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Interview with presidential candidate Charalambos Aristotelous, 6/12/2022 (Online Article)

Historical Note

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Content

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Phedias Christodoulides: I am Phedias Christodoulides from the international political group Platypus, as well as a member of the Cypriot [group 1917](#), and I am here with independent presidential candidate Charalambos Aristotelous... We are going to do an interview about your candidacy, about why you identify yourself as “independent”, about the Cypriot left and the left in general. In short, we will attempt something that hasn't been done so far, an interview from a leftist perspective.

A first question that is often asked by many journalists in our country: why did you decide to run in the presidential elections, even though the polls show that you have no chance of being elected, and as you told me before, you know it.

Charalambos Aristotelous: Many times in politics we not only overuse terms and words but in our attempt to hide things and situations or to get to our goal we use them without content. This is also the reason why we are running for presidential elections and we do not have the support of establishment parties. We are a clear voice, a voice that comes to advocate the other way of development and a voice that is absent, as you said earlier, from the public debate.

PC: Didn't you seek support from establishment parties?

CA: We have held some meetings to listen to how the establishment parties, the mouthpieces of the system, think. However, we certainly did not seek and did not enter into the logic of give and take, because the purpose of this action is not to elect us to the highest office of the Republic of Cyprus. We considered, and I use the plural 'we', that there are forces which have not been transformed into a movement, an organisation or a party. These forces want or are interested in translating their opposition to the system, by joining forces with those forces which are interested in creating a front, at least a minimum of convergence, which will form the opposite pole, that is, the counterweight to the establishment.

PC: Is that a left pole?

CA: I'm not just talking about Cyprus but globally. The capitalist system has destroyed what is left of the conquests or rights of the world proletariat. The capitalist world deliberately used the Keynesian touches within the system of the Scandinavian countries, namely a more welfare state, to prove to socialism that capitalism can become humane, superior to socialism and can be the future of humanity. But in the absence of socialism, what happened in the Nordic countries? Just the opposite. They, too, through the policies of neoliberalism, of capitalist restructuring, have been brought back to the level of the rest of the metropolitan countries of the capitalist world.

But in our opinion something else happened with the non-existence of the socialist camp. That is why our aim is to promote, as I said before, the real opposite pole. And I am talking first at the local level, so that the neoliberal policies, policies that have been followed for the last few years by the cloned situations of the DISY-Nikos Anastasiades government, Mr Christodoulides, Mr Averoff and Mr Mavroyiannis, policies of Milton Friedman and the famous Chicago School, find a mound, an "utteration" as our people say, the neoliberal policies, policies that have been followed for the last few years by the cloned situations of the DISY-Nikos Anastasiades government, Mr Christodoulides, Mr Averoff and Mr Mavroyiannis.

PC: Since you mentioned the need for this opposite pole, my next question is: What are your plans after the election? Is there a plan to create a new political movement or even a party?

CA: I think there is a clear need. There is nothing else to do except that. The contradictions of the capitalist system have now been sharpened to such an extent that the peoples of the world have no choice but to see this other way of development. So the creation of a front that favours this other path of development is more than a necessity. But it does not mean that I personally will create such a party, such a movement, such a front.

The percentage that we will receive in the presidential elections will not be capitalized by me personally, but by the forces that want and are interested in translating their opposition, as I said before, by creating an opposite pole, a front, a movement, and why not a political party.

PC: Are there already political processes in this direction?

CA: The turnout in the elections is a pulse of society's reaction to these ideas of the common front and this perspective of the opposite pole. The goal of the candidacy is mostly messaging and symbolism.

PH: What is your political career? As far as I know, you were also in AKEL, what is your relationship with that party?

CA: I personally think that the left in Cyprus is not only AKEL, and it couldn't be. I am a child of an AKEL family as both my mother and father and other relatives were cadre-members of the Progressive Party of Working People. They either voted for this party or were generally involved in the organisations of the left-wing popular movement in Cyprus. I have been through EDON (AKEL youth) from a very young age and it would be a mistake to say that I have not been nurtured with the seeds of love for humans, i.e. the impulses I received from my passage through EDON.

The movement's cadres and paymasters did not seek to push all those we passed to develop critical thinking, which was and should have been the job of the leftist popular movement in Cyprus. But I was one of those who, having received the stimuli, used them with deep study and self-education.

PC: Wasn't the study done by the movement itself?

CA: No, it wasn't thoroughly done by the movement itself. Because they obviously did not want to hatch all these years of working class cadres, members or supporters who would be critical thinkers and who would fight against the political-socio-economic system.

The Progressive Party of Working People (I am also talking about the AKEL organisations) wanted its members like the other bourgeois parties. In other words, there was no such distinctive difference that should have existed in the ranks of AKEL or the "left popular movement" in Cyprus, and that is critical perception, critical thinking, the formation of consciences with the ultimate aim of the final overthrow of the capitalist system and not its perpetuation. I think this says it all.

PC: What is your opinion of AKEL today? Is it a left-wing party? You had said in your interview with Michael Stavrou that AKEL had betrayed its ideals. How and when did this happen?

CA: Since its founding congress (1941) AKEL, in order to be able to exist in legitimacy, had allowed people like Ladas, Konstantinides, Vassiliades -that is, big bourgeois people- to enter the party. In fact, Vassiliades, who presided over the founding congress of AKEL, two years later, as the highest judge of the British colonial rule in Cyprus, tried the trade unionists of the Pancyprian Trade Union Committee, the forerunner of PEO.

PH: So you would say that from the beginning AKEL had ideological and organisational problems?

CA: The [Communist Party of Cyprus](#) had existed in illegality since 1931. In '41, while it was in illegality, it decided to create a broad front that would act within the law in order to be able to pass its political positions legally. Consequently, it could not exist unless people from the big bourgeois joined the ranks of the party. It seems that the Communist Party of Cyprus was unable to get its positions through AKEL and it seems that Ploutis Servas' role, in my humble opinion, was a very obscure one, and let AKEL prove me wrong. On many occasions, while he was also General Secretary of the Communist Party of Cyprus and AKEL until 44 (when the Communist Party of Cyprus dissolved itself and only AKEL remained), it seems that he did not pass the resolutions of the secret congresses and meetings of the Communist Party of Cyprus. For example, he was invited by the Labour Party and not by the Communist Party of Great Britain to get guidance. From here you can see that AKEL was not what the Communist Party of Cyprus wanted. From this point on, is also the narrative that says that the Communist Party of Cyprus in 1944 had no reason to exist since AKEL massed the movement. So it dissolved itself and was incorporated into AKEL. There are questions here, because there are several members and cadres of the Communist Party of Cyprus who were not allowed to become members of AKEL for various reasons. There is also the example of Lefkis, who became a member of AKEL much later - more than 30 years later.

PC: What for?

CA: Nobody said the reasons but I think that while AKEL honours him and promotes him and his work -the book RIZES [ROOTS] was very typical- it took a long time to make him a member of the party. But I think that Lefkis was one of those who had a firm conviction in communist ideology. And that says it all, about the role that communist ideology should play in Cypriot society.

Of course, we cannot invalidate the period of Ezekias Papaioannou: having on him a very big life badge and a sign of internationalist solidarity, the trauma of the Spanish civil war, his action essentially made him general secretary at a time when AKEL was truly militant. As the leader of AKEL he fought to push the party in the direction of the militant communist left. This does not mean,

however, that people were not hatched within the party's ranks who would later reverse the whole situation.

PC: For Ezekias's successor, for the governance of Demetris Christofias, what is your opinion? It seems to have done a lot of damage to AKEL's popularity, and since then the party seems to be on the decline.

CA: I have always been one of the people who thought that the management of capitalism is not appropriate for a party that believes in the overthrow of capitalism. But I believe that if we look at some elements of Dimitris Christofias' administration, we will see that not only should AKEL not have taken over the management of the state, but it should have remained a lever of pressure towards power.

And why am I saying this? At the beginning of the five years he gave 3.5 billion for social benefits and by the end of the five years he took it back from the Cypriot people because the financial system forced him to do so. The European Central Bank threatened the government that in order to support the banks it had to pass unpopular measures such as freezing CoLA or the 10% penalty at the age of 63. Who was minister in 2012? Mrs Sotiroula Charalambous, who is now the general secretary of PEO, who also has a position on the abolition of the penalty.

I think that a government of the Left, if faced with this threat, should resign rather than implement these unpopular measures. After all, we have the example of Allende in Chile, where he really tried to "pass" to socialism in a parliamentary and velvety way and was overthrown. Demetris Christofias was managed by the system. We are not discussing whether or not there were good intentions on his part but that the system has the means to manage you within it.

To be able to make a leap of this magnitude at the end of the day you have to be self-sufficient. But the question is, can a small Cyprus make this leap without there being a global revolution and without, for example, the peoples of the world being ready? Because the world economy can simply with an embargo destroy you.

PC: Do you think it is possible to have socialism in a country? As far as I know, Marx disagreed. He said that capitalism is a global society that can only be overthrown on a global level. What prospects would a communist left have in little Cyprus? Should Cyprus become self-sufficient as you mentioned in an earlier interview and if so how can this be done?

CA: On the issue of self-sufficiency I answered in this way when I was asked about the disengagement or exit of Cyprus from the European Union. Without your own economy, without your own currency, with a fragmented primary sector, agricultural production is only 2% of GDP, how do you make the leap out of the capitalist system? With a divided homeland, a semi-divided homeland, and imperialism at all levels controlling you, how can you make that leap directly? I was also asked about socialism in Cyprus. This is not a simple question either. But I said: when the peoples of the world will be ready and that says it all.

PC: But what does that mean: "when the peoples of the world are ready". How will they be ready and what role do we have to play?

CA: This is exactly the point. Why are we running for the presidency? Why are we talking about taking a poll of society? To create the conditions for the creation of such a pole that will prepare the Cypriot working class for tomorrow. The world progressive left communist movement should, now that the exacerbations of capitalism are at their extreme, lead the masses of the people, the peoples of the

world to overthrow the capitalist system.

PC: Let us say that in Cyprus a political consciousness is being cultivated and a revolutionary party is being created. Do you think there needs to be something similar at the global level?

CA: You have to take into account the international conditions. I repeat, we are talking about the nationalization of the exploitation of natural wealth. Hugo Chavez in Venezuela and Evo Morales in Bolivia are two examples of nationalization of natural wealth. It is not socialism that exists in their countries, but they went ahead with nationalisations within capitalism.

PH: Do you think it can be a transitional measure?

CA: No. It can, and does, occasionally alleviate the problems of the working and popular classes in their countries. But it cannot be the future.

It is within our political guidelines to try to mitigate -within our means- the problems that concern the younger generation, such as popular housing, the rise of the minimum wage, re-nationalisation, (e.g. the port authority), the expanded welfare state, expanded state interventionism. In any case, for the real economy under this system to develop, the working class must have purchasing power. In the present situation it does not even have purchasing power, which is why we are leading to the crisis of capitalism.

Someone will say to me: "But are you not now perpetuating capitalism with what you are telling us?" This is what capitalism did with Keynesianism in the Nordic countries. That's why I said we are not going to solve the problem. The question is to overthrow the system. But we have to prepare the consciences. The people of the world must be prepared.

PC: The question is: if consciences are prepared in Cyprus and not globally, can anything be attempted again? As it happened for example in Cuba.

CA: I will answer in the following way. In 1426 in Cyprus there was a popular revolution, the peasant revolution, which went down in history as the revolution of Re Alexis. The peasant revolution is a striking and illuminating example to interpret today. As in feudalism then, so in capitalism today, there is a given: the exploiters and the exploited. This follows from the exploitative system in question. Whether it is feudalism or capitalism.

PC: Is it in the nature of any class society?

CA: That's right. The Greek Revolution, which also sprang from within the bosom of feudalism, was prepared by the Greek bourgeoisie for the ultimate purpose of the first Greek bourgeois state. But there is a telling difference: the revolution of Re Alexis, which took place centuries before, within feudalism, was prepared not by the bourgeoisie, because it did not exist in Cyprus, but from the bottom rung of the pyramid of Cypriot society. Some bourgeois who did exist were incorporated with the feudal lords. Then shouldn't the peasants have taken the opportunity and built the new society themselves, even for a while?

In the period we are referring to there was no such term as socialism, capitalism or communism. But there was a universal, a universal demand against feudalism: communal ownership of production on the land and of all goods, except women. So, at the heart of the patriarchal society, they put women at the heart of the demands of the peoples of the world.

The paradox is that even the bourgeoisie at that time, in its infancy and before it was transformed

into a ruling class, also demanded communal property to keep the peoples within the geographical definition at that time, each people separately according to their culture, their religion, etc., within the geographical definition that they wanted to create the nation-state later on, i.e. the future bourgeois state.

So what I want to say is: yes, the villagers should have taken the opportunity. What happened in return? The former enemies, Mamluks, Muslims, and the Holy See, that is, the Papal Church and the Western states, came together to confront the revolution in Cyprus so that it would not become an example for the peoples of the world and as a domino effect all peoples would revolt. It would be a very big example for the exploiters from one end of the planet to the other to overthrow feudalism. But did the peasants/slaves then have to wait for five centuries for society to mature and move on to the next political-social-economic system? No! They took the opportunity, built what they built until it was overturned the way it happened.

PC: So you are saying that if there is a chance for the working class to take power in Cyprus, it should be taken?

CA: Even if the working class takes power in Cyprus, it will be overthrown. As it was overthrown by the revolution of Re Alexis (1426). But that doesn't mean that the serfs shouldn't have done so.

Russia in 1917 was an industrially backward country. There was no industry, so there was no proletariat. Lenin supported the bourgeois-democratic revolution by supporting Kerensky. When he was plotting to bring back Kornilov, he supported "all power to the soviets" and went ahead with the revolution. That is, knowing that things were not ready for him to take power right from the start, he let Kerensky take power first.

PC: Others believed in the possibility of the revolution evolving from a bourgeois-democratic to a socialist one, as can be seen, for example, from the "April Theses" he wrote at the time.

Lenin supported Kerensky, but in order to undermine the government in order to advance the revolution.

CA: Lenin took things as far as they went. First he gave ministries to the Left SRs. The Mensheviks joined in, and he honored the anarchists at the end of the revolution. It was multi-party, at first. So when was one-partyism implemented? When all of them joined the counter-revolution at the end of the day. Then he said the famous "violence wants counter-violence", which some people called red terrorism, and that's where the red army was born. But the red army that defeated the fascist beast, the Nazi beast, and saved the whole planet from darkness much later. I state this, to be fair.

I have studied the leap to collectivisation and then, after Lenin, I think it was a very serious undertaking. I am not talking about the errors and omissions in the attempt to build socialism in the Soviet Union.

PC: Let me ask you a more general question: what do you think about the October Revolution and the Soviet Union? In your Sigma interview you called it a rehearsal for the rehearsal of humanity for socialism, and it's a term you use a lot. Did this rehearsal ultimately fail, and if so, why?

CA: I consider the world communist movement to be defeated after the overthrow of the socialist countries and the Soviet Union. There is a notable difference here with the AKEL view that insists that it is dissolution and not overthrow. I continue to consider it an overthrow because the counter-revolutionaries and opportunists, as Lenin very characteristically put it, did their job well, in the sense

that they perverted the socialist states and the Soviet Union. And certainly the external danger and the war they were receiving from the metropolises of capitalism. I am convinced that the evolutionary course of society cannot be stopped, that the passage from capitalism to socialism is inevitable.

PC: What do you mean by inevitable? Do you mean that inevitably capitalism will fall whether we want it to or not? So you think that something analogous to the overthrow of feudalism will be the overthrow of capitalism?

CA: Feudalism fell when it was overthrown by the bourgeois-democratic revolutions. In the same way, but not by the ruling class this time, capitalism will be overthrown. But by whom? This time it will be overthrown by the exploited with the ultimate goal of a classless society. It is not at all analogous.

PC: What is the difference in their nature?

CA: The difference lies in which social class makes the revolution. In the bourgeois-democratic revolutions it was simply the people who participated in the organization.

PC: They participated but the leadership was in the hands of the bourgeoisie. It was mainly the working class that was in the fight.

CA: Sure. But weren't many revolutions characterized as stolen victories by the people? I consider the passage to the victories of the people to be inevitable.

There are voices that say that such a thing is possible only in self-sufficient regions of the planet, that socialism could be built there first and then extended to the whole planet. Marx said that the revolution would start in a metropolis of capitalism and even in an industrialized country. It turned out to be in an industrially backward country that still had a czar, with strong feudal elements and a rudimentary state capitalism.

PC: Of course there was Lenin's thinking at the time that they would spark a revolution in the rest of Europe, especially in Germany, which they did, but then we had the betrayal by the SPD.

CA: I won't disagree. But I will say this: the counterattack of the Red Army after the Nazi thunder was crushed, like the partisan movement, was a revolutionary process attempted by the Soviet Union to extend the revolution to the entire planet. So there is no specific recipe. That's what I mean.

PC: A clarification: do you think the revolution failed because of capitalism? Did capitalism prove to be more powerful?

CA: No, I wouldn't say that. It was an early attempt, and it came unorthodoxly, just as the overthrow of Re Alexis in Cyprus was early and unorthodox. Was it premature or immature? I think not. They should have taken the opportunity. When Lenin saw that things were being set up and would go somewhere else, he proceeded in the spirit of "all power to the Soviets".

PC: You state that you are confident that humanity will try again for a global overthrow of capitalism, but do you see such a tendency? In the last few decades we haven't seen anything, what makes you optimistic?

CA: It's a one-way street. There is no other way.

PC: So in your words, capitalism inevitably creates a discontent due to oppression and exploitation, inevitably pushing the working class back in revolutionary directions. What ought to be the role of a

communist party, of trade unions and what is their relationship?

CA: That's exactly it! That is, on the one hand, to give struggles within capitalism and to be a lever of pressure. Because Lenin made it clear in ““Left-Wing” Communism: an Infantile Disorder” that we participate in the bourgeois institutions. But he never took power himself.

PC: Management is one thing and participation is another.

CA: That's right. Participation and leverage are one thing. But on the other hand, I spoke in my previous public statements about the short term and the long term, and when I told them that the long term goal is to overthrow the existing political socio-economic system, the hairs on their heads stood up!

PC: Or they didn't take it seriously!

PC: They might not have understood what I was trying to say. Or they were trying to ridicule it, but they couldn't. They haven't studied the social evolution that is inevitable! They do not understand that the cycle of social evolution has neither closed nor stopped under capitalism, something that Charilaos Florakis said several times and I agree with him.

PC: Is it the role of the party to cultivate this consciousness?

CA: Right. Its role is to shape consciousness, to encourage and give socio-political class struggles. To certainly take things as far as they can go. From there, it's upheaval that has to occur.

PC: Do you think that in order to do this, new political parties, unions and movements will have to be created?

CA: When you say new, do you mean a new worldview? The worldview is there. In Cyprus in particular, I consider it necessary to create a communist party.

PC: When you say it is a necessity, you mean that it has to happen, which does not mean that it will definitely happen. But when you say it is inevitable, you imply that it will definitely happen.

CA: I said that the passage to socialism is inevitable. But whether a communist party will be created now is another matter.

PC: What do you think is the biggest problem facing Cyprus today?

CA: For us all issues are important because they are interconnected. We cannot say that some are primary and some are not. One example: if we want to talk about raising the living standards of our people under the current circumstances, does not that go through the solution of the Cyprus problem? It would be a mistake to say no.

Mr Mavroyiannis told us that socialism/communism is obsolete and I tell you that it is an inevitable evolution of society, that it is ultra-modern, timeless and necessary. Mr Mavroyiannis, without wishing to disparage any of my opponents, could not quite distinguish between what model, political-socio-economic system, current and policies for restructuring the capitalist system meant and he was putting neoliberalism as the same as socialism and communism! It is political illiteracy to say that neoliberalism is a new political-socio-economic system and not a system restructuring policy, as well as that it is a model! What exactly do we mean by model?

PC: I think that because what the establishment candidates say is determined by communicators, the communicators tell them that it's not important to discuss ideology. A communicator won't pay attention to the ideological part.

CA: I understand that the man is not a politician. We agree. But he has had political appointments in his life, such as the presidency of the European Union under Christofias. He knows very well what Mavroyiannis means when he says we need more European unification and European integration and more European defence. Does he mean PESCO and Frontex? Does he mean the Schengen Treaty? Does he mean Euro border guards? He served from this post, politically appointed by Demetris Christofias. What does he mean by all this? It is what prevents migrants from going to their countries of destination and staying in the host countries. And this is where nationalism is revived.

PC: Since you opened up these issues, immigration and the European Union, let's talk about them. What is your opinion of the European Union, and in a hypothetical scenario that you were elected, what would you do in relation to it? Talk to us about immigration as well since you've linked it.

CA: We are within the European Union, like it or not. Certainly one of our directions is to push as a member state of the European Union to get the Dublin Regulation abolished. The Schengen Treaty contradicts the Geneva Convention.

For us there are no illegal people. Because we needed it too, and I think that with Turkey's intransigence and the economic factors that Turkey has, we will need it again. And let the Cypriot people be frightened by what I am saying. We have signed international conventions and treaties. We cannot avoid this. But this is not the solution. I have heard my opponent say that the Cameroonians who come to Cyprus are of draft age. And will Cameroon come with a thousand and two problems to instrumentalize the migration issue in Cyprus? It's funny these things, and sickening of some to say it. So, as long as we are a host country we should push things within the capitalist institutions. That is why we are also claiming a bourgeois institution.

PC: So in the short term you would suggest that there should be better sharing of migrants within the EU countries, because there are still disproportionate numbers in the receiving countries. Would you disagree with some individuals and groups on the left who are heavily involved in this issue, and who in my opinion have a vague moralistic argument for free borders and full rights for migrants? They may have had a problem with you saying that immigrants are indeed a problem, even though you propose a more humane solution. Nevertheless, you think some should leave Cyprus as we have too many.

CA: I said right from the beginning and clearly that there are no illegal people for us and the tendencies that support us. I too am a refugee by birth. But beyond that I think that Cyprus is not an ideal place for these people to come and find a better future. No we don't want them, conditions are not appropriate. When capitalism has done its job well and left agricultural production at just two percent of GDP, where will these people come to work? Since there is no primary sector. In Greece, Albanians left the olive groves during the olive picking season and left for another country where they found better wages. Who picked the olives? They stayed on the trees. Anyway, many foreign workers both in Cyprus and in Greece cover sectors that we have abandoned or that we need or that we do not have the know-how or anyway for some reasons we do not participate in these sectors as Cypriots.

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