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cypriot consciousness

This text is my speech at an event organized by our magazine at Famagusta Gate. At the same event, Mehmet Yaşin spoke about “Turkish Cypriot identity in literature”. Yaşin's speech will be published in the next issue, which will feature a tribute to Turkish Cypriots. We will then respond to various newspaper articles about the event.

Costis Achniotis

First of all, I clarify that I understand the concept of collective consciousness (and its content) not as fixed and unchanging, and that I do not, of course, attribute to it the dimensions of a physical principle. Collective consciousness, like any social concept, is variable and follows the changing needs of a society.

This variability is certainly not mechanistic at all. The superstructure can have an impact on social evolution drastically. For example, the emergence of industry forms the totality ‘workers’ who can be carriers of worker consciousness. Worker consciousness is potentially common to all countries and can determine the totality of the world’s workers. Of course this perception is macroscopic. Other criteria, such as individual consciousness; are influential in forming opposing subsets.

For the purposes of this text I refer to Cypriot Consciousness as the consciousness of Cypriot Independence. Its carriers are all Cypriots who believe in Independence, that is, those who perceive Cyprus and its people as an independent entity and thus seek to preserve the corresponding political institution, that of the Independent Cypriot State.

Of course, the perception of Cypriot Independence is fundamentally a matter that has not been studied, neither historically, nor sociologically or politically, and this applies to both communities. And this is absolutely natural since the consciousness of Enosis and Taksim have been dominant here in absolute terms, since the 1950s. Despite the acceptance of a so-called Independence in 1960, the leaders of the two communities were (or behaved as if they were) unionist or partitionist. Therefore, only this aspect of history was projected, of course with the corresponding ideological viewpoint. It is indicative, for example, how even now the history of Greek Cypriots remains extensively overlooked.

So it is not easy to realize where the CCP [Cyprus Communist Party] supported its anti-unionist stance. I am reading you an excerpt.

“… The CCP considers it its duty to protest with all its forces, firstly against the local English government which by its indifference contributes to the sharpening of racial hatreds between the inhabitants of Cyprus and subsequently against the false leaders of this place, who have spoken and will speak in the name of the Cypriot people. DOWN WITH ENOSIS, LONG LIVE CYPRIOT INDEPENDENCE, LONG LIVE THE PROLETARIAT OF THE WORLD” (Neos Anthropos, 25.4.1925).

We thus see that the perception of Independence was already combined with the attempt to avoid inter-communal oppositions.

There is no doubt that from that time and until AKEL's unequivocal acceptance of "Enosis and Only Enosis" after nearly 25 years of ambivalence, the popular sentiment of the Greek Cypriot community had been increasingly oriented towards Greece. The Turkish Cypriot minority seems to have been following developments belatedly, finally catching up to them after the EOKA struggle. However, when AKEL was turning towards Enosis, the Trotskyist Party of Cyprus (a small communist organization) directed harsh criticism against it, perceiving independence as the self-governance of the oppressed classes, without referring to the Turkish Cypriot community. I read an excerpt:

"COMRADES, let this year's May Day find us in the struggle for the transition of power into the hands of our people, for SELF-GOVERNANCE. The treacherous abandonment of the slogan for Self-Governance by the Stalinist leadership and the adoption of the slogan of "Enosis", must make us come to our senses. We have to stop the fanaticism of "Enosis" by ourselves. We should force the inadequately fit leaders of our workers' organizations to get on the right track of serving workers' interests. If they refuse, we should sidestep them and move forward, with a new, militant, class-conscious and determined leadership, for the struggle of the transition of power in the hands of workers and farmers. "Enosis" can neither offer us better working conditions, nor higher wages, nor can it secure our social liberation. It can only bring a change of our chains. Nothing more, nothing less. WORKERS, FARMERS, THE OPPRESSED, Go ahead to the struggle for our emancipation. To the struggle for our economic and political claims. To the fight for better working conditions and for Social Security. For the opening of jobs for the unemployed. For unemployment benefits. For the organizing and raising of class-consciousness of all the oppressed. For SELF-GOVERNANCE. For a Government of Workers and Farmers, empathizing with the worker and protecting the farmer. For our total national and social liberation"

In this text there is no reference to Turkish Cypriots. However, in the municipal elections, the candidates of this party put forward the idea of the proportional representation of Turkish Cypriots while at the same time the demand for Enosis is contested through the demand for Self-Governance. The demand for Enosis is considered to be an entirely bourgeois demand ('Ergatis', May 15, 1949).

However, the Trotskyist organization split up and dissolved shortly afterwards. One of the reasons is that a section of its members became unionist, as the discussion texts we can see in its latest publications, indicate. In short, we see that before the 1950s, the Greek Cypriot left tends to want independence without always opposing it to Enosis; and combines this demand with an strong labor policy (it is no coincidence that the last workers' struggles happened at that time); and an understanding of the danger involved in a potential bi-communal opposition (and of course other reasons, for example, geopolitics).

I do not know if you, as I do, think that history has in fact justified the fears of the leftists of the time. However, while the Greek Cypriot community was in totality voting for "Enosis and only Enosis" in 1950, with the whole decade leaving no room for anything else, I suppose that even amongst the bourgeoisie there are muffled thoughts for independence, since it certainly cannot be accidental that Makarios gives that famous interview in 1957, or when the National Council of the time is involved, albeit resentfully, in the Zurich and London talks.

In evaluating the decade of the 1950s, we can briefly state that the entire revolutionary potential of the Cypriot people, Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots, was wasted in order to marginalize the conscious participation of the working class, building the bi-communal conflict, which provided neither

self-governance, nor Enosis, but dependency.

That is why Cypriot Consciousness is constantly a new-born consciousness. It never overcame early infancy. As a result, its face is marked by the grief of old age, and the main emotion it can feel is the uncertain pain of existence. Cypriot Consciousness exists trampled between the feet of its adversaries, engaged in an endless body-to-body combat. From the height of the ground where it stands, it sees them as enormous giants. Despite the constant trampling, Cypriot Consciousness is saved only by the fact that none of these giants dominates completely. Otherwise, Cypriot Consciousness would have been lost. Cypriot Consciousness believes itself to be weak. That's why it plays dead, waiting for better days.

Cypriot Consciousness is weak and humble. It knows this and does not enter the fight. It is sufficient for it to chuckle at the weakness of its much more powerful rivals, who nonetheless, are also unable to impose their own order of things. In its ears, their voices sound as mere rhetoric and fanfaronade.

Cypriot Consciousness has the pride of the marginalized.

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