# The Forgotten Trotskyists of Cyprus (Online Article)

## Historical Note

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## Content

### The Forgotten Trotskyists of Cyprus

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In the late 1940s, a small left-wing party called the Trotskyist Party of Cyprus (TPC) appeared in Cyprus. The party published its own newspaper, 'The Worker (Ergatis)', from 1947 to 1949, seems to have been influential among some workers, was openly opposed to the Union of Cyprus with Greece (Enosis), supported the independence of the island, and took part in the 1949 municipal elections in Limassol. It was fiercely critical of AKEL, which it saw as a political and ideological enemy that dominated the Cypriot working class, rather than expressing and representing it.

The first circles of Cypriot Trotskyists existed as early as the mid-1940s, as in 1945 Prolatis, a monthly sociological magazine of Giorgos Himarides, a left-wing poet and later editor of the Worker newspaper, was published.

Trotskyist activity at the end of the decade seems to have been intense, leading to reactions from AKEL, with the promotion of propaganda against the TPC, public denunciations of the new party by AKEL's leading figures, and an attempt to remove the Worker newspaper from workers' associations and trade unions. The TPC disappeared after 1949 – my interpretation, which at this time remains at the level of speculation, is that this must be due to both the collapse of the Diaskeptiki conference and the party's failure in the 1949 elections, events which probably brought about an internal crisis within the party, leading to its inactivity and dissolution. In 1949, articles appeared in the pages of the Worker criticising the party's positions on the national question, suggesting that an ideological split had developed within the small Cypriot Trotskyist movement.

AKEL's hostility towards the TPC should not come as a surprise, given that the AKEL leadership was often strongly criticised by the TPC, accusing it of being Stalinist. More interesting is the fact that AKEL was forced to publicly disavow the party, a practice which suggests that, at least for its leadership, the TPC was seen as a potential threat to the hegemony AKEL enjoyed within the wider workers' movement. However, the extent to which the TPC was a real threat to this hegemony does not seem to be able to be clarified at this time, due to the limited archival material available to us. The TPC can be placed ideologically to the left of AKEL in the 1940s, consciously opposing the shift of the workers' movement towards Enosis, promoting working class internationalism and remaining ideologically, at least in relation to the Cyprus problem, closer to the original line of the Communist Party of Cyprus (1926-1944) than AKEL itself.

It is worth mentioning that despite all the public confrontations, recriminations and exchanges of views between members of AKEL and the TPC in the 1940s, the TPC has disappeared from the historical record of the Cypriot workers' movement until today, with references to the party remaining scarce. Excerpts from two texts of the TPC were published in the 1980s in the left-wing magazine 'Within the Walls (Entos ton Teihon)', one of which was included in the Anthology of cyprocentric texts published in 2022. Short references to the party were also made by Costis Ahniotis, an important figure of the rapprochement movement, in a speech on Cypriot consciousness in 1988, while the TPC is referred to in a study by sociologist Andreas Panayiotou on Cypriot poetry of the colonial period, in which he deals with the poetry of Himarides. Apart from these few references, the TPC has been effectively erased from historical and collective memory. It is not even mentioned in footnotes of academic papers dealing with the period, no political group or party seems to have claimed it as its political heritage, while its material remained until recently in dusty state and private archives, until the digitization of its newspaper by the Press and Information Office's archive, and its subsequent inclusion in the Cyprus Movement Archive (movementsarchive.org).

The existence and activity of the TPC in the 1940s contradicts a number of interpretations of Cypriot history. For example, in Cypriot historiography and wider political culture, the dominant interpretation remains that the only political party during the colonial period that openly opposed Enosis, proposing some form of independence as an alternative, was the Communist Party of Cyprus, a position that was abandoned with the establishment of AKEL in 1941. The existence of the TPC evidently contradicts this so widespread interpretation, while pushing the existence of anti-enosis public discourse until at least 1949.

Another quite widespread interpretation, which appears in both left-wing and right-wing readings of Cypriot history, presents Enosis as the only anti-colonial goal ever proposed within the Greek Cypriot community after 1941, with the Greek Cypriot political forces of the period being presented as unable to imagine or conceptualise any alternative political vision beyond that of Enosis. Such an approach naturalizes the demand of enosis, turning our attention away from the political processes and decisions that elevated it by the end of the decade to the level of a self-referential truth. The systematic promotion of TPC's positions through its newspaper, as well as the public confrontations with AKEL, also challenge this interpretation, as they demonstrate that both the demand for independence and the opposition to Enosis were part of the public discourse in the 1940s, with TPC's positions being known within AKEL, and possibly even within nationalist circles. The Enosis line, though dominant, was not the only political perspective that had been expressed and proposed within the Greek Cypriot community as a response to colonialism. The adoption of Enosis, both by the right-wing nationalists and by AKEL, was therefore not made in ignorance of alternatives, but was a conscious decision between two alternative anti-colonial objectives, Enosis and independence, which were in conflict with each other in public political discourse in the 1940s, with Enosis obviously enjoying a much more advantageous position.

There is also an alternative historical interpretation of the 1940s, which reads in the events of Diaskeptiki an 'underground' demand for independence. This interpretation is based on the argument that due to the hegemony of nationalism over the Greek Cypriot community through a series of dominant institutions, such as the press, the Church and the educational system, a situation of censorship prevailed through which an alternative vision beyond that of Enosis could not be publicly expressed except indirectly, as an 'underground' demand. From this perspective, independence could only be implied, but could not be expressed directly. Through this interpretative approach, the then official AKEL line of 'self-government-enosis', which was differentiated from the nationalist line of 'enosis and only enosis', and presupposed the obtainment of basic democratic and political rights within the framework of colonialism as a transitional stage until the achievement of enosis, is interpreted as an 'underground' pro-independence position, an anti-enosis line, which nevertheless

had to wear the mantle of enosis in order to be able to express itself publicly.

The main weakness of this approach is the necessity of questioning the validity of the political positions as they were publicly expressed in the 1940s. By setting up a priori the expression of pro-independence public discourse as impossible, the public appeal to Enosis by the historical subjects of the period is underestimated, as the historical subjects are presented as unable to convey what they stand for and believe, with their 'real', 'underground' (but censored) hopes and views only surfacing through their theoretical reinterpretation. But if the promotion of independence and opposition to Enosis could not be expressed publicly in the 1940s, and therefore had to be expressed by necessity through a differentiated enosis discourse, as this approach assumes, then the very existence of an anti-enosis and pro-independence public discourse in this period calls into question the validity of this historical interpretation on an empirical level. How can we sustain such an interpretation, which invokes a flattening censorship to support its historical reading, when the following position was publicly expressed in print during the same period:

Now, what else could the slogan "Union with Greece" be, other than a social democratic nationalist slogan, since it demands, on the one hand, the expulsion of the foreign occupier, but on the other hand it asks for the continuation of exploitation in another form, through the union with another bourgeois state – even if that state speaks the same language as us, even if that state claims that our country is a part of its territory. In its appetites, it is no different than the present exploiter. This capital, regardless of its different national name, also seeks more places to exploit, also seeks more slaves in its service. That is why we struggle both for the expulsion of the foreign occupier and for the social liberation of the worker (Newspaper 'The Worker', Issue 3, 06/10/47, page 1).

This particular text is not an exception, but is typical of the public position expressed by the Worker newspaper, as can be seen from the extract below: Our party, the party of the Fourth International, from the very beginning made its position on our political question clear. We are against nationalist propaganda and against Enosis. Because we do not believe that the Cypriot proletariat will find it easier to solve its economic, political and social problems through Union with Greece as the Stalinist Nationalists proclaim, because it has been proved time and again that imperialism has no borders and does not hesitate to protect its own interests wherever they are attacked by the international workers' movement. […] What now comes before the Cypriot proletariat as an urgent necessity is the organisation of the struggle for self-government, the organisation of the struggle for the Constituent National Assembly. Only when we have the right to speak, to assemble and to march, only when we are masters of our own house will we be able to concentrate our forces for the demolition of capitalism (Newspaper 'The Worker', Issue 88, 22/05/49, page 2).

The 'discovery' of the TPC is obviously not going to radically alter the historical record of the 1940s, which is characterised by the creation of AKEL, the conflict between the left and the right, the effects of the Greek Civil War, the Diaskeptiki conference and the various demands of the Cypriot workers' movement. Nevertheless, the very historical existence of the Trotskyist party brings to the surface the complexity of the period, empirically challenging a number of historical readings built on the premise that both anti-enosis and support for independence were located outside the public discourse in the 1940s. Despite its disappearance from collective memory, the TPC remains interesting not simply because it is an interesting, if minor, aspect in the history of the Cypriot workers' movement, but because its very action is at odds with both hegemonic and antihegemonic interpretations of Cypriot history.

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