the system. The fascist dictatorship between 1936 and 1941 beheaded and paralyzed the clientelistic networks by arresting and deporting the patrons. The bewildered clients were left alone and started to look for new guidance. The occupation of Greece by the Axis powers created a political vacuum which was filled by the Communist Party.

³ On the Fascist character of the regime, see note 45.

⁴ Heinz Richter, "Zwischen Tradition und Moderne: Die politische Kultur Griechenlands", in Peter Reichel (ed.), *Politische Kultur in Westeuropa. Bürger und Staaten in der Europäischen Gemeinschaft* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1984), pp. 145-166.

⁵ Keith R. Legg, *Politics in Modern Greece* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969), p. 34.

The Greek Communist Party (*Kommounistiko Komma Elladas*; KKE) was the only political factor totally alien to the clientelistic system, introducing unknown elements of European political culture such as party programme or party discipline and, above all, offering no *rousfetia*. When investigating the history of the KKE, six distinctly different periods seem to be discernible between its founding in 1918 and the dissolution of the Comintern in 1943. They may be characterized by the following headings: convulsions of birth, 1918-1920; factional strife, 1920-1924; bolshevization, 1924-1931; intervention of the Comintern and subsequent Stalinization, 1931-1936; struggle for survival against the fascist dictatorship of Metaxas, 1936-1941; resistance and development towards a mass movement, 1941-1944.

2. Available Sources

Until 1974, research on the history of KKE was seriously impeded by the fact that the party had been outlawed since December 1947. Most party publications after the end of the Civil War (1949) appeared somewhere in Eastern Europe under the name Political and Literary Editions (*Politikes kai Logotechnikes Ekdoseis*). Few found their way into Greece and almost none into a public library. During the colonels' dictatorship (1966-1974), all public libraries were thoroughly purged of the few remaining leftist books. Nowhere in Greece were publications by the KKE legally available. Material dealing with the interwar period no longer existed. It had been banned and burned during the Metaxas dictatorship (1936-1940), and the little which may have had survived the onslaught of the secret police had disappeared after 1947. Only with great difficulty was it possible to trace some private collections and get access to them. The party's archives were inaccessible as they were located somewhere in Eastern Europe, most probably in Bucharest. When the KKE was preparing a series of documentations in the 1960s, parts of the archives were moved to Skopje. Their present whereabouts are unknown.

Scholarly research on a communist or leftist topic in Greece proper was non-existent for two reasons: official historians considered contemporary history (*Zeitgeschichte*) to be current politics and therefore unscholarly and the Greek state did everything possible to discourage research and historiography in this field. It did, however, inspire the publication of pseudo-scholarly studies on the KKE which were, in effect, scarcely more than anti-communist propaganda.⁶ The same purpose was served by publishing accounts of the KKE-renegades.⁷ In our context these are irrelevant, however.

Research outside Greece was arid. In the US there appeared a monograph on the history of the SEKE/KKE which, regrettably, was written from an extreme cold war position.⁸ Another American study scrutinized the Greek trade union movement.⁹ The development of the social question in the 19th and 20th centuries was the topic of a study published in the Federal Republic of Germany.¹⁰ The first account of the party's history from a KKE point of view appeared in 1945, when secretary general Nikos Zachariadis made a first effort to interpret the KKE history.¹¹ The first concise official party chronicle appeared in 1952¹² and was

⁶ See, for example, Athanasios Pavlopoulos, *Istoria tou Kommounismou en Elladi* (Athens: Geografiki Ypiresia Stratou, 1967).

⁷ See, for example, Theofylaktos Papakonstantinou, *Anatomia tis Epanastaseos* (Athens, 1952).

⁸ D. George Kousoulas, *Revolution and Defeat. The Story of the Greek Communist Party* (London, New York: Oxford University Press, 1965).

⁹ Christos Jecchinis, *Trade Unionism in Greece. A Study in Political Paternalism* (Chicago: Labour Education Division, Roosevelt University, 1967).

¹⁰ Basil P. Mathiopoulos, *Die Geschichte der sozialen Frage und des Sozialismus in Griechenland, 1821-1961* (Hannover: Verlag für Literatur und Zeitgeschehen, 1961).

¹¹ Nikos Zachariadis, *Theseis gia tin Istoria tou KKE* (Athens: KE tou KKE, 1945; reprinted in Eastern Europe 1950; Athens: Gnoseis, 1975)

soon followed by a lengthier history.¹³ The next effort for a party history was made by the KKE in 1978.¹⁴ All of them were rather uncritical and reflected little more than the prevailing ideological outlook.

After 1974 the situation changed radically. Immediately after the fall of the junta, the Karamanlis government legalized the KKE. The taboo which had hindered research for decades fell. During the ensuing years a kind of literary explosion took place in Greece: memoirs, reminiscences, articles, monographs and all kinds of reprints appeared in ever increasing numbers. The focus, however, was on the period of national resistance. The earlier period was still scarcely considered by historical researchers, but since most of the earlier party documentations and histories were being reproduced, the source situation improved considerably. The fact that since 1968 there had been two communist parties in Greece (the orthodox KKE and the Eurocommunist KKE *esoterikou*) furthered research as well, since both KKEs published documentations based on parts of the party's archives. These documentations sometimes diverged substantially, especially with regard to the late resistance period and the beginning of the civil war. But there are some memoirs of members of the Eurocommunist KKE which have proven helpful in our context.

A few years ago, the KKE set up an institute of Marxist studies (*Kentron Marxistikon Erevnon*) in Athens, where most of the reprinted material is now available. Researchers hoping to find controversial or sensitive material, however, will be unsuccessful. The party's archives are still outside Greece. There are a few private collections, which are accessible with difficulty. Government sources, especially police records, exist, but are in bad order and may only be consulted after 50 years, if at all.

In 1984 the present author published the first and so far only comprehensive bibliography on Greek communism, socialism and trade unionism,¹⁵ which lists more than 1,700 titles dealing with these topics. The entries dealing with the history of the KKE until 1941, however, scarcely exceed 120. These include party documents, monographs, memoirs, biographies, articles in periodicals, essays in books, dissertations, and pamphlets.

Despite these impediments, the primary source situation, as far as official party documentation is concerned, has actually not been bad - provided the publications could be traced.¹⁶ Secondary sources, such

¹² KKE (ed.), *Chroniko tou Agona, 1878-1951. Dokoumenta kai ylika apo tin Istoria tou Laikou mas Kinimatos* (n. p., 1952; reprinted: Athens: Na Ypiretoume to Lao, 1975). Its author was Vasilis Bartziotas.

¹³ KKE (ed.), *Voithimata gia tin Istoria tou KKE* (n. p., 1952; reprinted: Athens: Ekdoseis tou Laou, 1975, and: Koinonikes Ekdoseis, 1978). The author was again Vasilis Bartziotas.

¹⁴ KKE (ed.), *Exinta Chronia Agonon kai Thyseon, Vol 1: 1918-1945* (Athens, 1978).

¹⁵ Heinz A. Richter, "Greek Communism, Socialism and Trade Unionism", in Heinz A. Richter, *Greece and Cyprus since 1920. Bibliography of Contemporary History* (Heidelberg: Nea Hellas, 1984), pp. 263-325.

¹⁶ In 1947 KKE published its first two-volume documentation dealing with the period from the party's foundation until the intervention of the Comintern: KKE (ed.), *To KKE apo to 1918 eos to 1931*, Vol 1: *To KKE apo to 1918 eos to 1925* (Athens, 1947) and Vol 2: *To KKE apo to 1926 eos to 1931* (Athens, 1947). The crucial period of Stalinization was covered by another volume: KKE (ed.), *Pente Chronia Agones 1931-1936* (Athens, 1936; reprinted: Athens, 1946). Yet another book deals with the years 1935 to 1945: KKE (ed.), *Deka Chronia Agones 1935-1945* (Athens, 1945; reprinted: Athens: Poreia, 1977). In 1953, after the end of the Civil War, the KKE published a source book for the years 1931 to 1952: KKE (ed.), *To KKE apo to 1931 os to 1952. Vasika Dokoumenta* (n. p., 1953). In 1958 the first comprehensive documentation of the party history was published: KKE (ed.), *Saranta Chronia tou KKE, 1918-1958. Epilogi Dokoumenton* (n.p., 1958; reprinted: n.p. [Athens?], 1964). In the 1960s KKE published a documentary series covering the period to the Second World War: KKE (ed.), *To Kommounistiko Komma tis Elladas. Episima Keimena*, Vol 1: *1918-1924* (n.p., 1964; reprinted: Athens: Synchroni Epochi, 1974), Vol 2: *1925-1928* (n.p., 1965; reprinted: Athens: Synchroni Epochi, 1974), Vol 3: *1929-1933* (n.p., 1966; reprinted: Athens: Synchroni Epochi, 1974), and Vol 4: *1934-1940* (n.p., 1968). This series of documentation will be quoted as: *Episima Keimena*. For the resistance period there are two volumes of this series, one published by KKE Esoterikou and the other by KKE: KKE esoterikou (ed.), *To Kommounistiko Komma tis Elladas. Episima Keimena*, Vol 5: *1940-1945* (Rome, 1973; reprinted: Athens, 1974); KKE (ed.), *To Kommounistiko Komma tis Elladas. Episima Keimena*, Vol 5: *1940-1945* (Athens, 1981). Most of the documentations appearing after 1974 are compilations and

as memoirs and reminiscences dealing with the period until 1931, are scarce.¹⁷ The same holds true for the years up to the the Second World War.¹⁸ The resistance period, however, is characterized by abundance.¹⁹

In 1974 a *Unità* journalist with intimate knowledge of the KKE, Antonio Solaro, presented a story of the KKE from a Euro-communist position. Despite lack of sources, Solaro's account was a valuable contribution as it shed light on certain controversial episodes of the party's past.²⁰ The multi-volume history by Katsoulis, on the other hand, was written from a position very close to the KKE and is methodologically little more than a compilation of well-known party documents linked by accompanying text.²¹

However, even after 1974, historical research by non-communist historians dealing with the period under consideration has been scarce. Elefantis's account²² of the interwar period is a noteworthy exception, although, strictly speaking, it is not a party history. The pre-history of the KKE was analyzed by a Greek-American historian.²³ The story of the KKE from its foundation to the dictatorship is still awaiting its historian. The KKE-Comintern connection has not been scrutinized at all.²⁴

reproductions of earlier editions, but they are obtainable, whereas most of the earlier documentations have vanished.

¹⁷ The most important are the memoirs of two former party secretaries: Avraam Benarogia, *I Proti Stadiodromia tou Ellinikou Proletariatou* (Athens: Olkos, 1975); Eleftherios Stavridis, *Ta Paraskinia tou KKE. Airetai to Parapetasma tou KKE apo tis Idryseos tou mechri ton Symmoritopolemon* (Athens, 1953). Some information may be gathered from A. Stinas, *Anamniseis. 60 Chronia kato apo ti Simasia ths Sosialistikis Epanastasis*, 2 vols. (Athens: Vergos, 1977).

¹⁸ Only the more important ones are mentioned. Vasilis Bartziotas, *Ki' Astrapse Fos i Akronafplia!* (Athens: Synchroni Epochi, 1977) and *Stis Fylakes kai tis Exories* (Athens: Kastaniotis, 1978); Giannis Manousakas, *O Chalasmos. Apo to Chorio stin Akronafplia* (Athens: Dorikos, 1978) and *Akronafplia. Thrylos kai Pragmatikotita* (Athens: Kapopoulos, 1975); Dimitrios Michelidis, *O Skliros Dromos. Ena Chroniko pou Apokathista tin Alitheia sto Diastima tis Paranomioas tou KKE kata tin 4i Avgoustou* (Athens: Tolidis, 1983); Pavlos Nefeloudis, *Stis Piges tis Kakodaimonias. Ta Vathytera Aitia tis Diaspasis tou KKE* (Athens: Gutenberg, 1975); Vasilis A. Nefeloudis, *Martyries 1906-1938* (Athens, 1984); Mitsos Palaiologopoulos, *Ellines Antifasistes Ethelontes ston Ispaniko Emfylio Polemo* (Athens, 1977); Avra Partsalidis, *Anamniseis apo ti Zoi tis OKNE* (Athens: Synchroni Epochi, 1976); Stratis Someritis, *I Megali Kampi. Martyries - Anamniseis 1924-1974, Vol 1: Apo ti Dimokratia sto Fasismo 1924-1941* (Athens: Olkos, 1975).

¹⁹ See Richter, *Greece and Cyprus*, pp. 104-116, 276-277.

²⁰ Antonio Solaro, *Storia del Partito Comunista Greca* (Milano: Teti Editore, 1974; Greek edition: *Istoria tou Kommounistikou Komma Elladas*, Athens: Pleias, 1977).

²¹ Giorgis Katsoulis, *Istoria tou KKE*, 7 vols. (Athens: Nea Synora, 1976-78).

²² Angelos G. Elefantis, *I Epangelia tis Adynatis Epanastasis. KKE kai Astismos ston Mesopolemo* (Athens: Olkos, 1976).

²³ George B. Leon, *The Greek Socialist Movement and the First World War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976; Greek edition: *To Elliniko Sosialistiko Kinima kata ton Proto Pankosmio Polemo*, Athens: Exantas, 1978); a short version is "The Greek Labour Movement and the Borgeois State, 1910-1920", *The Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora*, 4:4 (Winter 1978), pp. 5-29.

²⁴ A first approach may be found in Heinz A. Richter, *Griechenland im Zwanzigsten Jahrhundert*, Vol I: *Megali Idea - Republik - Diktatur* (Köln: Romiosini, 1990).

3. Convulsions of Birth, 1918-1920

The first name of the Greek communist party was Socialist Workers' Party of Greece (*Socialistiko Ergatiko Komma Elladas*; SEKE). The SEKE was founded in November 1918 in the aftermath of the First Panhellenic Trades Union Congress in October 1918.

Provoked by labour unrest in 1911, the liberal government of Venizelos had established a system of paternalistic control over the tiny unions now emerging, by introducing the French organization system (*bourse du travail*). Right from the beginning, the Worker Centres became part of the Venizelist party clientèle network. In 1914 the right to form a union was established, and, simultaneously, control by the state and the Venizelist party increased. Nevertheless socialist ideas spread among the Greek trade unions. These remained local and extremely fragmented, however, until the end of the First World War. During the first congress, three political trends were discernible; the so-called reformists adhered to the Venizelist paternalistic system and opposed any political activity by the unions; the two other groups represented the right and left-wings of the socialist trend. They propagated class struggle and rejected any state intervention. As the socialists formed the majority in the congress, the statutes of the General Trade Unions League (*Geniki Synomospondia Ergaton Elladas*; GSEE) clearly reflected their influence.

Despite this initial success the original fragmentation continued. The state-imposed election procedure of delegates to GSEE congresses encouraged the creation of mini-unions, which became easy prey for the rival political parties. Thus, all the negative features of the clientèle system were introduced into the unions, which became a kind of unofficial state unions. By 1936 Greece counted several hundred trade unions.

Inspired by the Russian October Revolution in 1917, Greek socialists decided to found a nation-wide party. Until that date there had been few isolated socialist groups. The strongest was the Socialist Federation of Thessaloniki founded by Jewish intellectuals who had been in contact with the Second International before the First World War. Some days after the first GSEE-congress, a few unionists and left intellectuals founded the SEKE. They were idealistic leftists and their knowledge of socialism was limited. Accordingly, their programmatic resolutions became a colourful mixture of Marxist and liberal concepts, combined with Wilsonian idealism.²⁵

When in March 1919 the Comintern was created, trouble began. The left-wingers in the SEKE leadership demanded the severing of all contacts with the Second International and entry into the Comintern. In May, the Party Council (*Symvoulío tou Kommatos*) devised a compromise, by which it hoped to postpone the split for the time being: contacts with the Second International were to be broken off, and it was decided to get in touch with the Comintern. The final decision of adherence would be taken by the second party congress. In September, however, during another meeting of the Party Council, the left-wing majority decided to enter the Balkan Federation of Socialist Parties which had joined the Comintern a few months earlier. As this decision was finalized in anticipation of the resolutions of the second congress, the social-democratic president of the SEKE Aristos Arvanitis resigned and left the party. At the same Party Council it was decided to establish contact with the Comintern. The story of this first abortive mission to Moscow would form an ideal film plot, but is much too involved to be retold in this context.²⁶

In April 1920, the second SEKE congress convened. Since the Communist faction controlled the majority of the delegates, the decision to enter the Comintern was taken almost unanimously. According to the report of the Central Committee (CC), the SEKE counted approximately 1,000 members and the youth movement about 500. The congress also decided to change the party's name into SEKE (K) [*Kommounistiko*]. This decision caused the resignation of many leading socialist-oriented party members with their clientèle, and a split within the GSEE. The reformists created their own GSEE, within which two factions developed which soon became absorbed in ideological infighting. The Greek union movement was, de facto, paralyzed.

4. Factional Strife, 1920-1924

In the summer of 1920, the Second Congress of the Comintern put forward the notorious 21 conditions of

²⁵ The documents of the founding congress may be found in *Episima Keimena*, I, pp. 3-13.

²⁶ See Stavridis, *Paraskinia*, pp. 129ss and Lew Gkourvits, *Orion Alexakis* (Athens: Synchroni Epochi, 1979).

adherence. When these became known in Greece, they almost led to a split in the SEKE (K), as a considerable number of party members refused to submit to the leadership of the Comintern. In September 1920 the Comintern accepted the SEKE (K) as a member of the - renamed in the meantime - Communist Balkan Federation. Thus at the end of 1920, the SEKE (K) was only an indirect member of the Comintern. At the same time it became clear that the Balkan Federation would have a say in all matters of the Greek party. Within the party severe struggles were beginning.

In early 1921 three factions fought for control over the SEKE (K). The "extreme left" (N. Sargologos) propagated a revolutionary course. The "centre" (N. Dimitratos) demanded cooperation with the Venizelists and the dropping of revolutionary activities. The "right" (G. Georgiadis, Giannis Kordatos, Avraam Benarogia, P. Dimitratos) steered a more social-democratic course. Still another line was propagated by the owner of the party newspaper Giannis Petsopoulos. In order to settle the conflict, a delegation was sent to the Third Comintern Congress, which took place in June 1921. The Greek delegation was allowed to participate in the congress, but no leading representative of the Comintern received them. They met the Comintern responsible for the Balkans, Christian Rakovski, and the Secretary General of the Bulgarian party, Vasil Kolarov. When the Greeks asked for admission to the Comintern, they were told to purge their party of all dissidents and accept the 21 conditions. It was clear that the Comintern did not trust the Greeks, since they were obviously not proletarians but intellectuals. The delegation returned to Greece with a lot of propaganda material but little financial help.²⁷

In the meantime, the Greek-Turkish war was reaching its climax. The SEKE (K) organized an anti-war campaign which provoked repressive measures by the Greek government (Gounaris). In February 1922 the party's "centre" and "right" staged a coup, calling together the first Panhellenic party conference which was not provided for by the charter. As many from the "left" were at the front, the moderates had a majority and were able to carry through a social-democratic platform (participation in elections and parliament). From then on the party would regard the Comintern resolutions as historical documents which might serve the SEKE (K) as an orientation on the specifically Greek way towards socialism.²⁸ Kordatos was elected secretary of the CC. The takeover of the SEKE (K) by the moderates led to renewed factional strife among the rank and file, which even reached those at the front in Asia Minor.

In May 1922 the Executive Bureau of the Communist Balkan Federation met in Sofia. On that occasion, Vasil Kolarov deferred a resolution for the autonomy of Macedonia and Thrace, reasoning that the Bulgarian refugees resulting from the treaty of Neuilly would otherwise side with the IMRO. With this demand the Bulgarian party took over the positions of the bourgeois parties aiming at the creation of a greater Bulgaria. The representative of the SEKE (K), Petsopoulos, managed with great difficulties to hinder the passing of this resolution for the time being.²⁹ However, the Greek embassy in Sofia learned about the affair and informed the Athens government. Thus, when Petsopoulos returned to Athens, he and the whole SEKE (K) leadership were arrested.

During the ensuing months, the Greek-Turkish war ended in the "Asia Minor Catastrophe", and the population exchange between Greece and Turkey was agreed upon within the framework of the Lausanne peace treaty.

In November 1922 the second extraordinary SEKE (K) congress convened. Here, the "left" majority reversed the decisions of the Panhellenic party conference by reinforcing the decisions of the second congress. A new CC and CC-Secretary (Sargologos) were elected. Despite this, factional conflicts continued in 1923. Dissidents were fired from the party, and new members, especially from Asia Minor, recruited. Among the newcomers were Serafeim Maximos, who belonged to the International Workers' Union of the Comintern, and Pantelis Pouliopoulos, who would become CC-Secretary and was later denounced as a Trotskyist. In May 1923 the first Comintern emissary (Andrej Pestkovsky, CC-member of the CPSU) appeared in Athens to assist in overcoming the factional strife. Neither he nor the election congress in September 1923 were successful. A few comrades were thrown out of the party because of right-wing deviation, and Sargologos was replaced by T. Apostolidis, but the infighting continued.

In December 1923, during the sixth conference of the Balkan Federation in Moscow, the SEKE (K)

²⁷ Stavridis, *Paraskinia*, p. 32.

²⁸ *Episima Keimena*, I, p. 213.

²⁹ Giannis Petsopoulos, *Ta Pragmatika Aitia tis Diagrafis mou apo to KKE* (Athens, 1946), p. 47 and Benarogia, *I Proti Stadidromia*, p. 156.

received an almost lethal blow. At that time . Since the last meeting of the Federation, the Bulgarians had procured the assistance of Dimitrij Manuilskij and Christian Rakovski, of the Comintern leadership. Thus, when the conference began, the Greek delegate (Sargologos) and the Yugoslav were asked to agree to a resolution demanding an independent Macedonia and Thrace. The Yugoslav flatly refused. Sargologos, who had received no instructions, was blackmailed by the Russians into accepting it. When he returned to Athens, he was violently attacked. Totally frustrated and disillusioned, he emigrated to the United States.³⁰

The CC was split. *Rizospastis* editor Kordatos railed against the resolution: the proposition for an autonomous Macedonia and Thrace lacked any basis. Macedonia had been divided into three parts, and the Greek section (after the population exchange) was almost homogeneously populated by Greeks. Perhaps the proposition was useful for the Bulgarian party, but certainly not for the Greek. The CC were not ready to ruin the Greek party in order to protect the interests of the Bulgarian party.³¹ Maximos believed that the Comintern resolutions had to be obeyed. CC-Secretary Apostolidis steered a neutral course. It was decided to bring the whole matter before the Comintern once again.

The Macedonia policy of the Comintern intensified the factional conflicts within the SEKE (K). In February 1924 the Party Council met and replaced the leadership with a committee (Kordatos, Apostolidis, Maximos). Its task was to purge the party of all opportunists (social-democrats) and extremists (Trotskyists). In the months to follow, the "deviationists" left the party or were expelled, and founded their own organizations. These, however, degenerated quickly into sectarian groups without any role in Greek politics.

5. Bolshevization, 1924-1931

In June 1924 the Fifth Comintern Congress massively criticized the Greeks and Yugoslavs for their attitude towards the Macedonian question. When the Greek delegates (Pouliopoulos, Maximos) gave in, the congress left the matter to be settled at the seventh Balkan Federation conference, which was to follow the Comintern congress.³² There the Bulgarians scored full success. The position of the Yugoslavian and Greek parties was denounced as right-deviationist and liquidarist. Pouliopoulos and Maximos surrendered and signed the resolution. Knowing that pushing this decision through in the Greek party would lead to a major controversy, they asked for moral assistance from the other CPs.

This aid was indeed granted. In the spring of 1924, Greece and the Soviet Union had reestablished diplomatic relations. In June the first Soviet ambassador (A. M. Ustinov) appeared in Athens, to be followed by further diplomatic personnel and a number of graduates from the Communist University of the Workers of the East (*Kommunisticheskij Universitet Trudyashchaya Vostoka*; KUTV; 1921-1952). Western European communists were trained in the party high school at Sverdlovsk, but as the Soviets considered Greece an Eastern country, Greek communists received their training at the KUTV. The KUTVists, as the graduates were called in party jargon, were mostly Greeks who had grown up in Russia or Greeks from Asia Minor who had found their way to the Soviet Union after the Asia Minor Catastrophe. Among them was Nikos Zachariadis, who would later become Secretary General of the KKE. The Soviet embassy asked the SEKE (K) to employ the KUTVists in party work. The SEKE (K) leadership complied, though reluctantly, since they did not trust their loyalty. Indeed, these cadres felt loyalty only to their masters in Moscow. Soon they monopolized the contacts with the Soviet embassy and thus controlled the material aid flowing from Moscow to Athens.³³

When the Macedonia resolution became known to the party members, it created an uproar. In order to quell this, the Comintern sent two emissaries to the third extraordinary congress of the SEKE (K) in November 1924: Manuilskij and Secretary General of the Czechoslovak party and member of the Comintern Executive

³⁰ Stavridis, *Paraskinia*, pp. 175-180.

³¹ B. Kofos, *Nationalism and Communism in Macedonia* (Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1964), p. 74.

³² Joseph Rothschild, *The Communist Party of Bulgaria. Origins and Developments 1883-1936* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), p. 168.

³³ Andrew L. Zapantis, *Greek Soviet Relations, 1917-1941* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), pp. 169ss.

Committee Richard Šmeral.

This congress constitutes a milestone in the history of the party. The SEKE (K) was renamed KKE, the 21 conditions were accepted and the organizational structure was remodelled according to the CPSU pattern, i.e. the cell system was introduced. Pouliopoulos was elected new CC-Secretary. With massive help from the Comintern emissaries, the Macedonian policy of the Comintern was enforced.³⁴ But even then, the KKE hesitated to align itself publicly with this policy. When the first article appeared in *Rizospastis*, many members left the KKE, and in early 1925, after a further article, the Greek government had the KKE leadership arrested and brought to court for treason. However, before the trials began, the Pangalos dictatorship was established and the KKE outlawed. Clumsy management of the trials gave the accused the opportunity for propaganda. They were assisted in this by an international press campaign organized by the Comintern, which presented them as political martyrs.

Pangalos's anti-communist campaign played into the hands of the KUTVists. As most of the old party leaders were arrested, the KUTVists' influence grew: they had been trained for illegality, and thus many of them managed to escape the persecution of the police and soon controlled large sections of the party.

After the fall of the Pangalos dictatorship in August 1926, the conflict with the KUTVists began. CC Secretary Pouliopoulos resigned from his post and attacked the Macedonian policy: it had ruined the party and ought to be given up. Equally calamitous in his eyes was the growing influence of the KUTVists. They had no roots in the party and only aimed at bringing it under Moscow's control.

In the general elections of 7 December 1926, the KKE received 41,982 votes (4.38%) and, according to the proportional voting system applied, 10 deputies. In the previous elections (December 1923), under the majority system and politically totally different conditions, the SEKE (K) had won roughly 10,000 votes but no deputy. The increase of votes was caused by three factors: the proportional system was applied, meaning that the Greek voter did not waste his ballot if he voted for the KKE, the repressive measures by the dictatorship had provoked a protest reaction against the old clientelistic parties, and the KKE had not mentioned the Macedonian problem in the election campaign.

In the meantime Pouliopoulos continued his attacks. During an enlarged CC meeting in mid-December 1926, the KUTVists accused him of liquidarism. Pouliopoulos countered: the Macedonian policy would have serious consequences for the labour movement in Greece. It was unacceptable that any international institution decree the course of the various parties. In each country there were specific conditions. This was clearly a Trotskyite position, and the KUTVists had him condemned for factionalism and liquidarism. In February 1927 Kordatos sided with Pouliopoulos: the Macedonian policy and not the persecutions of the Greek government had delivered the *coup de grâce* to the KKE. The Greek workers regarded the Greek communists as allies of Bulgarian chauvinism. Kordatos and Pouliopoulos were right: in March 1927 the KKE counted 860 members.³⁵

Despite this distressing situation the fights between the factions continued. During the third party congress in March 1927, three factions became discernible: the "liquidarists" around Pouliopoulos, who had the support of the deputies, demanded that the Macedonian policy be dropped. They advocated the building of an efficient cadre structure prior to the enlargement of the mass basis. The KUTVists, assisted by the Comintern emissary and member of the CC of the German CP Hermann Remmele, aimed at sacking the "petit bourgeois intellectuals" and wanted to create a mass basis which they could control more easily. The "centrists" around Maximos took an opportunistic position. The KUTVists gained a partial victory. The Macedonian policy was declared obligatory, and it was decided to open the party to the mass influx of workers. These, however, showed rather little interest, since the KKE could offer no *rousfetia*. If the Comintern faction did not score full success, it was due to the KKE deputies, who threatened to lay down their mandates if the KUTVists tried to purge the "liquidarists".

In August 1927 the crisis reached its climax. Pouliopoulos made a frontal attack on the KUTVists, condemning Stalin's policy of socialism in one country as anti-Marxist and anti-Leninist, and openly siding with Trotsky, Sinoviev and Kamenev. The Stalinist Politbureau from which the "centrists" had resigned in June, fired him from the party and had his expulsion confirmed by the Comintern.³⁶ Now the KUTVists turned against the

³⁴ *Episima Keimena*, I, pp. 513-518.

³⁵ Rothschild, *The Communist Party of Bulgaria*, p. 238; Kofos, *Nationalism*, p. 81.

³⁶ *To KKE apo to 1931*, II, p. 220.

"centrists" around Maximos. The Comintern asked him to come to Moscow, which he wisely refused. In November 1927 the KKE Politbureau accused him of factionalism, but hesitated to sack him directly since this would mean the loss of deputies as well. The Stalinists found a better way: they started a campaign for the autonomy of Macedonia. The Greek government promptly lifted the parliamentary immunity of KKE deputies and sent them to trial. Although they were soon released, they lost control over their followers and the KUTVists were able to expel them from the CC at a meeting in February 1928. The Comintern agreed. At the same time plans were made to create a purely communist union.

In the elections of 19 August 1928, the KKE mustered 14,325 votes (1.41%), but, since the majority system was applied, no seats. The drop in votes was caused by a variety of factors. The Macedonian policy surely played a major role, but more important was the return of Venizelos to active political life. On the other hand, since under the majority system any vote for the KKE was a lost vote, many left voters transferred their votes to the liberals, under whom, moreover, *rousfetia* were possible.

Despite this election defeat, the purges continued. In December 1928 the fourth party congress attended by a Comintern delegation sacked all former deputies save one (Kostas Theos). The new Stalinist leadership under A. Chaitas approved the measures taken by the Comintern and the Soviet government against Trotsky. The Comintern emissary, in turn, congratulated the KKE for the successful purge of the party.

The ensuing two years were the blackest in the history of the KKE. In February 1929 the KKE founded - as planned - the communist union federation, United GSEE (*Enotiko GSEE*; EGSEE), which institutionalized the split of the Greek labour movement. This made it easier for the Greek government to persecute the communist unionists and reinforce state control over the non-communist unions. In March 1929 the Venizelos government introduced a bill (*Idionymo law - sui generis law*) which made agitation against the social order a crime. In July it became a law. Although the KKE denounced the law as fascist and the Comintern mobilized Europe's public opinion against the dictatorial situation in Greece, the repressive measures of Venizelos were rather mild, scarcely more than administrative hindrances to the party's work. If the KKE's star had sunk to its lowest point, it was not because of government persecution, but because of continuous internal strife.

The quarrels were not about ideological differences, but about personal rivalries in the top leadership. The fourth congress had demanded an increase in membership to 5,000. Instead, membership diminished. In March 1930 the KKE had 170 members in Athens and in red Piraeus only 70. The total membership was below 1,500. Not even when the worldwide economic crisis hit Greece could the KKE attract new members: when in August 1931 an anti-war demonstration which had been prepared for weeks took place, only 150 persons showed up. Quite rightly this period of KKE history is called the time of unprincipled opportunism.

The Comintern had been watching these fights with growing displeasure. In June 1929 a Comintern emissary tried in vain to lead the KKE back to the "right" way. In January 1930, during the third plenum, the communist deputy of the Reichstag and emissary of the Comintern Ernst Grube made another attempt to overcome the personal feuds, but the squabbles continued. Two groups were discernible in the exchange of accusations concerning the decline of the party: the Stalinist clique around Chaitas and a less orthodox and more nationally oriented circle around Theos and Georgios Siantos. In August 1931 the Greek police tried to arrest the KKE leaders. Though Chaitas was arrested, he managed to escape to Moscow, where in 1935 he was executed as a Trotskyist. Siantos had left for Moscow before the police raid. When Theos was caught in September, the KKE was leaderless.

6. Intervention of the Comintern and Stalinization, 1931-1936

In view of this desolate situation the Comintern decided to intervene directly in the internal affairs of KKE. In November 1931 a Comintern resolution analyzed the situation in Greece and made it known that the party had a new leadership.³⁷ In December the fourth plenum met, and, in the presence of a Comintern emissary (Henryk Walecki of the Polish CP), the KUTVist Nikos Zachariadis was installed as the new leader of the KKE.

As Zachariadis was to lead the party until 1956, a few words about his career seem appropriate. Zachariadis was born in Adrianople (Edirne) in 1903 as son of *petit bourgeois* parents. As his father often changed his place of work, he grew up in various towns in Ottoman Turkey. His formal education consisted of four years of primary school and one year of High School. From 1919 on, he worked in the Istanbul docks and, later, as a Black Sea sailor. During this time he got in touch with the local unions. In 1923 he joined the CP of

³⁷ *Pente Chronia Agones*, p. 13-26.

Turkey and was sent to the KUTV. In 1924 the Comintern sent him to Greece. Between 1924 and 1929 he held various posts in the Federation of Communist Youth of Greece (*Omospondia Kommounistikou Neolaion Elladas*; OKNE) and the KKE. Several short stays in prison interrupted his activities. In 1929 he left Greece until 1931 to be trained as a cadre in the Soviet Union. Zachariadis was an absolute henchman of Stalin.³⁸

The new leadership promised to follow all the instructions of the Comintern. Indeed, during the next two years, the KKE underwent a reorganization according to the Bolshevik model. In July 1932 the first Panhellenic organisational conference declared the factory cell as the basis of the party. In August a conference on union questions took place. In the September 1932 elections the KKE received 58,223 votes (4.97%) and, as the proportional system was applied, won 10 deputies. The KKE rejoiced and attributed the success to the competent leadership of Zachariadis.

This was exaggerated of course. The true reason for the gains was that the Greek voters had turned against Venizelos's liberal party, which had proved incapable and unwilling to cope with the disastrous effects of the Great Depression. They voted for the conservative Populists or for one of the smaller progressive parties, such as the KKE. The new KKE deputies were all staunch supporters of the Stalinist line.

Toward the end of 1932, the economic situation deteriorated rapidly. As the two big bourgeois parties were unable to form a stable government, new elections were held in March 1933. Here majority system was applied, and the KKE received 52,958 votes (4.64%) but no seat in parliament. The effects of the Depression had obviously paralysed some of the old clientelistic mechanisms, and thus the KKE electorate stabilized.

During the following years the KKE played a totally passive role in Greek politics. It was preoccupied with reorganizing itself. The most important event for the development of the party was the sixth plenum of January 1934 which laid down the ideological line which would hold until 1945.

Since, until then, the KKE had never worked out a party program (the first official program was to be formulated in 1961), the Comintern resolution of November 1931 was the basis of thought. It was quoted at length in the relevant document.³⁹ According to the resolution, Greece could be classified among the countries which were on the road towards capitalism, despite the remains of important semi-feudal elements in their agriculture. In these countries, the bourgeois revolution must first be completed, before the socialist revolution could be carried through. It was possible, however, that this transformation process could quickly evolve into a socialist revolution. Up to this point, the sixth plenum document reproduced the Comintern resolution correctly, but, from then on, in their description of the manner and evolution of the transformation process, the authors blurred the matter. The way in which elements of the Comintern resolution were mixed up with KKE's own concepts make evident that they had no very clear idea what it was all about.

"The hegemony of the proletariat in the bourgeois-democratic revolution, won in the struggles leading to victorious revolution and safeguarded in the form of rule by soviets, with the active cooperation of the international proletariat, will ensure the rapid transition from a bourgeois-democratic to socialist revolution. Government by workers' and peasants' soviets, which in the first stage of the revolution will achieve the revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the working class and the peasantry in the form of soviets, will now become the government of the dictatorship of the proletariat."⁴⁰

In other words, the KKE hoped to complete the bourgeois-democratic revolution by a radical-democratic system of government, a system of soviets somewhat resembling the workers', peasants' and soldiers' soviets in Russia in 1905 and 1917, or in Germany at the end of 1918. This means that in 1934 the KKE rejected the parliamentary system and preferred the radical-democratic, Leninist system of democracy by soviets.

A piece of self-criticism by the sixth plenum sheds an interesting light on the social composition of the KKE. Only 44% of the rank and file were workers, and, among them, no more than 9.1% were factory workers. Forty-four of the 590 party cells were factory cells. Obviously, the overwhelming majority of KKE members stemmed from the *petit bourgeoisie*.

In the local elections of February 1934, the KKE scored its first great success. Dimitrios Partsalidis was the first communist elected mayor of Greece in Kavalla. In May, however, he was unseated, being accused of turning the town hall into a communist stronghold.

³⁸ Stavridis, *Paraskinia*, p. 477.

³⁹ The text of the Comintern resolution may be found in *Episima Keimena*, III, p. 294-306; the text of the sixth plenum of January 1934 is reproduced in *Episima Keimena*, IV, pp. 13ss.

⁴⁰ *Episima Keimena*, IV, p. 24s.

The fifth party congress, in March 1934, ratified the course of the sixth plenum and propagated the Comintern slogan of establishing an antifascist popular front. Also, Zachariadis's leadership, which was still provisional, was officialized. Obviously, the KKE was well on its way towards Bolshevik unity. Finally the congress accepted a party constitution which was modelled after the CPSU statute and soon developed into an instrument for disciplining dissenting party members.

In the months before the abortive *coup d'état* of March 1935, the KKE tried to mend the union connection but was met with deep distrust by the other trends. At the same time it tried to prepare the mass basis for a general strike in case of a military takeover. This was in vain - Greek workers refused to join the KKE. Thus the KKE had to confine itself mainly to the role of onlooker. During the third plenum of April 1935, there was much complaining about the impossibility of influencing Greek political developments. But the same plenum received the Comintern's permission to change the slogan of Macedonian autonomy into "full equality of all minorities within the Greek state". Thus one of the KKE's handicaps was removed.

The elections of June 1935 were boycotted by the Venizelist parties, because the ruling Royalists were going to rig them thoroughly. The KKE did not join the boycott and thus won 98,699 votes (9.59%), but no seat in parliament due to the majority system applied. This success was caused by two main factors: first, many Venizelists were not ready to passively succumb to the Royalists, and thus voted KKE in protest; secondly, the Venizelist clientelistic network was beginning to disintegrate, and many disillusioned Venizelist followers shifted their loyalty to the KKE. The new Macedonian policy probably did not have much influence on the voters.

The electoral success filled the KKE with new self-confidence. At the third organizational conference the party set itself to work for the establishment of an anti-fascist popular front. Efforts to improve relations with the GSEE were intensified, but to no avail. The fourth plenum in September 1935 ratified the decisions of the Seventh Comintern Congress about the popular front strategy and elected Zachariadis Secretary General of the KKE.

In December 1935 the sixth party congress took place. The leadership proudly stated that all delegates were workers. No words were wasted on the composition of the rank and file, however. In the best Stalinist manner, the delegates unanimously approved the work of the CC since the last congress. Obviously Stalinism had been successfully implanted. In order to alter the social composition of the party in favour of the workers, the congress decided to found a peasant party (*Agrotiko Komma Elladas*; AKE) to organize the popular front in the countryside. Until the Second World War, the AKE was a typical communist-controlled front party which held no attraction for the peasantry. The AKE would reach its peak during the occupation, when it became one of the parties active in the Greek Resistance.

More important for the KKE, however, was the introduction of the personality cult surrounding the Secretary General. Pavlos Nefeloudis, later a leading cadre, remembers: "The sixth party congress can be seen as the party congress which implanted and fostered personality cult in Greece. To all the defects which characterized the internal functioning of our party from its birth, now a new evil was added, the cult of one person, of the person of the leader [...] They began to weave the legend of the 'omniscient' [*panexyfnos*], the great theoretician, the heroic leader [...] It is he who has created the new party strategy for a bourgeois revolution based on deep study and scientific analysis of the Greek situation. He it is who inspired the resolutions of the sixth party congress for a united peasant party. He is the great conspirator, the phantom whom the security police cannot catch."⁴¹ But this was only the beginning. A few years later one of Zachariadis's henchmen stated: "The party is Zachariadis and Zachariadis is the party".⁴²

In October 1935 the Greek monarchy was restored by a fraudulent and unfree plebiscite. The returning King, however, insisted on correct elections in January 1936. The KKE campaigned as a popular front and won 73,411 votes (5.76%) and 15 deputies. The drop in votes by more than 25,000 since the June 1935 elections was caused by the return of many protest voters to the liberal parties. It is certain that many others had continued to vote for the KKE, a fact that explains the relatively high number of votes received. The membership of the KKE in 1936 was well under 10,000,⁴³ and even these were not seasoned communists in the sense that they were adherents of the teachings of Marx and Lenin or Stalin. Most of them were people who were dissatisfied

⁴¹ Nefeloudis, *Stis Píges tis Kakodaimonias*, p. 107.

⁴² Zizis Zografos, "Provlímata Schetika me to Esokommatiko mas Kathestos", *Neos Kosmos* (December 1956), p. 48.

⁴³ Richter, *Griechenland im Zwanzigsten Jahrhundert*, 1, p. 196.

by the existing clientelistic system and wanted social reforms. The hard core of the KKE were the KUTVists and a few hundred staunch supporters, altogether less than 1,000.

The electoral success of the KKE, however, soon gained disproportionate importance. Since the conservative and the liberal camps had come out of the elections with almost equal strength (Venizelist 141 seats, Antivenizelists 143 seats), neither were able to form a government on their own. Years of hostile relations precluded a coalition government in the bourgeois camp. So conservatives and liberals began to bargain with the popular front, hoping to win their votes to form a minority government; a coalition with the KKE was also precluded, of course. A deal with the conservatives was blocked by the military. The negotiations with the liberals were more successful and ended in the conclusion of a mutually satisfying agreement. At the decisive moment, however, the leader of the liberals Sofoulis did not have the courage to face the furious attacks of the conservatives in parliament and backed out. The KKE took revenge by revealing the contents of the negotiations with both parties. These events as well as the growing labour unrest offered the Greek right-wing politicians a unique chance to conjure up the idea of communist danger.

7. *The Struggle for Survival: the Fascist Dictatorship of Metaxas, 1936-1941*

The strike wave which passed over Greece in the spring of 1936 was not the work of the communists. In 1935 mounting misery of the working population caused the socialist unions to dissolve and their organisations and its members to return to the Venizelist controlled GSEE. The Venizelists, who had been ousted from government, approved of strikes since these would bring the conservatives into trouble. From January 1936 on, the base organizations of the communist EGSEE increasingly participated in the strikes. The government reacted with brutal repression, the anticlimax of which was the May 9 demonstration in Thessaloniki where the police actually killed 12 and wounded 300. Ensuing protest strikes spread all over Greece. Prime Minister Metaxas cleverly used these to increase the communistophobia of the Greek bourgeoisie to hysteria. In July the GSEE-leadership agreed to organize a nationwide strike on 5 August together with the communist unions. Though the danger of a communist takeover existed only in the frenzied minds of fanatical anti-communists, Metaxas and the King used this as an excuse to establish a dictatorship on August 4, 1936.

One of the main characteristics of the fascist⁴⁴ regime of the 4th of August was its anti-communism. Accordingly, the communists became the first victims of the regime's repressive measures. Up to November 1936, the secret police arrested 1,330 "communists". The definition of a communist was left to the police, and they discovered "Venizelo-communists", "Populo-Communists", "Anglo-communists", and "Gallo-communists". Towards the end of 1936 the prisons were so overcrowded that the authorities established a concentration camp for communists in the former fortress of Akronafplia. Similar camps were established on Aigina and Corfu.

The communists were not only incarcerated, but subjected to a "re-education program" designed to lead them back to the right way. The methods applied to obtain the declarations of repentance (*dilosia metanoias*) recalled the most sinister procedures of the inquisition and included all kinds of torture. When the victim signed such a declaration in which he condemned Communism and praised the dictator, it was published and he was set free. This branded him as a former communist, however, which led to his isolation in society, on the one hand, and made his former comrades break off any contact with him, on the other. Until 1939 the secret police collected over 45,000 such declarations. It must be noted, however, that this figure does not reflect the real number of KKE-members but the zeal of the hunters.

In the beginning, the KKE-leadership tried to direct the party from jail, but this soon proved to be a hopeless enterprise. The still free (second rank) cadres and members had enough on their hands just avoiding arrest and were not able to do any underground work. In order to confuse the rank-and-file of KKE even more, secret police minister Konstantinos Maniadakis had a few renegades and undercover secret police agents form a CC and even edit a *Rizospastis*. To keep up appearances, the police hindered the distribution of the fake *Rizospastis* as well. The bogus CC, which became known as the provisional leadership (*prosorini diikiisi*), managed to get in contact with true KKE cells, resulting in the exposure of their members and their subjection to persecution.

Until 1940 less than 1,000 KKE-cadres and members resisted the onslaught of the regime and did not

⁴⁴ For the discussion about the character of the regime, see Heinz Richter, *Griechenland zwischen Revolution und Konterrevolution 1936-1946* (Frankfurt: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1973), pp. 54-67 and *Griechenland im Zwanzigsten Jahrhundert*, 1, pp. 201ss.

sign a *dilosis*. Since the prisons and concentration camps were overcrowded, the regime could not isolate the communists, and their message spread to the other inmates. So it was that the prisons became communist breeding-grounds, where future cadres were prepared.⁴⁵

If Metaxas did not succeed in destroying the KKE, he was certainly successful in ruining the clientelistic networks of the conservatives and liberals. As most of their clients had never closely identified themselves with the clientelistic system, but had simply used it as a means of survival, it was easily wiped out. Many of the former clients hated the fascist system, and as their former masters showed little readiness to fight against it, they looked for new leaders. Thus the KKE acquired more attraction as a resistance organization than it even would have gained in the old setup. The KKE became the bearer of hope for all those who wanted to fight fascism.

In February 1939 Siantos, who had managed to escape from his island of exile, called together a few leading cadres who had not been arrested for a meeting which became known as the fifth plenum of the CC. Analyzing the national and international situation, they came to the following conclusion: "Our party fights to secure the independence and integrity of Greece, but at the same time it announces that the greater enemy of our independence and of the integrity of our country is in Athens - the monarchofascist dictatorship."⁴⁶ The fight against the internal enemy had priority. Somewhere in the course of July 1939, the Comintern corrected this position: "Your country is being threatened by the fascist Axis and especially by Italian fascism which is very active in the Balkans. The first duty of the KKE is to defend the independence of your country. As long as the Metaxas government is fighting against the same danger, there is no reason for you to give priority to its overthrow."⁴⁷ Siantos and Zachariadis complied and reoriented the KKE propaganda accordingly. A few KKE leaders (Ktistakis, Papagiannis), however, were taken aback by this Comintern *volte-face*. They did not understand that the Comintern, in fact, had for quite some time degenerated into an instrument of Soviet foreign policy, and that at this particular time, Soviet foreign policy was trying to build a dam against fascist expansion in the Balkans at all costs.

After the conclusion of the Hitler-Stalin-Pact, the Comintern changed its line again. Now Zachariadis and Siantos kept a low profile, whereas they who had been tools of axis propaganda until recently (Ktistakis, Papagiannis) now staunchly supported Comintern policy and demanded a revision of KKE priorities.

Mussolini's attack on Greece complicated the situation even more. In a letter of 31 October 1940 Zachariadis took an absolutely nationalistic position as regards the war against Italy.⁴⁸ Though he apparently knew about the Comintern directive of September 1939,⁴⁹ he deliberately dismissed it and returned to the Comintern position of July 1939. His underlying motives for this step are subject to speculation. However, when the Greek army succeeded in pushing the Italians far back into Albania, Zachariadis, in a second letter⁵⁰ dated 26 November 1940, took a position halfway between his first letter and the September 1939 Comintern directive. He thereby denounced the Greek advance as an imperialist war which served only the interest of Britain. The British should leave the country, and the war should be stopped and an armistice effected through the good offices of the Soviet Union.⁵¹

When, on orders of Security Minister Maniatakis, the publication of the second letter was prohibited, Zachariadis made another effort. On 15 January 1941 he wrote a third letter. In it he again condemned the Albanian war as a fascist war of conquest and complained that Metaxas had not sought the mediation of the Soviet Union. The continuation of the war only served the Greek plutocrats and British imperialism. Therefore Metaxas remained the main enemy of the people and of the country. His overthrow was the primary target. Army

⁴⁵ See Bartziotas's reminiscences mentioned in note 18.

⁴⁶ *Episima Keimena*, IV, p. 463.

⁴⁷ *Deka Chronia Agones*, p. 140.

⁴⁸ The letter was eagerly published by the Greek authorities in the press of the time. It may be found in *Episima Keimena* [KKE esoterikou], V, p. 16.

⁴⁹ John C. Loulis, *The Greek Communist Party 1940-1944* (London: Croom Helm, 1982), p. 8.

⁵⁰ Text in *Episima Keimena* [KKE esoterikou], V, p. 22s.

⁵¹ The second letter was published neither by the Greek authorities nor by the KKE at the time.

and people should join in an effort to establish an antifascist, anti-plutocratic, popular regime.⁵² Luckily for Zachariadis this letter, too, was not published. It might have ruined the positive impression the first letter had created among the rank-and-file and the Greek people in general, and Zachariadis's appeal to the army to overthrow the regime at a moment when the Greek nation was fighting for survival might have had similarly disastrous consequences as the Macedonian policy.

8. Resistance and Development towards a Mass Movement, 1941-1944

In April 1941 Hitler's troops conquered Greece. The invasion scattered whatever remained of the clientelistic networks. However, in the Albanian campaign and in the battles against the Germans, the people had developed a new mentality. They had learned that things did not have to be accepted passively; even superior forces could be resisted. The victories against the Italians were victories of the people and not of their defeatist leadership.⁵³ And this will to resist was not broken by the occupation. Spontaneously, in the summer of 1941, the first resistance groups came into being.

The old elites had no part in this. As they could not expect to lead the resistance in the old clientelistic way, they decided to sit the occupation out. Only a few younger intellectuals, a number of democratic and republican-minded officers, and the few remaining communists were ready and had the expertise to organize and lead the spontaneous resistance. The communists who had survived the dictatorship in illegality numbered 200, and in the chaos of the first days of the occupation, a few hundred others managed to escape from prisons and camps. Zachariadis was taken by the Gestapo and sent to Dachau, where he remained until the end of the war.

During the first days of the German occupation, the KKE, in want of new Comintern instructions, showed signs of uncertainty about which line to follow. But when the Germans attacked the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941, the KKE fell into line again. The sixth plenum which met a few days later appealed to members of the two communist groups to set aside their disagreements and contribute to the reconstruction of the party. The basic duty of each communist was to organize the struggle for the defense of the Soviet Union and for the overthrow of the foreign Fascist yoke. The communists must help the people to survive, organize the resistance against the invaders and explain that only a government of the workers and peasants could permanently free Greece from foreign dependence and internal exploitation.⁵⁴ This resolution, which was not influenced by any Comintern directives, repeated the old slogan of the defense of the Soviet Union but oriented the party towards resistance. In the seventh plenum of September 1941 and the eighth plenum of January 1942 - still without any guidance from the Comintern - the CC, though still paying lip service to the defense of the Soviet Union, changed priorities. The struggle for national liberation became the primary aim, and only after this was achieved could the establishment of a different social system be considered. The resistance struggle would be organized on the broadest possible popular basis.

The story of the ensuing development has been well researched.⁵⁵ Thus we can confine ourselves to registering the developments that are of interest in our context.

In September 1941 the KKE founded the National Liberation Front (*Ethniko Apeleftherotiko Metopo*; EAM). The horrible famine during the first winter of occupation (1941/42) once again showed the masses that they had been abandoned by their former leaders. Help came mainly from a suborganization of the EAM called National Solidarity (*Ethniki Allilengi*; EA) which saved thousands by feeding them. Within the next three years

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁵³ The former commander of the British Military Mission with the Greek partisans wrote: "In the Albanian Campaign it was the people of Greece who fought and did so splendidly against the enemy inspite of the regular Army. The regular Army was shamed into fighting by the will of the people. The people advanced inspite of the senior regular Army officers who, directed largely by Metaxas himself, rather than the Greek C.-in-C., were not only unwilling to fight and incompetent, but had not the spirit to lead the Greek Army against the invader." Quoted from E. C. W. Myers, "Inside Greece. A Review" (unprinted manuscript in the possession of the author).

⁵⁴ *Deka Chronia Agones*, p. 120s.

⁵⁵ See note 19.

the EAM developed into a mass organization. In half a dozen suborganizations, the EAM recruited about 1.5 of the 7.5 million Greeks. Its members came from all classes and strata of society.

From the beginning, enemies and critics denounced the EAM and its suborganizations as communist front organizations. According to them, the KKE built up the EAM in order to erect a dictatorship of the proletariat after the war.

It is true that the KKE played a major role in creating, organizing and leading the EAM, but the EAM never became a front for the KKE. Besides communists, the leadership of the EAM comprised a number of progressive and left personalities as well as former leaders of small leftist clientelistic networks. The rank-and-file were similarly heterogeneous: a large part originated from the former liberal clientèle who had temporarily shifted their loyalty to the EAM. Others were simply patriots who wanted to free their country, and again others dreamed of social reform. And there were the few "true" communists who followed their leaders unconditionally. Although the KKE had placed its cadres in all decisive posts, their number was far too small to control the mass organization of the EAM and keep it on the track of communist orthodoxy. The communists within the EAM who had been KKE members before the dictatorship counted less than 800. Still, most of these - as already stated - were not seasoned communists but people wanting reform. The KUTVists were just a handful without any guidance by the Comintern.

With growing success and expanding membership, the influence of the KKE cadres decreased. One of the reasons for the dwindling control of the KKE over the movement was that, in the liberated areas, the EAM were developing new forms of political expression of will, whose main features were open discussion and free voting, in other words, grass roots democracy.

At the same time, the KKE itself also encountered mass entry of new members. By the end of the occupation, KKE membership had increased to about 200,000. These new members were no disciplined cadres or ideologically staunch communists, but individuals who wanted social reform and a new democratic republican postwar Greece - by no means a return to the pre-war clientelistic system. Roughly half of them were of peasant origin. The influx of new members changed the character of the KKE as well, of course. Out of a monolithic Leninist-Stalinist sect, a mass party had evolved in which pluralism of opinions and disputes among the various wings were normal. In other words, the KKE was evolving into a heterogeneous, democratic, socialist mass party with strong populist features.

Not all the new members were idealists, of course. The EAM and KKE benefited from the clientelistic thinking of the Greeks. The new organizations attracted the masses because they showed perspectives the old parties had never offered. The evolution of the organizations was facilitated by the fact that the links with the Comintern had been broken and that the KUTVists had lost control over the movement. The wartime KKE leader Siantos allowed the new spirit to carry him away from communist orthodoxy, despite his KUTV training, and steered a course which may be characterized as democratic socialist, with strong national features. A Greek way towards socialism began to loom on the horizon.

This development, however, was stopped in 1944, first by Soviet and then British intervention. Since the summer of 1943, the EAM had increasingly met with opposition from the British government, which saw its traditional role as protecting power endangered by the developments in Greece. In order to stop the EAM's course towards independence, the British and Soviet governments, in May 1944, agreed upon temporary spheres of interests. (In October 1944 these were made permanent in the notorious percentage agreement.) The Soviets honoured the British readiness to acknowledge the Soviet sphere by sending a Soviet military mission to ELAS to demand a more compromising attitude towards the British. Though the Comintern had been dissolved a year before, the Greeks complied. This paved the way towards the British intervention in December 1944, which destroyed everything that the resistance had built up and brought about a complete reversion of forces. This, in turn, triggered developments leading directly to the civil war from 1946 to 1949. During this period the KKE was reduced from a mass party to a cadre party of Stalinist type, a process which has been analysed elsewhere.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Heinz A. Richter, "Die griechische kommunistische Partei (KKE) 1944-1947: Von der Massenpartei zur Kaderpartei", in Dietrich Staritz and Hermann Weber (eds.), *Einheitsfront, Einheitspartei. Kommunisten und Sozialdemokraten in Ost- und Westeuropa 1944-1948* (Köln: Verlag für Wissenschaft und Politik, 1989), pp. 453-468.

Conclusion

The developments of the Comintern and of the KKE were asymmetrical. When the first was flowering, the latter was scarcely more than a sectarian group in Greek political life. The reasons for this underdevelopment of the Greek labour movement were both exogenous and endogenous.

The external impediment to the KKE's development was the Comintern policy itself. By enforcing a pro-Bulgarian Macedonian policy upon the KKE, it branded the Greek communists as anti-national and discredited them in the eyes of the Greek electorate. Being stigmatized as traitorous precluded any role for the KKE in the political life of the country.

Among the internal factors contributing to the delay in development, the major obstacle proved to be the predominantly agrarian character of Greek economic life. The second impediment for the KKE was the specific political culture of the country, especially its clientelistic system which prevented the intrusion of communist or socialist ideas into the lower social strata. The allegiance of the people towards the leaders of the clientelistic networks was unshakeable, even through the Asia Minor catastrophe: even the refugees voted for a clientelistic party, i.e. for the liberals of Venizelos. What finally weakened the hold of the bosses significantly was the social shock of the Great Depression.

For the first time the KKE attracted an increased number of voters. Most of these, however, did not vote communist out of conviction but out of protest. The party's attraction did not increase, the more so since it became Stalinist from 1931 on. Before this became evident, the Metaxas dictatorship was established, paralyzing the traditional political clientelism. The KKE was decimated, but it survived the persecutions. Paradoxically enough, it was the Axis occupation of Greece which removed the external and internal encumbrances for the KKE and brought about the breakthrough.