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The Problem of AKEL (Online Article)

Historical Note

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Content

THE PROBLEM OF AKEL

May 30, 2021

Recently, there have been a number of online posts by individuals and groups of the Cypriot extra-parliamentary left calling on us to vote for AKEL in the upcoming parliamentary elections. The reasons put forward for this vote vary. The more restrained posts tell us implicitly but clearly that AKEL is the lesser evil in these elections, and present it as the only organised left-wing political force that can rid us of the DISY 'gang' that rules us. While they acknowledge that AKEL has long-standing weaknesses, they believe it has become more progressive in recent years. But there are also several more picturesque posts that present a vote for AKEL as a vote for the working class and the class struggle, telling us that an AKEL victory in the elections will trigger a "class counterattack" and bring the “socialist prospect” closer. They also tell us that it is not the place to point out any mistakes and weaknesses of AKEL, as this would weaken AKEL and unwittingly help the right.

This short text is a response to these posts. Its position is that AKEL is a purely bourgeois, and therefore right-wing, party, which is an enemy of the working class and an obstacle to the prospect of class struggle in Cyprus. It also argues that the fact that the vast majority of the extra-parliamentary left supports AKEL in the forthcoming elections shows us that this left too is unwittingly becoming an obstacle to the prospect of class struggle in Cyprus.

Not much effort is needed to highlight the bankruptcy of AKEL as a left-wing party of the working class. AKEL is a force which sided with the reactionary nationalist Makarios almost from the beginning of his presidency and which participated in half the governments of the Republic of Cyprus, usually in collaboration with right-wing parties. AKEL's main characteristic is that it has been a time-honoured tail-rider of the right, whether pro-enosis, pro-Makarios or liberal. For some 75 years now, AKEL has supported the nationalist policies of the right, from the enosis referendum (which it first proposed and rushed to organise) to the NO to the Annan plan and, more recently, the Anastasiades National Council. It has always proceeded in a nation-centred and nationalist manner, postponing and avoiding the class struggle until the alleged 'national problem' is solved. It has never had the political will to

stand clearly against nationalism and in favour of reunification, let alone have radical demands in relation to capitalism, etc.

The extra-parliamentary left claims that we need a strong AKEL against the right and the extreme right. What it avoids mentioning is that over time we have had a strong AKEL, with the party coming first or second in every election since the founding of the Republic of Cyprus, without this threatening the hegemony of the right on the island. Over the years we have seen neither a class counterattack nor the promotion of the socialist perspective. AKEL went so far as to elect its general secretary as president of 'democracy', and his administration proved that AKEL has no alternative socio-economic proposal to neoliberalism, ultimately leading us into a memorandum. In the last election it didn't even have the courage to run its own left-wing candidate, running with the technocrat Malas, and seriously flirting with supporting the neoliberal businessman Mike Spanos. It also found himself embroiled in corruption scandals more than once, the latest being the passport scandal, and fully embraced the Anastasiades government's authoritarian anti-constitutional measures for Covid-19, until the mass protest of Os Dame indicated that it was in its interest to change his stance (a little).

In the coming years, AKEL will complete its transformation from a bourgeois party with popular policies to a bourgeois party with anti-popular policies but with social sensibilities. Its political base will be not so much the poorer sections of the population but the progressive and liberal people of the island. As the political situation in Cyprus will not improve, new populist and/or far-right parties such as ELAM will continue to grow, and with a pro-popular discourse they can win over many traditional AKEL voters. At the same time, the Cypriot extra-parliamentary left will be increasingly pushed towards AKEL in the name of anti-fascism. It will thus become the most vocal supporter of the establishment.

The election period has shown us the great extent to which the extra-parliamentary left continues to have delusions about AKEL, or simply does not believe in itself and its ability to come out of AKEL's shadow. Although it claims to support AKEL critically and to recognise its weaknesses, it really has little criticism of it. Instead, it is reduced to criticizing and attacking the right and the government in particular (mostly through easily digestible ironic comments and memes that are consistent with a sense of politics in modern times rather than the cultivation of critical thinking). It thus washes away AKEL's huge historical responsibility for the current political situation of the country, namely, the impending partition, the ongoing neoliberalism, and the complete lack of leftist education and class consciousness of the Cypriot working class.

The reasons that lead the extra-parliamentary left to support AKEL are various: some people are emotionally attached to AKEL from a young age, many follow the logic of the lesser evil, and I suspect that many support it out of desperation, having lost faith in the possibility of a revolutionary left on the island. In all cases, however, the result is the same: the individuals and groups/collectives in question unwittingly support an establishment party, foster illusions in that party (and by extension the establishment), and ultimately prevent the working class from realising the need to self-organise and take its fate into its own hands. AKEL can take the people of this area as his given supporters, without serious pressure to pursue more left-wing policies. Particularly now, with the rise of ELAM and the shift of DISY to the right, it can easily present himself as the lesser evil that will prevent the rise of fascism.

Regardless of the outcome of the elections, the primary obstacle to the creation of a revolutionary left in Cyprus remains AKEL and its satellites on the extra-parliamentary left, since they will try to sabotage any attempt to create a new left communist political force, in one way or another, whether it is called 'BBF' or 'anti-fascism'. The extra-parliamentary left bears the primary responsibility for the non-existence of a revolutionary left in Cyprus, as it was its own task to create this left and failed to do so. Nowadays, the prospect of creating a new revolutionary left-wing faction in Cyprus is rarely

mentioned, with the extra-parliamentary left contenting itself with proclaiming that the only serious left-wing force on the island is AKEL. Perhaps these proclamations are a way for the extra-parliamentary left to hide its weakness and desperation, presenting AKEL as more left-wing and radical than it is, but they only succeed in demonstrating this weakness and desperation.

The task of those who really want to defeat nationalism, authoritarianism, and the far right on the island is to understand the nature of these phenomena, especially their root in capitalism and the failure of the left to confront it. Nationalism is not legitimised primarily by specific bourgeois political forces and individuals but by the thousands of ordinary people who support it and make it a political force, which is inevitable given the capitalist reality in the absence of a revolutionary left.

Without a left candidate in the elections, the extent to which the working class will be helped by the election result will be at best minimal; at worst it will not be helped at all. The most important thing we have to do as leftists in this election is to highlight the necessity of having a left political option within the bourgeois system, and to begin to work towards building the political force that will provide that option.

It is imperative to build a left political force that can express the direct interests of the working class, proposing its own popular reforms to the government's reactionary approach. A left political force that will simultaneously cultivate class consciousness in the world and link any reformist struggles today with the need for revolutionary transformation of society tomorrow, in cooperation with similar forces internationally.

Our task as the new generation of Cypriot leftists and communists is to ensure that there will never again be a situation where AKEL can present itself as the only left-wing political force in the country.

NO VOTE FOR AKEL! CLASS SELF-ORGANIZATION AND CREATION OF A CYPRIOT COMMUNIST PARTY!

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