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the "self-evident truths" of social patriotism (part b) (dialogue)

publishing group [workers' democracy](#)

This article was received by "Within the Walls" in November '88, and [the first part](#) was published (without mentioning who the authors were, because of lack of editorial oversight) in March '89. Thus dates mentioned at the end of the article, belonged to the future when the article was received, while now they belong to the past. However, since then, important events have occurred that strengthen the politics of the article.

The "incompetent" Greek Cypriot bourgeoisie became self-sufficient very quickly after 1960. From '64 onwards, the development of the Greek Cypriot bourgeoisie was such that it allowed it to take over the "neo-colonial" state of Zurich and turn it into its own independent centre of control of capitalist accumulation in the Cypriot region and a base for economic infiltration in the "underdeveloped" surrounding region, neutralising the "restrictions" imposed on it by the Turkish Cypriots and the Zurich agreements. Even the British bases that remained were never an obstacle to its development, on the contrary, they ensured "peace" and "tranquility" in the same areas of the Middle East where it was also extending its small but imperialist hands to grab what it could.

What else was left to do to realize "national independence" so that Eliades and others would not consider it "incompetent"? The union of "all of Cyprus" with Greece? The forced "reunification" of Cyprus against the will of the Turkish Cypriots? Or being able to "look after" its own interests in the region with its own, "independent" bases and not with those of the British or with accommodations to the Americans?

However, the myth that it is "imperialist dependence that nurtured and created the conditions of intercommunal bloodshed, chauvinism and intolerance" as Eliades writes, prevails. But no one has a convincing explanation why American and NATO imperialism would want to create a split in its south-eastern wing. Instead, this convenient patriotic insistence on blaming everything on "foreign" imperialism prevents them from seeing something much more fundamental. That ethnic conflicts like the one in Cyprus are the result of **capitalism**, of the factionalism and competition that lies at the heart of the system itself at all levels, in all its individual parts, and appears wherever it finds the opportunity. The "foreign thumbs" may shape them in one way or another, but to believe that they are the ones causing them is at best patriotic naivety and complacency, if not racism in reverse ("WE wouldn't have been fooled if we were left alone").

Analysis of the particular” 3: Were the French colonialists in Algeria “cheap labour”?

Where Ch. Eliades gives a great example of how not to avoid “ ahistorical generalisation” is by equating the Turkish settlers, the vast majority of whom are migrant workers, with the French colonialists in Algeria before '62:

“But apart from the Cypriot “social patriots” and the Palestinians, the Algerian revolutionaries showed similar “racist” feelings towards the French settlers whose removal they sought and achieved with the independence of Algeria (1962). ... the French revolutionary workers' organisations not only did not consider the removal of the French settlers as 'barbarism' but considered their removal as an expression of the implementation of the principle of self-determination of the Algerian people!”

What relationship can French landowners, senior state officials, oil company executives and privileged French workers of colonial Algeria have with the Turkish “settlers” whom they all accuse of causing problems for Turkish Cypriots as “cheap labour”, working even below the legal minimum wage?

For the “marxism” of Ch. Eliades, it is not the actual economic and social situation that determines the character of the Turkish settlers and separates them from the French in Algeria, and thus the attitude we should take towards them, but the common factor that they are both foreigners. And this seems to be the only thing that Ch. Eliades considers. Both the French colonialists and the Turkish settlers, after all, crossed the sea from the north to come here. Since it was progressive that the local Algerians sent the French northwards, it would be equally progressive for us to send the Turkish settlers in the same direction. The fact that Algerians were the “cheap labour” in Algeria is of no importance to Ch. Eliades.

To the extent that Ch. Eliades understands that this contradiction exists, he solves it by baptizing the Turks as “settlers”, instruments of Turkish imperialism, and gets rid of the issue. That the Turkish and Turkish Cypriot bourgeoisie are trying to use the “settlers” for their own purposes (one of which is to use them as cheap labour) there is no doubt. God forbid if the only thing determining the Marxists' attitude towards a section of the working class was the goals the bourgeoisie wants to serve by using this section, unless we are told that the “settlers” are organised fascists and cops posing as cheap labour. But then how do you explain that in Davlos the “Turkish Cypriots and the Turkish settlers living in the area” took on the big businessman Asil Nadir and his multinational company “Polly Peck” and clashed with the police to resist their plans to “develop” the area? (“NEA” 22/12/88). Such would be the attitude of the settlers if they were “instruments” of Denktaş and the Turkish and Turkish Cypriot bourgeoisie?

After all, if the settlers and Turkish Cypriot bourgeoisie want to use the settlers to serve the goal of demographic change that will further their reactionary national interests, their expulsion would serve the reactionary goal of violent demographic reversion that will serve the equally reactionary national interests of the Greek and Greek Cypriot bourgeoisie. What should determine our attitude is the economic and social reality, the class position of the settlers as one of the most oppressed sections of the working class in northern Cyprus. The solidarity of the workers of the different ethnicities is not a “Christian” feeling, as Ch. Eliades wants to describe it. It is the essence of workers' internationalism.

Analysis of the particular 4: The State of Israel is similar to the TRNC

In this “specific analysis”, of course, Ch. Eliades has not been a pioneer at all. The hypocritical propagandistic exploitation of the Palestinian struggle by Greek Cypriot patriots is on the agenda, especially in the last year with the heroic “intifada”. The catchphrase of the campaign is 'Cyprus Palestine common struggle'. And Eliades' corresponding words are:

*"It would be extremely interesting if Workers' Democracy could enlighten us as to whether **by the same reasoning** it recognizes the right of the Zionist state of Israel (1947) to exist, which under the pretext of securing the democratic rights of the Jewish people.... placed the whole of Palestine under Zionist occupation."*

Of course we are on the side of the Palestinians and against the existence of the Zionist state of Israel. But here in Cyprus, who were the real Palestinians? Slums like the ones we see on TV where the Palestinians live only the Turkish Cypriots had in Cyprus. And as for sieges of camps, levelings and demolitions, does anyone remember what happened from '63 to '67 in Cyprus? What happened in Omorfita in 1963? In Kofinou in 1967, about the events of which even Papandreou said:

*"It was indeed a great provocation to Turkey. There were also **slaughters and looting**" (Speech of Papandreou in the Parliament on the "opening of the Cyprus file" 21/2/86).*

Nobody remembers? If we all do not accept the "right" of the Israelis to oppress the Palestinians and recognize the latter's right to self-determination, then why not recognize the right of self-determination for the Turkish Cypriots? Because they do not have, as Ch. Eliades, a "compact national-geographical" space? It may not be "historical", but this is something that might be of concern to bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalists, not Marxists.

But Eliades, along with all the other social patriots or mere patriots, parties, the church, etc., has an "irrefutable" argument: "We don't accept the finality of violence". As he puts it:

"this state (TRNC) has now materialized under specific conditions of barbarism and is the product of the displacement of the indigenous inhabitants, of military occupation and of mass colonization."

And he thinks he has settled the issue so well that he asks us to quote him "even one (only one) specific Leninist quote stating that the right to create a state implies the seizure and occupation of the territories of others, the displacement of the legitimate indigenous inhabitants of those territories..." etc. Of course Lenin didn't write such bullshit, just as we never said that the Turkish invasion was "necessary" or "justified". It's just that Eliades, as a patriot, believes that anyone who is not with him is a friend of his enemy.

We had answered all this long before Eliades put this "irrefutable" challenge to us. In the relevant section of the book ["The Cyprus problem"](#) we wrote:

Before '74 the populations were indeed mixed and there was of course no way the Greek Cypriot revolutionaries could ask for separation of populations as a solution to the problem of ethnic oppression of Turkish Cypriots. However, they could and should have fought against the ethnic oppression of the Turkish Cypriots by the Greek Cypriot bourgeoisie within the state that existed at the time, and to uphold their basic democratic rights....

But all this ceased to apply after '74. There are no more mixed populations in Cyprus. But the hypocritical response of the bourgeoisie to this is the "fait accompli of the invasion" and the "human rights" of the refugees in Cyprus.

That is, they say that the populations are no longer mixed because of **war violence** and that this "fait accompli" must and can be changed. What is our response to this argument?

First, it's good to remember that separation of populations and refugees as "the fait accompli of

violence” existed before '74, and the Greek Cypriot bourgeoisie and politicians who are nowadays busting their asses over the “fait accompli of violence” achieved by their enemy, were responsible for it then.

Second, what should be the attitude of revolutionaries towards the various “fait accompli” for which the working class is **not responsible**? The Marxist tradition treats the results of historical processes without moralising and independently of the aims and intentions of those who made them. What is of interest is what the new situation that has taken shape is and what it leads or can lead to.

*“The bourgeoisie makes it its business to promote trusts, drive women and children into the factories, subject them to corruption and suffering, condemn them to extreme poverty. **We do not “demand”** such development, **we do not “support” it.** We fight it. But how do we fight? We explain that trusts and the employment of women in industry are progressive. We do not want a return to the handicraft system, pre-monopoly capitalism, domestic drudgery for women. Forward through the trusts, etc., and beyond them to socialism! (Lenin, English Collected Works, vol. 23 p. 81).”*

*“England, it is true, in causing a social revolution in Hindostan, was **actuated only by the vilest interests**, and was stupid in her manner of enforcing them. But that is not the question. The question is, can mankind fulfil its destiny without a fundamental revolution in the social state of Asia? If not, whatever may have been the crimes of England she was the unconscious tool of history in bringing about that revolution. (K. Marx “The British Rule in India” from “Marx Surveys from Exile”, Pelican, p. 306).”*

*“All the English bourgeoisie may be forced to do will neither emancipate nor materially mend the social condition of the mass of the people, depending not only on the development of the productive powers, but on their appropriation by the people. But what they will not fail to do is to lay down the material premises for both. **Has the bourgeoisie ever done more? Has it ever effected a progress without dragging individuals and people through blood and dirt, through misery and degradation?**” (K. Marx: The Future Results of the British Rule in India, Ibid, p. 323).*

So the fact that the situation after '74 was shaped by the “force of arms”, that it is a “fait accompli of the invasion”, does not mean that we have any duty to support “our” bourgeoisie to return to the period of Greek Cypriot rule and racist oppression of Turkish Cypriots, to persecute settlers and the like. The fact that the current situation is the result of the “fait accompli” cannot be decisive for the revolutionaries. After all, the vast majority of the world's current borders are the result, in one way or another, of some “acts of violence”, sometimes distant in time and sometimes quite recent...

Separation is now an event which the revolutionaries and workers neither wished for nor have any responsibility for; it is a **reality**, a “fait accompli” created by capitalism by force and with terrible consequences for the workers and peasants, such as the change by British colonialism of Indian society by force and so much more. The revolutionaries, unlike the hypocritical bourgeois, “recognise the fait accompli”, i.e. the present reality, and are looking for how to move forward, starting from this reality.

The entrenchment of Turkish Cypriots and Turkish settlers in a separate region is by now an indisputable fact. The integration of the refugees in the South, i.e. their transformation into proletarians, petty bourgeoisie and bourgeoisie is also a fact; today there are no refugees as a

separate social category. It would of course have been our duty, before these things happened, to fight against the war and its results, the barbaric population movements through the fault of both the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot bourgeoisie from '63 to '74, although it was never our duty to fight against the migration of Turks from Turkey to Cyprus in order to preserve the "Greekness of Cyprus". But now our duty is to fight to move forward starting from what presently exists: the geographical separation, the "sympathies" and will of the Turkish Cypriots, and the settlement of poor settlers from Turkey in the North. ("THE CYPRUS PROBLEM and the Internationalist Tasks of Greek Cypriot Revolutionaries" pp. 178-181.)

There are, of course, the refugees, for whom Ch. Eliades and all the others are so concerned about, while their stomachs turn upside down if one shows the same sensitivity and concern for the impoverished Turkish migrant workers who make up the majority of the settlers. There is a way to address the problem here too without being either insensitive or a hypocritical nationalist. Here is what we wrote in "The Cyprus Problem":

...it does not mean that the demands of the poor refugees who lost the home they worked for and were deprived of are unjust or hypocritical. So how do the revolutionaries deal with the refugee problem?

Refugees are not a single social stratum. They range from the big bourgeois refugees like the Catsellis and the Lordos families with the hotels and businesses they lost and "miraculously" regained in the South, to the poor working class and peasant who lost everything they had and regained nothing.

To the former, one can only say "well, deserve it and worse things may come your way, only we would prefer that next time it should be the working class and not the Turkish army that will take them from you".

But what do we say to the poor working class refugees? First we have to explain how and why Turkish expansionism is **only half responsible** for the war. The other half is the responsibility of "our" ruling class, those who oppressed the Turkish Cypriots for so many years. The same ones who are now taking from our salaries for military spending so they can do the same thing again if they can.

And then, we have to say that **it is not possible now** to support their right of return without inevitably supporting the aggressive plans of "our" bourgeoisie, and forgetting the rights of other workers, of Turkish Cypriots and Turkish settlers. Anyone who argues that in the current situation we can avoid this is politically naive to say the least.

But we must fight against "our" bourgeoisie for their remaining rights **as workers and as refugees**. That is, the right to work, which is constantly denied them by Greek Cypriot capitalism, and the right to receive from the state housing and compensation for what they have lost. It is our duty to fight against "our" bourgeoisie and the aggression of "our" government and this cannot be done today by supporting this aggression in any way, even if it is covered behind the slogan of "defending human rights" and the return of the refugees (Ibid p.183).

Our slogan should therefore be "houses for refugees" and not "all refugees in their houses".

And the question that we asked [from our first article](#) in this magazine is still unanswered. Is there any progressive and non-“barbaric” way to undo the “fait accompli” of '74, to remove the settlers and return all refugees to their homes? The only way to get the settlers out is by forcibly moving an entire population. This will be done either by a “victorious” Greek army, or even, after an agreement, by the Turkish army. If one thinks that a victorious proletariat can do the same in a progressive way, then one has a completely different conception of proletarian democracy and socialist revolution from that of the Marxist tradition.

A PLAIN CHAUVINIST

It is not surprising that the outcome of Ch. Eliades' politics is the justification of a “national liberation” war, joining his voice with other chauvinists:

*“Workers' Democracy reduces the substance of the matter more or less to a level of discussion about the ability or not of the Greek Cypriot ruling class to achieve a **a victorious military confrontation** with the Turkish occupation army.*

*At the outset, we should note that freedom from Turkish military occupation is the **absolute right** of the entire Cypriot people, without excluding **any means**.*

Are we wrong when it seems to us that when Ch. Eliades “notes” that war is “the absolute right of the entire Cypriot people” inevitably includes among those who have this “right” the Greek Cypriot ruling class? Are we wrong to understand from this that if in the future the Greek Cypriot ruling class declares war, Ch. Eliades will support this war?

This is of course his “absolute right”, but he cannot call it a Marxist position.

Lenin, in one of the most famous and intense cases of national oppression, that of Poland, which was in under the subjugation of Tsarist Russia, made it clear whose “absolute” duty it was to fight for Poland's right to self-determination and whose it was not:

*“In **no** nation does **hatred of Russia sit so deep** as with the Poles; no nation dislikes Russia so intensely as the Poles...The Polish Social-Democratic comrades have rendered a great historic service by advancing the slogan of internationalism and declaring that the fraternal union of the proletariat of all countries is of supreme importance to them and that they will never go to war for the liberation of Poland. This is to their credit, and this is why we have always regarded only these Polish Social-Democrats as socialists. The others are patriots...*

Why should we Great Russians... deny the right to secession for Poland?... But people don't want to understand that to strengthen internationalism you do not have to repeat the same words. What you have to do is to stress, in Russia, the freedom of secession for oppressed nations and, in Poland, their freedom to unite.” (Lenin, English Collected Works, Vol. 24 p.298).

INTERNATIONALISM AND DEMOCRACY

“In the age of imperialist decline....” writes Ch. Eliades “the realization of democratic national goals (self-determination, national independence) now falls on the shoulders of the working class”. This is not only the position of Ch. Eliades. It is the meeting point of almost all tendencies of the Greek Cypriot far left. We must cooperate with the bourgeoisie as long as the “national question” exists, says AKEL. The bourgeoisie is “incompetent”, so it is time for socialism, replies the far left, only the working class can “solve” the “national question”.

And so they think they prove that AKEL is reformist and they are revolutionaries. It seems completely self-evident to all of them, traditional leftists and far leftists, that [missing part of the text, probably was: a national liberation] struggle is needed and all the rest. They can't even get past their social patriotic thinking that it is possible to question this. That is why it seems equally self-evident to them that the only problem is..... whether or not some part of the Greek Cypriot bourgeoisie can defeat the Turkish army and neutralize the (equally "self-evident") anti-Hellenic (or "anti-Cypriot") intentions of America and Western imperialism.

The only thing that this proves is that the former are social patriotic supporters of class cooperation at least until now.

This is because in today's southern Cyprus there is no question either of "solving" any "national problem" or of conducting any "national liberation struggle", either with class cooperation or with socialist revolution.

The aim of the revolutionaries is indeed the socialist revolution, the seizure of power by the working class both here and internationally. But not to solve with it some non-existent "national question" here in Cyprus.

So what is the relation of the socialist revolution to the Cyprus problem, i.e. the reactionary and unjust conflict between the Greek and Greek Cypriot bourgeoisie on the one hand and the Turkish and Turkish Cypriot bourgeoisie on the other?

There is a direct connection. A clear internationalist stance by revolutionaries will contribute to the workers on each side ceasing to see the people of the other side as their enemies and thus to see "their" bourgeoisie as allies. In other words, it is necessary both for the class unity of the Greek, Turkish, Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot workers and for breaking the class collaboration of each side with "their" bourgeoisie.

A clear internationalist stance is still necessary to enable the workers of all sides to make a victorious socialist revolution. Something that cannot be done unless the working class is trained in democracy, not bourgeois democracy, but socialist, internationalist democracy:

*"Capitalism and imperialism can be over thrown only by economic revolution. They cannot be over thrown by democratic transformations, even the most "ideal". **But a proletariat not schooled in the struggle for democracy is incapable of performing an economic revolution...***

...Through utilisation of bourgeois democracy to socialist and consistently democratic organisation of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie and against opportunism. There is no other path... We must direct free secession and free merging of nations along that path, not fight shy of them..." (Lenin, English Collected Works, Vol, 23, p, 25, 27).

If we see that the "emancipation of the working class must be the work of the working class itself" (Marx), then we must also see the importance of the education of the working class in democracy. Socialism means democratic self-organisation and self-management of the masses, freedom for the workers and the oppressed. If the working class does not **learn** to be the most consistent supporter and protector of the rights of **all** the oppressed sections of society, be they women, homosexuals, whores, or even oppressed religious minorities and other marginalized social strata, then.... it will not be able to take power, nor, if it does, will it be able to build a new liberated society. And what applies to other democratic issues also applies to the attitude towards ethnic conflicts.

How can **Greek Cypriot** workers and revolutionaries maintain a consistent (and not **hypocritical**) democratic stance on the Cyprus problem in the present period? Only by supporting the democratic right of the Turkish Cypriots to have their own state, if they want it. In the current period, socialist internationalist democracy demands from the workers of Greece, Cyprus and Turkey neutrality, abstention from the imperialist in-fighting as to whether the Greek and Greek Cypriot bourgeoisie will control the whole of Cyprus, or share this control with the Turkish gang.

But that's not enough. In the present period, democracy always requires (and this is the most important thing) the active reaction to the OFFENSIVE ACTIONS of "our" bourgeoisie which aims to impose its own interests on the Turkish Cypriots by force. Not only at the military level but also at the economic, political and even cultural level. This means in practice, for the Greek Cypriot and Greek working class, supporting the Turkish Cypriots' right to self-determination against "our" bourgeoisie which denies it to them.

And democracy and internationalism still demand from the working classes of Greece and southern Cyprus to **consciously** leave the task of practically confronting the Turkish army, and Turkish aggression in general, to those who have the obligation and duty to confront them. To the Turkish and Turkish Cypriot comrades and the Turkish and Turkish Cypriot working class, for whom in turn this is the only way to educate themselves in internationalist and socialist democracy.

This is the only correct attitude towards the real danger of war. The problem for workers is **not** the risk of a Turkish attack, against which we need "defence". It is the danger of another war, for which both sides will be equally responsible, as they were in the previous ones.

The only thing that can really reduce the risks of new wars is to re-engage and restore trust between the workers of the two hostile sides. It is the only thing that can make any bourgeoisie more reluctant to start a war in which it is not sure that it will have its working class on its side.

Proclamations of workers' rapprochement that are not accompanied by a workers' struggle against the military armaments of "their" government cannot be considered sincere by workers on the other side. When Turkish Cypriot and Turkish workers see us supporting our government and military armaments, they are easily convinced that all Greek Cypriots are their enemies and that Denktaş and Özal are their allies. Do similar feelings not prevail among the workers on 'our' side?

THEY DO NOT WANT TO SEE

The problem with Ch. Eliades, as with others like him, is not that they cannot see and understand what is really happening in southern Cyprus.

They just **don't want** to understand and they won't understand, because it doesn't suit their nationalism.

Today the Greek Cypriot and Greek bourgeoisie dominate, as well as their social patriotic fellow travellers of the traditional left. Alongside them, there are those who do not cooperate (in words only) with "our" bourgeoisie because they consider it "incompetent" because they want even more extreme measures than it can implement today. Those of us who see the hypocrisy of all this can and must move on to discussion and joint action. The [committee for the defence of conscientious objector Y. Parpas](#), who is being retried on 18 January, continues to provide this opportunity.

The nationalist "self-evident" and "self-explanatory" truths of Ch. Eliades are the same as those of almost the entire Greek Cypriot society.

They express the current dominance of bourgeois and petty bourgeois ideology and nationalism. It is for this reason, and not because of their theoretical or logical strength, that they are very difficult to deal with.

But it is not impossible. At least the lowest strata of workers and youth are not as steeped in it, as anyone who had joined us outside the factories to campaign against the re-vote on the "emergency contribution for defence" could see.

These "self-evident truths" need to be addressed, not just in theory but in practice.

PUBLISHING GROUP "WORKERS' DEMOCRACY"

1. If anyone thinks that in order to be imperialist a country must necessarily be a great power, with heavy industry, fleets and colonies, let him look at what Lenin wrote mainly about "little" Switzerland in 1916 but even about Bulgaria of the same period in his article "Defence of Neutrality", in Greek Collected Works vol.30 pp. 336.

- p.g.w.d.

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