

What was AKEL and where is it going? (Other Material)

Historical Note

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Content

What was AKEL and where is it going?

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On December 22, 2022, the Platypus Affiliated Society hosted a panel on AKEL at the House for Cooperation in Nicosia, Cyprus. The speakers were Charalambos Aristotelous (independent candidate in the 2023 presidential elections), Phedias Christodoulides ([Platypus](#) and [1917](#)),^[1] Athina Karyati ([New Internationalist Left](#)),^[2] and Marios Thrasyvoulou (historian and author). The moderator was Charis Theodorou. The panel was translated into English by Phedias Christodoulides, Charis Theodorou, and Thodoris Velissaris. An edited transcript follows.^[3]

Introduction

Following the decision of the Central Committee of AKEL (the Progressive Party of Working People)^[4] to support Andreas Mavroyiannis in the upcoming presidential elections, many on the Left have raised questions about the purpose and future of the Party, opening up for scrutiny not only the Party's recent crises but also its deep history both in relation to the international Left and the Cyprus problem. This panel invites you to consider the meaning of this history in the present for the Left.

What is the relationship between the Communist Party of Cyprus (CPC) and AKEL? How and why did one party evolve into the other? How did AKEL's nature change over the years? What were the turning points in its history? What is AKEL's relationship with the Greek Cypriot Right, both historically and today? How would you assess AKEL's stance on the Cyprus problem, both historically and today? What is the relevance of AKEL to the tasks and problems facing the Left? How do you see the future of AKEL? Opening remarks

Marios Thrasyvoulou: In order to understand the character of AKEL today, we necessarily have to go back in time. Its creation in 1941 was an attempt to break the left out of its isolation and make its ideas more accessible to the world. Although both Communist Party of Cyprus (CPC) cadres and bourgeois democrats took part in this effort, the influence of the Communists was clearly more significant. AKEL, as the continuation of the CPC, has its ideological and historical origins in Marxism and the October Revolution. De facto, its policy was influenced by what was happening in the center of the communist world. But it would be a mistake to assume that the communist parties that existed

at the time were controlled in an absolute manner by Moscow. Yes, they were broadly subordinate to it, but at the same time they retained a degree of autonomy in their policies within their own countries. Those of the West in particular had more freedom of movement, let alone if we are talking about a party from a small and relatively insignificant country, such as AKEL. Their policy depended to a large extent on the circumstances of each place, the choices they had before them, but also on the level of their leadership.

In Cyprus, the geographical peculiarities (small place, small population), colonialism, the powerful Church, social conservatism, and the predominance of nationalism are factors that influence the communists, pushing them into ideological retreat. AKEL does invoke Marxism, but from the outset it seeks to win over the other national forces, putting aside radical politics. Moscow's position in favor of communist parties' involvement in popular fronts with the democratic bourgeoisie and other forces, either first to counter fascism or shortly afterwards to counter imperialism, simply came to reinforce the already formed conservative policy of the AKEL leadership. Although the Party exploits the open field of promoting workers' rights and trade-union organization, it lacks the courage to go against the unifying current within the community, which is growing stronger and stronger as a result of the messages sent by the struggle against Nazism in World War II.

From about 1945 onwards, and with the expulsion of Ploutis Servas, people from within the working class, with a class consciousness, with a sincere desire to contribute, but without any particular ideological training, without experience from the international Left, without the ability to produce policy, slowly began to predominate in and around the leadership. They favor a party which, with the shield of a strong apparatus, collectivity and centralization in its internal functioning, will increase its power, strengthen its organizations, elect mayors, but without adhering faithfully to ideological principles. Indeed, this combination of liberal and pro-union politics increases its influence in society. With the descent to Cyprus of Ezekias Papaioannou in 1946 and his assumption of the post of General Secretary in 1949, the political approach that had been cultivated in the Party in the previous years finds its true expression. The bureaucratic mentality became stronger, and policy production was put aside.

For the next 10 years the picture is roughly as follows: AKEL further develops its trade-union activity and gains the confidence of the majority of the working class in the community. It is the only political force that builds bridges with Turkish Cypriots (TCs). Through the Pancyprian Federation of Labour (PEO) in particular,[5] AKEL has a significant influence on TC workers, but over time and with the intensification of the unionist struggle, this relationship is weakening. It occasionally makes calls to the Turkish Cypriots for cooperation and appeals to the necessity of friendship between the two communities, but it is clear that, however well-intentioned, the fact that it supports Union (enosis)[6] with Greece is driving the Turkish Cypriots away. AKEL constantly calls on the "ethnarchy" to cooperate and form a common front for Union. The Right and the ethnarchy are waging a harsh polemic against AKEL and discrediting it. The Civil War in Greece (1946–49) and the class conflicts are aggravating the tensions. AKEL reacts to the polemics and the denigration by the Right, but not only continues to insist on the rightness of the Union struggle, but often accuses the Right and the ethnarchy of selling it out. This pattern repeats itself constantly.

Something that is not discussed in the public sphere is that, where AKEL once decided to go its own separate way at important junctures — e.g., in the 1947–48 Consultative Assembly, or in collecting signatures in favor of the Union before the famous referendum organized by the ethnarchy in 1950 — in the 1959 presidential elections when AKEL went against Makarios, it does so after first being "kicked out" by the ethnarchy and the Right, after they first refused its call for cooperation. Again the content of its action is nationalist, and again it asks for the cooperation of the ethnarchy and Makarios, recognizing them as the leaders of the struggle. AKEL has been thirsting all this time to be

accepted in the national core.

It is with this psychology and this mentality that AKEL enters the new era of the Republic of Cyprus in the 1960s. It continues to keep radical politics out of its plans, while carrying at every step the fear of isolation. It even carries the anxiety that its patriotism might be questioned, as it happened a few years earlier in the EOKA[7] struggle. It supports Makarios almost uncritically and gives him carte blanche. In order to justify this policy, the theory of stages is used, i.e., that Cyprus is going through a period of incomplete independence, with democracy under threat and with imperialism threatening it, and therefore as communists they have a duty to form a front with the national progressive bourgeoisie in order to counter the dangers, complete independence, consolidate democracy, and then, when conditions permit, implement their own program of power.

I chose to limit myself to the 20 years from the mid-1940s to the mid-60s, because in the initial stages of this period, when AKEL was created and after, the Party was increasingly inoculated with specific perceptions and with a specific leadership body, under Papaioannou, while at the end of it we already had a fixed political mentality, which lasted for many years, and it affects the political DNA of the Party to this day.

AKEL was behaving in a contradictory manner. When it was following conservative politics, at the same time it was invoking Marxism, or when it was talking about Union and unvindicated national desires, at the same time it was calling the Turkish Cypriots to join forces. This coexistence, within its character, of Left-wing ideology and conservative practice, clouded its political horizon permanently. It was like a split personality.

In critically approaching the entire edifice of AKEL, infinite issues arise worthy of comment and discussion. I want to focus on three in particular.

(1) AKEL carries a contradiction throughout its journey. While on the one hand it has always been a great power, with a significant influence in civil society, on the other hand it never wanted to be a hegemonic power, to determine developments, to overturn a prescribed course of developments, to stand autonomously with its own forces, or to win over society. If we exclude the leadership of the labor struggles in the 1940s and the building of the trade-union movement, AKEL never took the lead in matters of power and of the Cyprus problem. To put it metaphorically, it never wanted to be the first violin of the orchestra. It willingly gave up its place to others.

(2) The absence of a vanguard and hegemonic consciousness limits AKEL's self-confidence and puts it in a position of constant defense. Its main concern was and is — even if it is not so obvious today — to be able to survive as a political entity and as a mechanism, not to isolate itself, not to take big risks. This traditional conservative consciousness permeates the whole of AKEL, from the leadership to the grassroots. It is also important to understand that this consciousness permeates, in a way, almost the whole of the rest of the Left. It's a vicious circle. AKEL's phobias become phobias for the rest of the Left. We often see other Left entities or individual Leftists not only accepting its dominance in the field but also feeling the need to defend this dominance. Let us look at the Greek example in contrast. The Greek Left, with all its mistakes, pathologies, and contradictions, led the way at crucial crossroads, stepped forward, sometimes took up arms, changed or tried to change the course of history, clashed with itself, split, and split again. This tradition has boosted its confidence, armed it with the courage to try new things, to take the initiative, without being afraid to split. We don't see this in the Greek-Cypriot Leftist milieu.

(3) Since, as was said before, AKEL is dominant in the Left, and its dominance is not actually threatened, it is logical that today it has the flexibility, or rather the luxury, to make a self-criticism for

some wrong choices, to examine its history, to try to change politically and organizationally, to become a modern force that can attract young and working people. But we see that the will is not there. It seems that this dominance is working in the opposite direction: both the leadership and the professional apparatus, along with a critical mass of traditional cadres, are complacent, preferring to keep the Party as it is rather than engage in a process of reflection, fearing that they might upset an internal balance.

Charalambos Aristotelous: I am not here tonight as a historian — after all, my specialty is political science. I am also participating in my capacity as a candidate in the upcoming presidential elections.

The reason why we are running in the presidential elections is because of AKEL's decision on the candidacy of Andreas Mavroyiannis. It is because we have separated our position from the Party of the parliamentary "Left." It is up to the people and the working class to tell us and decide whether this Party represents the working class of Cyprus. While it could and had the potential to broaden the struggles — I agree with much of what Marios said — it did not. The aim of my candidacy and the forces supporting it is not to be elected per se, but to promote the opposite pole that is absent from the political life of the country today. By "opposite pole," we mean the pole that will represent resistance to neoliberal policies. All of you know what these policies mean for the Cypriot working class. But I have not seen AKEL fighting class struggles or political struggles, either on the streets or in parliament.

I have long dissociated my stance from the political stance of AKEL, as expressed in the Party's declaration "Our Concept of Socialism" (1990).[8] There are two key points in this declaration which find us in total opposition: (1) AKEL rejects the dictatorship of any social class, i.e., also the dictatorship of the proletariat, a position which is unthinkable for communists; and (2) it envisages a velvet passage from parliamentarianism to socialism, which we consider unattainable. As Marios rightly said earlier, AKEL gave all its energies, willingly or not, to the national question first and foremost, without dealing with the class dimension of the Left's existence.

But I don't think that AKEL's origins were Marxist-Leninist, as Marios does. In 1941, its founding congress was presided over by the haute bourgeois Vassiliadis, who two years later prosecuted the trade unionists of the Pancypriot Trade Union Committee, the forerunner of the PEO, for their actions, as the supreme judge of colonialism in Cyprus. Do you get the impression that the British colonists would have agreed to let AKEL into legitimacy if it had not been compromised? If it was not a mouthpiece? The haute bourgeois like Ladas and Konstantinidis joined AKEL to enable it to be allowed legitimacy. Finally, there was the obscure role of Ploutis Servas, who took his guidance from the Labour Party of Great Britain rather than the Communist Party of Britain. The CPC attempted to massify the movement in legality, with the idea being that CPC members would pass their positions through AKEL. However, while there were secret CPC meetings, Ploutis Servas does not seem to have passed the decisions and positions of these meetings on to AKEL.

I also disagree with the AKEL narrative that says that in 1944 the CPC dissolved itself and joined AKEL because it felt it no longer had a distinct *raison d'être*. If this is true, why were many CPC members not allowed to join AKEL? For example, Lefkis became a member of the Party only 30 years later. Why? These are big questions. And there are those saying that the CPC accused AKEL of being opportunist, but who eventually joined AKEL. How do you accuse AKEL and then join it?

We also have AKEL's criminal return to the idea of Union in 1968, while, since 1964 and the events of Tillyria,[9] the Soviet Union had been promoting federation in Cyprus — rightly so in my opinion.

I also disagree with AKEL's decision under Demetris Christofias to take power instead of remaining a pressure lever of power, simply because capitalism will manage you instead of you managing it. Two

examples: (1) Christofias gave €3.5 billion in social benefits at the beginning of his five-year term, and by the end of the term he was forced by the bourgeois state, through the capitalist institution of the EU, to take it back from the Cypriot people. (2) I recall the 12% penalty and the freezing of the automatic indexation, the unpopular measures passed by the Christofias government under pressure from the Troika and which have since been made permanent. In both cases the Minister of Labour was Sotiroula Charalambous, who is now the General Secretary of the PEO! The government of Christofias should have resigned then, and it should never have taken power.

I close with this: Lenin created the Soviet state in 1923. Notice, the Revolution was in 1917. In the beginning he went for multipartyism, giving ministries to the Left Socialist-Revolutionaries. When he saw that things weren't going any further and were being pushed towards civil war, he said the historic "violence wants anti-violence." This was the precursor to the creation of the Red Army which crushed the Nazi beast. So he only took power under socialism. The Left's management of the system is an illusion. Capitalism cannot be humanized. What can be done is not to victimize the present generations with such efforts, and to promote our own vision, which is none other than the society of man's self-realization.

Athina Karyati: We are speakers with different emphases, but more or less similar analysis. I too would like to take my turn in thanking Platypus for the event. It is useful to have a discussion like this. I hope we can continue the discussions regarding the Left in Cyprus to draw the right conclusions and to be able to figure out how to move forward.

In saying that we have different emphases, I wanted to pick up on the theory of stages mentioned by Marios regarding the attitude of the CPC and the creation of AKEL, because the theory of stages was not a theory that the communist parties at that time could choose to apply or not. Certainly what Marios says may be true, that some of the communist parties may have had a flexibility in terms of the instructions they received from Moscow, an autonomy, but at the same time the theory of stages was a general policy of all communist parties, particularly in Europe, which was followed and has actually betrayed a number of revolutions and movements, not only the course of the Left in Cyprus. So AKEL is the result of the theory of stages: it is a popular front, it is the cooperation of the Stalinist CPC with the progressive bourgeoisie as it was in the other communist parties of the time. This is the result of all history which says that wherever there are unresolved problems, whether national, anti-imperialist, or democratic, the struggle for socialism must be postponed until these problems are solved. And this is the position that, unfortunately, AKEL and especially its youth held until very recently. Now I do not know whether it has taken up some other formulation.

This theory has nothing to do with Marxism. It has nothing to do with the history of the Bolsheviks who proceeded to overthrow the bourgeois government when their country was at war with Germany in 1917. So we cannot say that this stage theory was held by the CPC because it was Marxist-Leninist. The cooperation with the bourgeois progressive class that starts with the CPC not only affects its character as a party, that is, its transition to a popular front, AKEL, but this is also the turning point in how it deals with social reality and the Party's positions. In other words, while it was the only party in Cyprus, while it was the party of the workers and it organized both Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot workers in its trade union and in its struggles, as soon as it became AKEL, as early as 1946, it has in its charter the slogan of the Union. It is not that AKEL got carried away; it was a conscious policy, and unfortunately it was the gravestone of the cooperation with the TCs. From then on, although there are good intentions from various cadres and members of AKEL, especially from the labor movement, unfortunately, it is very difficult to bring two communities together when you have inflicted such a great blow, when you have supported the nationalism of your ruling class.

An aside: in general, the criticism we make of AKEL always concerns its leadership. There are

certainly members and executives, especially in the labor part of AKEL, who are credible, who do work in the workplaces and try to change things. But its leadership, since it believes that in order for the Left to move forward it has to cooperate with the bourgeoisie, is basically losing whatever Marxist-Leninist identity it might have had.

As far as the Cyprus problem is concerned, apart from supporting the Union, we have the problem that AKEL does not recognize the Cyprus problem as a class problem, which means that it cannot actually solve it. The hopes for a solution that Christofias had fostered during his five years and AKEL's subsequent call for mobilizations in support of the leaders of the two communities were mistaken. It was a lack of recognition of the class character of the Cyprus problem. Cyprus is a small but not insignificant country. It is in a strategic position, and both the Greek and Turkish bourgeoisie, along with the local and international ruling classes, have interests which cannot be compromised, as can be seen with what is happening with natural gas at the moment. It is not the role of the Left to reconcile these interests. That is where AKEL has started to lose a lot of support with regard to the Cyprus problem.

Apart from the Cyprus problem, AKEL, being the only party of the working class and with a 30% share, had a serious foothold, and, especially until 1990, it was a danger for the bourgeoisie, i.e., AKEL could have easily shaken up the economy and society. By the 1990s the Greek Cypriot bourgeoisie had managed to find ways to exploit the situation in the Middle East and create this distorted system we are living in now — this parasitic economic model that was making incredible profits. And when the bourgeoisie has incredible profits, when you are in conditions of growth, and when the banks here had such a large reserve that they had to give out loans in abundance, it was to be expected that AKEL, with the threat of strikes or even without — even just by negotiating through the trilateral — could ensure better conditions for the workers. Before 2000 we had what we called a mixed state, a model of governance in Cyprus that would be the envy of many European workers.

But when the crisis hit Cyprus, and AKEL won the elections, it was no accident. The workers, seeing the crisis coming in 2007-08, put at the helm of the economy and the state the party they thought could serve their own interests and save them from the coming disaster. In the first few years AKEL did indeed continue a subsidy policy that somehow kept things as they were, and so there was no opposition from the people. But when the banks collapsed — with "Laiki" being the first one — instead of taking measures in the interests of the workers, Christofias and his government reassured the markets by saying that they were not going to change the system, and went on to formulate a policy guided by the EU and the International Monetary Fund, which are the biggest capitalist and anti-worker institutions. They may not have signed the first memorandum but they are the ones who managed it; they were the ones who gave all the money to the banks and who essentially created the public debt, which we are still paying off, and which didn't exist before. It was also, unfortunately, the first party to bring in a law banning strikes — with the air traffic controllers — and laid the groundwork for the neoliberal avalanche that followed.

Then AKEL said it was against the memorandum. But post festum, even when it said it was against the memorandum (we do not question its intentions), the tendency to cooperate with the bourgeoisie was still expressed. While there was a magnificent movement during the deposit haircut with thousands of people outside the parliament, instead of presenting the position of not voting for the memorandum, AKEL presented it to the Democratic Party (DIKO)[10] and the Socialist Party (EDEK)[11] not willing to oppose the memorandum without the support of a part of the bourgeoisie. Unfortunately, although AKEL had the strength to mount a serious opposition after 2013, it did not do so, and so it is largely responsible for the situation we find ourselves in today: starvation wages, 50% of people living on less than €1,000 a month, 23% on the poverty line, and medieval working conditions, like those of Wolt delivery men.

Phedias Christodoulides: In order to see where AKEL stands ideologically, it is important to define the notorious concepts of Left and Right. For me, following the Marxist philosopher Leszek Kołakowski, the concepts of Left and Right are the two poles of the spectrum of what we can change in the society we live in.[12]

The Left (speaking in the ideal, not the existing Left) is characterized by a sense of possibility, desirability, and necessity of a radical social transformation that will increase human well-being, and fights for this transformation. It opposes the existing reality and follows principles about how this reality should and could be, regardless of how it is today. In other words, the principles or political ideology of the Left is based on the possibilities in the present for a better future, not on what exists today. The Left believes that social relations and human nature itself are mutable and wants to change them for the better. It does not accept the authority of what exists, i.e., that if something exists at the moment, for example an institution or a widely held belief, we should accept it simply because it exists (in the name of pragmatism).

The Right, on the other hand, is characterized by the belief that social transformation is impossible. It takes a fundamentally conservative attitude towards the existing reality and portrays existing conditions as unchanging, e.g., it claims that society will always be based on the pursuit of profit because human beings are by nature profit-seekers. Because it does not believe that the present can be drastically changed, the Right seeks the best way to adapt and navigate this present, and exploits it to its advantage as much as it can. While the politics of the Left is in the service of ideas, the politics of the Right is simply tactics to seize and maintain power. It seeks so-called “practical” or “pragmatic” solutions as opposed to radical change.

From the definitions I have given it should be clear that the Left and the Right are ideological tendencies or sensibilities, rather than sociological groups. To be Left or Right is to have a particular sense or orientation with respect to the possibility of social transformation. One is more or less Left-wing to the extent that one more or less feels and believes in the possibility of social change, and conversely, one is more or less Right-wing to the extent that one sees the present status quo as unchanging, and seeking only to adapt to it. In short, the Left is revolutionary with respect to the status quo, the Right opportunistic.

Since the Left is defined by its revolutionary goals and ideas, it cannot afford to abandon them. The Left is under constant pressure to make ideological compromises in order to gain power, but it cannot do so because it would abandon its *raison d'être* and cease to be the Left. Inevitably, the Left has to compromise on a tactical level with adverse historical circumstances, but it must recognize the compromises as such, i.e., that they fall short of its ideology. If it begins to replace its ideology with tactical compromises, it becomes part of the Right, and therefore defeated even if it succeeds in gaining power. The Left does not want power at all costs: defeats are preferable to ideological capitulation in the name of “pragmatism” and “realism.”

Of course, to say that the Left represents the need for radical social transformation is a vague definition to allow us to distinguish specifically between the forces and parties of the Left and the Right today. A full definition of the Left requires the specific positions of the Left in today's political conflicts. However, I think that even my general definition makes it clear that a party like AKEL cannot be considered Left-wing. AKEL is an establishment party that repeatedly makes opportunist alliances with Right-wing parties to be in government. Despite its professed goal of communism, in practice the Party has never attempted more than minor social reforms, and has always prioritized its adaptation to the nationalist and corrupt political environment of Cyprus. It was and is a predominantly Right-wing party.

The main characteristic of AKEL since its foundation in 1941 is that it has been tailing the Cypriot nationalist Right. Contrary to the popular narrative that AKEL was a communist party that went wrong and decayed over the years betraying its history, I believe that AKEL was from its foundation a bourgeois party whose main concern was to be accepted by the nationalist Right rather than to lead a class struggle on the island. The thread that runs through AKEL's history is its cowardice and tailism in the face of the Cypriot Right. I recently read the autobiography of Andreas Zartides, a founding member of AKEL and leader of PEO for half a century, and it does not deal at all with Left-wing, communist ideology, and does not contain a single reference to the Marxist goal of the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism. This is indicative of the fact that the policy of AKEL and PEO did not follow any communist ideology nor did it have a revolutionary objective.

AKEL's main concern at that time was to avoid the stigma of being anti-national so as to reach the masses and become a mass party (as the other speakers also told us). There was the notion of reducing the suspicion that existed in the world about communists. So, for mainly opportunist reasons, AKEL abandoned the anti-unionist stance of the CPC, and adopted the nationalist demand for Union with Greece. Instead of attempting to elevate the nationalist consciousness of the working class into an anti-capitalist class consciousness, AKEL bowed to the existing consciousness in order to win supporters. This choice goes against the very basics of the Marxist ideology that AKEL was supposedly espousing at the time. As Lenin points out, the working class on its own can only acquire a trade-union consciousness, that is, the conviction that it must fight the employers for its own immediate day-to-day interests and demand workers' legislation from the government. The task of a socialist / communist party is to raise the consciousness of the proletariat to a class consciousness, i.e., a consciousness of the necessity of overcoming capitalism. For this, according to Lenin, "we must actively engage in the political education of the working class, in the development of its political consciousness." [13]

An important negative result of AKEL's Unionism was the withdrawal of the TCs from the Greek Cypriot (GC) trade unions and the creation of TC trade unions. In other words, AKEL and PEO considered the demand for Union and their acceptance by the nationalist Right more important than not ethnically dividing the working class of Cyprus. While Marx and Engels stressed in the Communist Manifesto (1848) that "the proletarians have no homeland," and that the task of communists "in the various national struggles of the proletarians [is to] emphasize and [to] put forward the interests which are common to the whole proletariat and irrespective of nationality," [14] AKEL did the exact opposite: it put the national demand of the GC working class for Union above the common class interests of the multi-communal Cypriot proletariat.

In general, no special effort is needed to highlight the bankruptcy of AKEL as a Left-wing party of the working class. It has always proceeded in a national 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 favor of reunification, let alone have radical demands in relation to capitalism, etc. It is in the context of this policy that the AKEL of 2022 ended up having as its presidential candidate the Anastasiades' government official who led the bicomunal negotiations for Bicomunal Bizonal Federation talks to a definitive wreck. The choice of Mavroyiannis is not a turning point in AKEL's history, but rather a continuation of its tailism and nationalism. AKEL's responsibilities for the ethnic division of Cyprus are many and great.

A large part of the extra-parliamentary Left claims that we need a strong AKEL against the Right and the far Right. What it avoids mentioning is that we have had a strong AKEL over time, with the Party coming first or second in every election since the founding of the Republic of Cyprus (1960), without this threatening the hegemony of the Right on the island. Over the years we have seen neither a class struggle nor the promotion of the socialist perspective. AKEL went so far as to elect its general

secretary as President of the Republic, and its government proved that AKEL has no alternative socio-economic proposal to neoliberalism, ultimately leading us to a memorandum.

Now I will talk about the negative influence of AKEL on the extra-parliamentary Left, something that we have not yet addressed much. Unfortunately, the influence of AKEL on the extra-parliamentary Cypriot Left is enormous and has been naturalized to an extent that it is not easily perceived. Following AKEL, the vast majority of extra-parliamentarians are hardly concerned with the category of class, taking for granted that national struggles are of paramount importance, and focusing on whether the Left in Cyprus, Greece, and Turkey should support independence or Union. This is, for example, what the milieu of “Defteri Anagnosi” does, and is more generally evident in the work of our Leftist historians as expressed in the recent book series Rotsos centering on the Cyprus problem.

Another, related legacy of AKEL is the burial of an internationalist approach to capitalist reality. AKEL early on invoked the so-called anti-colonial internationalism that emerged after the end of World War II, but this was in fact nothing more than the coalescence of various nationalisms, each claiming the creation of its own nation-state. There was no ultimate internationalist goal in most of these movements that could constitute them as internationalist. The error of this so-called “anti-imperialism” lies in the naturalization of all nation-states as political subjects and as fields of potential political action. This “anti-imperialism” ultimately agrees with the imperialists in their political horizon: the existing international nation-state system. The Left can be divided into local and national Lefts who take one or the other position on national issues — for example, independence or Union — but all these divisions of the Left, and certainly the Cypriot Left under the leadership of AKEL, are on the same side, that of adaptation to the global capitalist imperialist system. But socialism / communism was not intended to be a political ideology of “national liberation,” but of a global political and social transformation intended to respond better to the need for liberation from national oppression under capitalism.

The Cyprus problem has never been the main problem holding back the Cypriot Left. It was and is simply the perennial excuse of the Cypriot Left, led by AKEL, to avoid the class struggle until the “national problem” is solved. And precisely because it treats the Cyprus problem in terms of identity politics (Cypriot patriotism, the so-called “Cypriot consciousness”) it does not contribute to a meaningful solution. The only thing that already unites GCs and TCs is their common class interests, and it is imperative that the Left on both sides make these interests conscious. “Cypriot consciousness” can unite the two sides only to the extent that it is unconsciously based on common class interests, but this unconsciousness is an obstacle to the redemption of these interests.

Responses

MT: I'll comment on two issues. It is dogmatic to say that AKEL is not a Left-wing party. You can simply be a Left-wing party, but not revolutionary. You can be reformist, you can be social democratic. A party is judged as Left-wing by its principles, its origins, its programmatic positions — even if they are not implemented — the consciences of its cadres. In a Right-wing party, the average executive/member, the advanced party member cannot be conscious that “I am a Leftist” while the party is Right-wing. It also comes from the consciousness of the party and the consciousness of society. In the consciousness of society, AKEL is a Left-wing party, Like EDA[15] was in Greece. It was extremely nationalist when it came to the Cyprus problem. For example, EDA was the first party in Greece that was in favor of the Union of Cyprus with Greece, and they spoke about the Turks in a similar way as today's ELAM.[16] But its social policy was radical. In the consciousness of both society and its members it was a Left-wing party. EDEK is another prime example. In the 1970s-80s, if you told an EDEKite, “you are Right-wing,” you would be beaten up. In the 2000s, it comes out and says it is Right-wing. So the Party itself has changed there; its image and character have changed.

Another point, mentioned by Athena, is that theory of stages, which — it is true — was present. It was the general orientation of the Stalinists of Moscow, for their own reasons, to preserve their interests, their bureaucracy, etc. The communist parties of the Eastern countries did not reflect this in the same way as the Communist Party of Cyprus. It was more of a reflex effect in Cyprus, i.e., they received the general principle that “we can work with the political Right to prevent imperialism from dividing the country,” etc. These things could be received by the AKEL leadership. But until the mid-1960s there is no substantial evidence that AKEL leaders had any dealings with the Soviet Union and received directives. The paradigmatic example was the Union with Greece.

AKEL’s basic position is the nationalist position for the Union, which was a purely local choice by the leadership. It did not have the strength or courage to go against the grain, and so it chose the Union. Here are some examples:

(1) 1948: Fifi Ioannou, the secretary of AKEL, goes with Ziartides, and they find Zachariadis, General Secretary of the Communist Party of Greece (KKE),[17] on the mountain in the middle of the Greek Civil War in Prespes — it was an AKEL initiative, not a KKE initiative. The KKE had no idea basically, nor did the Soviet Union. The comrades felt the need to go to Nikos Zachariadis to hear his position. So where was the planning? Where was the position that the Soviet Union was determining this thing?

(2) Leaving the mountain, Ziartides went to London and found the leader of the Communist Party of Great Britain, Harry Pollitt, who said to him instead, “no, go with self-government.”

(3) Fifi Ioannou went to Bucharest and failed to meet with anyone from Cominform.[18] People had no idea about the Union there.

(4) In 1949 Ziartides testified that the World Federation of Trade Unions was against the Union.

(5) In 1950, after the famous Union referendum, Adam Adamantos and Papaioannou went to the communist parties of Europe (France, Romania, etc.), who paid no attention to them. No one was concerned with the Union, including the leadership of Cominform.

(6) The most striking example for me, regarding the debate about the Soviet Union giving a line to AKEL, is that of all the historic AKEL cadres — Servas, Adamantos, Fifi Ioannou, Ziartides, Andreas Fantis, Diglis, who either wrote books or quoted positions — none of them ever mentioned a directive from the Soviet Union to AKEL. At least until the 1960s. So the Union was a local choice; it was purely the choice of the AKEL leadership, the easy way to survive. And there was every reason for those I mentioned to testify that there was a directive from the Soviet Union, because they all clashed with the AKEL leadership at some stage. AKEL was reflexively receiving messages from the Stalinists but was more influenced by its fear of being isolated.

CA: I would like to comment on two things regarding the policy of cooperation over time. The policy of passive resistance of Gandhi, which AKEL had applied during the EOKA struggle, by not responding to the murders committed by the masked men of Grivas against members of the Left, was the right choice at the time. However, it does not mean that this policy of passive resistance should last to this day. If, for various reasons, the armed struggle could not develop at that time and AKEL rightly pursued strikes and political and social struggles, rather than the armed struggle, it does not mean that AKEL should then continue to operate on the basis of the policy of passive resistance right up to the present day. This issue cost the class struggle. Giorgi Dimitrov expounded in the Third International the cooperation of the communist parties at the international level even with the Christian democratic parties in the struggle against Nazism, and that policy at that juncture was seen by the world communist movement as the right choice. But it does not mean that this policy should be translated at the local level in Cyprus, e.g., the party cooperating with other bourgeois parties such

as DIKO and EDEK. At the end of the day it is a vicious circle that leads to the same denominator, namely the management and the perpetuation of the system. Dimitrov was right at that time, but only then. AKEL should not use this as an alibi to collaborate and manage / perpetuate the bourgeois state, capitalism, etc.

There is also, Marios, the question of the Comintern, which placed the CPC on trial and described its attitude with regards its involvement in the 1931 Cyprus Revolt as bad.[19] Some members of the Comintern have described this attitude at the time as “Left-wing” communist. But this is not true, because studying the CPC and the conditions, the people were not ready to be led into an anti-colonial struggle of this type. Nor could the CPC be involved in a struggle led by the Right, the ethnarchy, and the church with the aim to thwart the communist perspective in Cyprus. But the CPC was blamed for this attitude of not taking part in the October Revolt, and Plutis Servas said that the CPC should be condemned by the Comintern for not cooperating with the ethnarchy and the Right.

In conclusion, Dimitris Christofias misinterpreted Lenin’s attitude of initially supporting the bourgeois-democratic revolution as the first stage, because we were in an industrially backward country that did not go through industrialization and the bourgeois-democratic revolution for socialism. When he saw that things were not going any further, he then led the revolution and said the famous “All power to the Soviets.” Christofias misinterpreted Lenin here as “come to power,” and that says it all.

AK: I didn't say that the position in favor of the Union came from Moscow, but that there was a theory of stages, which is a theory of cooperation between the communist parties and the progressive bourgeoisie in order to cope with issues such as the national (to solve the national problem), in order to be able to make an anti-imperialist struggle, a democratic struggle, etc. I don't know who analyzes this as a correct tactic. It was a treacherous theory; it led to the betrayal of great revolutions such as the Spanish Revolution of 1936–37, May 1968 in France, December 1944 in Greece, the movements in the Middle East and the Arab world of the 1960s, and the Iranian Revolution of 1979. This was the policy followed by AKEL. Cooperation with the progressive parts of the bourgeoisie has its own specificity in each country, but the important thing is that AKEL followed the same theory and tactics. AKEL called the Cypriot Union struggle an anti-imperialist struggle, and its support for Makarios was called an anti-imperialist struggle, which it was not.

We didn't talk about where AKEL is going. We can't say that AKEL is not a Left-wing party either. It is a reformist party that is leaning increasingly to the Right year by year, i.e., the rhetoric used by its expressive organ, Haravgi, may be more radical, but at the same time we see its choice of Mavroyiannis. This is part of a broader historical movement, as we have seen with other left-wing formations and Stalinist communist parties in Europe. As for where AKEL is going, we can't expect to see any Left turns. Stefanou made some statements that by June they will make radical changes to the Party — a move to pick up some of the disillusioned voters — but certain things circulating in the media suggest that one of the changes proposed is the election of the secretary at the congress, which is clearly a move towards social democracy — a Right turn.

PC: I would agree with Marios that AKEL was indeed not as Soviet-directed as some claim, and Charalambos is right about the influence of the British Labour Party on Ploutis Servas. AKEL was quite influenced by the British Labour Party, which was trade unionist. AKEL and PEO's understanding of trade unionism is that it is a collective effort by workers and employers to improve the living standards and working conditions of the people regardless of ideology. Therefore, AKEL and PEO have not tried to cultivate revolutionary consciousness and radicalize workers. Such a class peace is anathema to any real communist thought. According to Rosa Luxemburg, the importance and goal of communist trade unionism is not the short-term improvement of the living standards of the workers but to teach the proletariat that it is impossible, by this struggle, to radically change its position, and

that it is necessary to seize political power once and for all. In other words, the aim of the communist trade-union struggle is to sharpen the confrontation between the two classes and to show the proletariat that it is not enough to have trade unionism within capitalism; what is also needed is the political revolution, the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism. Luxemburg states that this ultimate goal of revolutionary upheaval “constitutes the only decisive factor distinguishing the Social-Democratic movement from bourgeois democracy and from bourgeois radicalism, the only factor transforming the entire labour movement from a vain effort to repair the capitalist order into a class struggle against this order, for the suppression of this order.”[20]

AKEL does nothing more than vain efforts to save capitalism. So we come to the question of whether or not AKEL is a Left-wing party. How can a party trying to save capitalism be considered a Left-wing party? How can a party that is in favor of Union with a NATO member state, i.e., a party that ultimately supports imperialism, accepts imperialism, accepts capitalism, make partnerships with such Right-wing parties — Tassos Papadopoulos, Spyros Kyprianou, Mavroyiannis. AKEL is not a reformist party because it does not aim at a reformist development of capitalism into socialism. At best it wants some kind of welfare state, a Keynesian policy. Roosevelt was more expansive in his positions on the welfare state than AKEL is today. We don't call Roosevelt a Leftist. Why would we call AKEL Leftist? Trotsky, Luxemburg, and Lenin would in no way call AKEL Leftist because they would consider it a bourgeois party. If a party is bourgeois, it is not Left-wing, because the Left is about the need for radical change in society.

I will end with something that was said in one way or another by all the speakers. It was said by Marios that people consider AKEL to be a Left-wing party; It was said by Athena that the workers put AKEL and Christofias at the helm in 2008; and Charalambos said that the workers today will judge if AKEL represents the working class today. I disagree with all this. Since there has been no education of the workers about what is Left and what is Right, what is communism, what is capitalism, why should we rely on their understanding of AKEL? A large percentage of the working class will vote ELAM and are against immigrants. The working class being working class doesn't mean that they have a more developed consciousness than other sections of the population. For this to happen, consciousness needs to be cultivated by trade unions and communists, a communist party. That was AKEL's task and it didn't do it. We don't need to take seriously what the working class thinks today about the Left and the Right.

Q&A

Charis Theodorou: We haven't much addressed where AKEL is going. Marios noted that, compared to Cyprus, Greece had a more radical Left that took risks, had splits, etc. In Greece there was the case with SYRIZA: we had a Left-wing party that was getting 2-3% and eventually it went up. We saw Podemos as well. In Cyprus there was no push from the Left, and the question is why there wasn't. Why is there this situation in Cyprus?

Marios, what do you think of what Phedias said about the Left?

PC: I predict that in the coming years AKEL will complete its gradual transformation from a bourgeois party with social welfare policies to a bourgeois party with anti-welfare policies but with social sensitivities. It will be something like today's Labour Party in Britain, one of AKEL's main models. It doesn't need to change anything in substance, only manage to free itself from its image as a Left-wing or communist party. Its political base will not be the poorer sections of the population but the progressive and liberal strata of the island. I do not expect a Centrist liberal party to be created, although there are some who want to create one. AKEL can play this role with some changes in its image and rhetoric.

The only reason for AKEL to move to the Left is if it is threatened by the Left. We saw how the threat of ELAM from the Right pulled the rest of the Right further Right. This Rightward shift also allows AKEL to move more clearly towards the abandoned "Center," the so-called liberals. It can more easily appear progressive in the face of the nationalism of the others, to invoke "anti-fascism" in the face of the ELAM threat, without the need for Left-wing politics. As the political situation in Cyprus will not improve, new populist and/or far-Right parties like ELAM will continue to grow, and, with a pro-populist 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. Perhaps it is already that supporter.

CA: Let me comment on something that Phedias mentioned in responding to me. Yes, I referred to the rise of the opposite pole. Yes, I agree with the second part of your statement, which says that in order to push the situation in a more Leftist direction, there should be the rise of a communist party. We have seen that SYRIZA and Podemos did not lead in those directions. Apart from that, yes, it is the working class that will dismantle AKEL and promote the pole that we are talking about. That is why we are running for the presidential elections, to inject the public discourse with positions that are absent from our people and unheard in the public discourse, precisely to educate the working class and to deconstruct this obstacle called AKEL, which prevents the rise of the trade-union and communist movement in Cyprus to counter the neoliberal policies that we have analyzed tonight.

I detected an abstract element to a lesser or greater extent in all four speakers. There is a general myth that, once upon a time in Cyprus, there was a party that was good, there were good conditions, and then somehow things went wrong. But, what if things were not right from the beginning? Was the then Left in Cyprus, the CPC, and later AKEL, ever strictly a party of the Third International? Can we argue that there was once the good CPC and then AKEL spoiled it? From the beginning the Left in Cyprus was problematic. We need to go further back to see the problems. No social phenomenon can appear by chance in the 1940s and lead to everything that all four speakers mentioned, namely the creation of an essentially populist, reformist, Left-wing bourgeois-democratic party, which was eventually called AKEL.

MT: I never said in any way that AKEL or the CPC were good. I barely mentioned the CPC. Things were difficult from the beginning. What I see in the Communist Party is that it was trying to conform to the line of the Third International. However, the backwardness of the region, the isolation, the messages coming only too late, the lack of contact with the more progressive Europe, led to sectarianism, and to an exaggerated sloganeering that could have been avoided. Beyond that, the CPC was trying to be near the Third international.

Now, as far as AKEL is concerned, things were bad from the beginning, I agree. Once "Union" becomes your main slogan, it is problematic. We had a Left that was influenced by the place and time in question: Cyprus under colonialism, backwardness, illiteracy. Everyone was religious. We were behind on so many issues. In no way am I saying that things were good and then got worse.

CA: I said at the beginning that in 1941, in order to be able to exist in legitimacy, the CPC tried to create a broad legal front. Then the big bourgeoisie entered the party. The CPC wasn't dissolved in 1944; something else happened. This is precisely connected to the reformism you mentioned earlier. There are two narratives about AKEL: (1) the CPC dissolves itself, accusing AKEL of being reformist, but then merges into AKEL; and (2) that AKEL dissolved the CPC. In fact, AKEL did so, in illegal, secret congresses.

AK: I didn't say that the CPC or AKEL was once good either. The striking thing is that the CPC was the first party in Cyprus, appearing before anything from the Right was created. It appeared among the

working people and had radical rhetoric. It brought together GCs and TCs. It stood for independence-autonomy, i.e., it proposed a solution for a united Cyprus based on GC-TC cooperation. What I mentioned was the circumstances that led to AKEL being created and taking a Union position and what that had as a result. I don't want to get into the debate whether or not the CPC was dissolved or not dissolved, etc., because it doesn't matter. I would never want to say that AKEL is the continuation of the CPC. That was thought out at some point by the AKELists, and they started signing as "CPC-AKEL." That doesn't matter. It is in the context of them losing members and support, with them trying to find a way to stop that.

On the other question. Because we belong to the Left which is not a tail of AKEL, and we were also in one of the two efforts for an alternative Left — Drasy-Eylem,[21] which did push AKEL to a certain extent, as AKEL ran Niyazi Kiziljirek, a TC, in the next European elections. We had formed Drasy-Eylem which had a bi-communal list in the 2014 European elections — four GC and two TC candidates — and it did well. A lot can be said about what happened then, but AKEL was indeed pushed.

A common point that all the speakers mentioned is that AKEL, both historically and today, does not have a pro-worker, communist policy. What steps do we need to take today to start seeing a more radical, communist perspective? Do we want unions, a party, a front? What is missing?

PC: I will answer, but first I will also answer the previous question, because it wasn't answered sufficiently by the other speakers. The question is about the CPC. In relation to AKEL, it was a Left-wing party because it aimed to overthrow capitalism in Cyprus and the Balkans, in 1926-31 at least. From 1935 onwards, when Servas took over the leadership, it gradually took a petty-bourgeois turn which eventually led to the creation of AKEL. Now, whether things could have been different, whether the CPC could have taken a different course, is a difficult question. The crisis of Marxism began in 1914 when the Second International went bankrupt supporting the First World War. Then we had the bankruptcy of the Third International, from the mid-1920s, with the rise of Stalinism. With social democracy and Stalinism dominating the left, they were the biggest influences on AKEL and I don't know if things could have gone any other way. There were small Trotskyist groups, like the Trotskyist Party of Cyprus in the 1940s, which were better voices than AKEL and the CPC, but they didn't manage to acquire a mass character.

As for the question about today, the easy answer is that yes we need a new party and new unions. The problem is that the majority of the Cypriot extra-parliamentary Left does not believe in the possibility of a new party or does not want one, e.g., the anarchists think it is authoritarian. We need to have a discussion about why such a psychological fixation of many with AKEL exists, the difficulty of admitting that it is bourgeois, Right-wing, and that we want something new, and we need to start a discussion about what needs to be done.

AK: The fragmentation of the Left internationally, especially after the fall of the Soviet Union, has occupied the Left; the Left has debated, investigated, studied, etc. The Left came to the conclusion that it needs to create new formations so that there will be, in a federal way, Left fronts that will come together and create new mass parties of the Left and the workers. That's how Syriza, Podemos, etc. were created. It should be a matter of debate on why they failed, went to the Right, and eventually supported the TINA[22] theory, which is what AKEL ultimately supports and supported in the 2013 and 2014 Memoranda. The Left in Cyprus also took two steps: ERAS[23] and Drasy-Eylem, which were attempts at creating an independent Left beyond AKEL.

PC: Why did these efforts fail?

AK: To some extent it was because they didn't want to have as radical a program as we would have liked as the New Internationalist Left (NEDA). They gave in to the pressures and disbanded. Today,

when even the smallest reform we want to make seems extreme and implies a rupture, we have to be prepared to make ruptures and upheavals. We can no longer ask for small reforms and be given them; that model has passed.

I arrive at the proposal we made. When AKEL announced the candidacy of Mavroyiannis, we as NEDA took the initiative to contact the whole extra-parliamentary Left, to see what they say to the possibility of us running a Left, independent, collective candidacy, which would emerge from the extra-parliamentary Left, the front of the Left, and the movements created in recent years. Our opening was general and broader in scope than the basic Left. The intentions were all positive, and the responses were positive in the summer, but it was not possible to find that candidate that we as a front could support in a collective way. The project was abandoned, but there are still discussions, and we want to start discussions again in the next period with all the forces of the Left to create a new Left that will be a real front, be democratic, respect disagreements, exchange ideas, and discuss — because it has to discuss what positions it will have, what tactics it will use, etc.

What I was asking is this: is there even a small possibility that these problems of the Left are structural? That structurally we cannot have a Left-wing party? Perhaps hierarchical structures always end up creating bureaucratic layers and leading the party to failure.

[A separate audience member asks] Charalambos, you are talking about management. You think that if a miracle happens and you become president, you will not resign the next day. My point is that I notice in the debate that there are central disagreements about what the Left is, what should be done, where we should go, how far Left, what is feasible, etc. Communist movements and parties tend to go to the Right or lose a lot of people because of the way movements are formed. We have to deal with the issue that if we create movements, everyone would create their own to represent their own point of view. Take the example of SYRIZA, which grew on the basis of a specific purpose, the Memorandum policy that people couldn't stand. But because we have different views on what to do and how to do it, either the movement's positions have to be so loose that people with different views can exist within it or the movement is constantly breaking up into smaller movements. The looser your positions are, the more Right-wing you are.

CA: On the question regarding the presidential election, we have no illusion that we will be elected. But we believe that a large part of the working class will honor us with their vote, and that this will create the conditions on the eve of the elections to do what all those who have already spoken have said, i.e., to begin to graft revolutionary ideas onto the consciences of the people.

Lastly, ultra-Leftism is the childhood disease of communism, as Lenin masterfully puts it. According to Lenin, we must participate in bourgeois institutions; we must fight both on the road and in parliament. But I did not say to take over the management of capitalism. I said clearly before that I have disagreed with Demetris Christofias ever since, and that was one of the reasons why we split our position and left AKEL afterwards. But we are running this campaign so that we can be ready to contest the parliamentary elections in 2026.

PC: As for what is to be done today, I see the candidacy of Charalambos in a positive light, despite any disagreements we may have. We do need to break with AKEL in the first instance, including breaking with AKEL's satellites on the extra-parliamentary Left such as Workers' Democracy,[24] Left Wing,[25] and Deferi Anagnosi. By the way, these groups were invited and refused to participate in this event because they consider Left-wing unity in favor of the Mavroyiannis candidacy to be paramount. We wanted to have people who support AKEL, critically or not, at the event, so that we could hear their arguments and have a discussion, but they refused to be here.

We need to get away from the logic of Left-wing unity and return to Marxist unity. We don't need to invite the whole extra-parliamentary Left to join a new project, because a large part of it is made up of unrepentant AKELists who are not really on the Left. We need to focus on the people who are against AKEL and really want to create new unions, maybe even a new party.

In conclusion, it is of paramount importance today to show the world that elections are not the main road to social change, let alone the only road. Those who tell us that voting is the only way to influence society are being reactionary as they cultivate electoral illusions in people and do not recognize the real potential for social change. The only result of these illusions will be to create disillusionment and cynicism, as happened with SYRIZA, Christofias, etc., making people even more skeptical of the possibility of any social change. Social change cannot come immediately; it needs long-term preparation, political discussion for the development and integration of our ideas, etc. Therefore, let's say now that many questions have been opened. The last statement rightly pointed out that we have many disagreements. In order to start resolving the disagreements we need to have more discussions, and yes, a framework needs to be set up —

My comment was specific. I said that if we have a lot of disagreements. Do you hold your position — do you lose people or do you compromise?

CA: You're aiming for a front of minimum convergence at least.

MT: I want to answer a question that Charalambos asked before and that fell by the wayside: why was no second, different Left was ever created in Cyprus? Here are some reasons. First, the national question covered everything; Cyprus was inculcated with nationalism. Second, after the disaster of 74 we had a good economic situation, which did not contribute to reflection and rethinking on the nature of the society we live in; we did not have social upheavals so that some consciousness could develop and another Left could be created. EDEK could have been another Left, but it quickly became a very nationalist party, and so AKEL had no rival. Finally, the fact that we are a small country and economy allowed AKEL to deal more directly and influence people in their small businesses, absorbing whatever shocks were threatening to be created.

I also welcome the listener's question about structural issues that have prevented the Left's success historically. He put structural issues down that we need to look at again, such as the 1917 Revolution. Aren't there issues that need to be revisited? Consciously I'm an anti-Stalinist but didn't that man step somewhere to make the disaster that happened? There were problems. Trotsky and Lenin carry responsibilities. The fact that the Party took over the Soviets, that democracy was undermined, even before the revolution, by the Party — aren't these problems that we have to look at? Stalin found an open field and stepped into it. Even now, when we talk about a revolutionary party, the discussion has stopped 30 years ago. I coincidentally wrote on Facebook recently that we no longer discuss: no books are written on these party / revolutionary issues anymore; we are left with Trotsky's books and some later ones. As remarkable as these books are — Trotsky's analysis of the Soviet Union is excellent — after the collapse of the Soviet Union there is this downside: the great debate about socialism ceased, and the level of debate on the Left fell. I was misunderstood when I said that we should continue to talk about the Soviet Union and Stalinism. Usually you are called a liberal Leftist and that's the end of the matter. But if you keep the conversation about socialism on a high level, you develop some sophistication; interplay of ideas takes place; you get people with better minds on the Left. Now that the conversation has stopped, you see, with mathematical precision, that a drop in reflexes has come about. I see my old comrades who were in the same organization, Trotskyists, talking about socialism having been overthrown, which is a Stalinist position. We had a collapse in the USSR, not an overthrow. In general I notice a turning backwards of people who used to be critical of Stalinism.

This meeting would be more constructive if we could come up with a way forward. It would be a good idea to have a coordinating body that provides a follow-up, otherwise we would just go home with some reflections. Such discussions have taken place in the past. What follow-up can we give? I am not an anti-AKEList; I am against capitalism, but I believe that AKEL has no prospect of moving forward. We need a self-contained, autonomous action, a new anti-capitalist Left.

Did AKEL actively resist the coup,[26] like the groups of Doros Loizou, for example, or was it inactive and inert?

PC: During the Junta, AKEL advised Makarios not to clash with them because they feared that something bad might happen, some intervention by the junta in Cyprus. Unlike EDEK, which at the time was holding demonstrations against the junta, AKEL was fearful and even received sponsorship for Omonoia from the junta, as I read in Ziartides's autobiography. In general, AKEL, at all critical moments in the history of Cyprus, did not put its hand in the fire. That is why I say that its main characteristic is that it is a phobic party, the tail of the Right.

MT: Makarios was juggling with the junta. That is, when Grivas was firing bombs, Makarios was going to Papadopoulos (President of Greece under the junta) and pandering to him. Whenever Papadopoulos pressed him to sit down and find a solution to the Cyprus problem, he would even go to Grivas, while the latter was in illegality. Makarios was operating on opportunistic terms to stay in power. AKEL followed all of Makarios's zigzags; so it was moderate and cautious with the junta, and during the coup it had no organized resistance.

CA: In Ezekias Papaioannou's Recollections of My Life, AKEL pushes Makarios. I agree with Phedias that it didn't put its hand in the fire in many cases, but I disagree about the strike struggles of 48. I'll also say that AKEL proposed to Makarios, and even trained a number of its cadres, around 100 people, to form resistance forces around Makarios, and Makarios didn't accept it. I say this for the sake of reflection and to be fair to history.

PC: Regarding the Grivism[27] that was mentioned, AKEL will now always try to highlight fascist dangers in order to present itself as the lesser evil to get votes. AKEL needs Grivism.

CA: And when Mavroyiannis mentioned the EU army, FRONTEX[28] and PESCO[29] — the EU border guard that also creates the migration issue in the host countries — AKEL did not come out to separate its position. What does an EU army mean? Joint exercises with NATO; the NATO part of the European Union. For us it is a red line and it is a disgrace for today's AKEL to not oppose it.

The basic problem facing the Left — the Left that wants a socialist transformation of humanity in general — is that there are no models. There is no global model, a global movement with organization in which a local Left can participate. There is no International. In other words, there is no prospect of transformation locally. If there is going to be a transformation, it has to be on a global scale or at least a regional scale.

There are no indications of what this new global socialist movement will look like. This is exactly where what Marios Thrasyboulou said earlier, that we stopped studying the Soviet Union, fits in. Because we stopped studying, we don't know what we want. As one speaker said earlier, if everyone sits down and says what they want, everyone will make their own movement.

We have a concrete example here before us. Athina, on behalf of NEDA, does not support, at least officially, Charalambos. We are 50, 100, 200 people in Cyprus who could be said to have a socialist orientation. Charalambos is running for office; he wants to put up some positions to educate society,

to make the working man hear another voice, but NEDA does not find enough of a foothold to support him. There are deeper reasons for this. We don't analyze the course of socialism in the last century, we leave our differences and disagreements about what went wrong under the rug, and we keep finding them in front of us. Let's say, I understand from watching Charalambos that he is sympathetic to the Soviet regimes that prevailed after WWII, that he finds more positives than negatives in them. The issues of the last century are a stumbling block for us today.

AK: We certainly have disagreements on the Left and they are respected, and they should be respected. We are fighting for a front that can respect disagreements and differences, that can put things down, and find a minimum agreement, a consensus, and move forward. The important thing for us is collectivity. We made a call to all individuals and groups in the field to try to build a collective effort to come out with a candidate or candidates. We are not at all interested in the face, but in substance and positions. Charalambos took the initiative and ran on his own. To tell you the truth, we didn't know him beforehand, but he did well. He has positions, he comes out, he speaks, he has the courage of his convictions and we agree on many things. But it's not one or the other. We're in a situation on the Left where we have a plurality and any movement or group can make its own decisions.

We expect new attacks from the Right after the presidential election, and that's exactly where we have to have an answer. Our best answer will come about collectively, i.e., if we can work together, make a minimum agreement, organize movements, take to the streets, and discuss our disagreements. The theoretical and historical disagreements we may have don't indicate that we can't work together. We need to discuss why we need to study history, and we need to discuss the present — what positions we put out there and how we can achieve more rights for the working class.

CA: I would agree with everything Athina just said. The day after tomorrow is the essence for us: the day after the elections and the creation of this front as a first stage. Of course, we have disagreements, and it is healthy to have these discussions and to agree and disagree. But this does not mean, as Athina said, that we will not come down collectively until the final overthrow of capitalism.

Closing remarks

MT: I would like to thank the team for inviting us and the friends who came to discuss with us. It was an important discussion not only in terms of content but also because the speakers' approaches were different. This is important for the Left, especially the left outside of AKEL, and it is not common; usually there are discussions between people who agree.

CA: Here is an example of the meaning of words having been stretched out in distorting fashion. I am a refugee from Famagusta by birth from my mother's side. AKEL never voted in favor of an equal status between refugees of matrilineal and patrilineal descent. Today my mother's genital organ determines how much or little I am a refugee, and this sexism is coming from AKEL. It is absurd and the Party of the parliamentary Left should be ashamed to have such positions. It is the most sexist, most medieval, and reactionary thing. This came out of the mouths of AKEL cadres and AKEL's policy, because they voted to abstain from the complete equality of "maternal" and "paternal" refugees. This example shows the slippage of the values of this defender of capitalism, AKEL, which exists to prevent the creation of the communist movement in Cyprus. It is a gift to the system because it keeps the Cypriot working class asleep. We must open our eyes. Our people can't take it anymore; the Cypriot working class can't take it anymore. We have disagreements, we understand that. This is healthy, this is democracy, this is direct democracy. Take it as you like. Common front of minimum demands now.

AK: In conclusion, there is a method: Marxism. We can study it; we can see how it can be applied to

our case. There are international movements with which we need to get in touch and cooperate. Because we believe that there should be no dogmas, we have to look at history and theory with a critical eye, discuss the conditions of today, and come up with positions. It takes work. Even though it is up to the organizers to decide its format, something could come out of this event: maybe soon we could have a follow-up meeting to discuss the next steps for the Left to take.

PC: I would like to respond to the last point that Athina and audience members said — that this event should have been organized so that a Left front could begin to be created, etc. We didn't collect any emails, but that doesn't mean that this event happened for nothing. The event was filmed, recorded, and will go down in history. It will go into the [Cypriot movement archive](#), and may even be published in the *Platypus Review*. It will not be lost.

The purpose of Platypus as a group is to combat ideological obstacles that prevent the re-creation and re-foundation of a Marxist revolutionary Left. That is why we are having these discussions. We are not trying to become that Left ourselves, which is why some of us who feel the need to build that Left formed the [1917 group](#). As the 1917 group we would like to create a communist party in Cyprus. Now, I am not sure that the conditions are ready. It was said before that now is not the time to discuss the ideological differences of the past but to try to make something new. Yes, but why did [ERAS](#) fail? Why did [Drasy-Eylem](#) fail? Perhaps because, instead of discussing history and the mistakes made, we were again in a hurry to promote Left unity, where "Left unity" ultimately means the logics of popular fronts, etc. Why should we continue this vicious circle? That is why we need to take a step back and look at history again and learn, because the problem today in Cyprus and in the Left worldwide is that it suffers from historical amnesia; it does not learn from the mistakes of the past, and repeats the same mistakes even more unconsciously and therefore in a worse way. I agree with Marios that we should not forget the Soviet Union and we should discuss it. We used to have such events in the past.

Of course, this is not enough. Those of us who want to overthrow capitalism and the state have to do something. And what we have to do is organize civil society against the state and capitalism. How that is to be done is a long discussion, and there has to be a discussion about how to proceed.

Calling all the groups of the extra-parliamentary Left once again won't lead anywhere, because many of them are not willing to break with AKEL and with the system. |P

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[1] 1917 is a newly formed political organization that aims to build a Marxist Left in Cyprus.

[2] Nea Diethnistike Aristera (NEDA), founded in the 2000s; it disaffiliated itself from the International Socialist Alternative on June 24, 2021, which was a split from the Committee for a Workers' International that was founded in 1974.

[3] Video of the panel is available online at
<<https://www.facebook.com/PlatypusNicosia/videos/1193945398166562/>>.

[4] Anorthotikó Kómma Ergazómenou Laoú, founded in 1926 as the Communist Party of Cyprus, before being made illegal in 1931. Leading members of the CPC, along with others, founded AKEL in 1941.

[5] Founded in 1941, The PEO is an umbrella organization for trade unions in Cyprus.

[6] [Greek] Union. Enosis is the movement of Greek communities outside of Greece for the incorporation of their regions into the Greek state. We will use "Union" here. Reference to the Soviet

Union will always be made explicit as “Soviet Union” or “USSR.”

[7] Ethniki Organosis Kyprion Agoniston (National Organization of Cypriot Fighters), operating in 1955–59.

[8] <<https://akel.org.cy/our-concept-for-socialism/?lang=en>>.

[9] The Battle of Tillyria, also known as the Battle of Kokkina or the Erenköy Resistance, was a conflict on August 6, 1964 between the Cypriot National Guard and Turkish Cypriot armed groups.

[10] Dimokratikó Kómma, founded in 1976.

[11] Founded in 1969 as the United Democratic Centre Union (Eniaia demokratiki enosi kentrou).

[12] See Leszek Kołakowski, “The Concept of the Left” (1958).

[13] V. I. Lenin, “Trade-Unionist Politics and Social-Democratic Politics,” in What is to be Done? (1902), <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1901/witbd/iii.htm>>.

[14] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, “Proletarians and Communists,” in Manifesto of the Communist Party (1848), <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch02.htm>>.

[15] Eniέα Dimokratikí Aristerá (United Democratic Left), founded in 1951 and dissolved in 1991.

[16] Ethniko Laiko Metopo (National People’s Front), founded in 2008.

[17] Kommounistikó Kómma Eládas, founded in 1918 as the Socialist Labour Party of Greece and given its current name in November 1924.

[18] The Information Bureau of the Communist and Workers’ Parties (Informatsionnoye byuro kommunisticheskikh i rabochikh partiy), known as Cominform, was a body of Marxist-Leninist communist parties, including that of the Soviet Union, founded by Joseph Stalin in 1947. While not intended as a replacement of the Third or Communist International (Comintern), it was seen as a kind of successor to it.

[19] The 1931 Cyprus Revolt, or October Events — Οκτωβριανά (Oktovriana) — was a revolt against British colonial rule that took place in Cyprus — then a British crown colony — between October 21 and early November 1931. The revolt was spearheaded by Greek Cypriots who advocated the Union of the island with Greece. The defeat of the rebels led to a period of autocratic British rule known as “Palmerocracy,” that would last until the beginning of World War II.

[20] Rosa Luxemburg, “Introduction,” in Reform or Revolution? (Paris: Foreign Language Press, 2020), 1.

[21] A political party formed in 2014. Its name is a combination of the Greek (drasy) and Turkish (eylem) words for “action.”

[22] “There is no alternative.”

[23] Επιτροπή για μια Ριζοσπαστική Αριστερή Συσπείρωση (Committee for a Radical Left Rally), founded in 2011.

[24] Εργατική Δημοκρατία.

[25] Αριστερή Πτέρυγα.

[26] The 1974 coup d'état by the Greek military junta to take control of Cyprus.

[27] The main far-Right nationalist current in Cyprus, taking its place from Grivas.

[28] The European Border and Coast Guard Agency.

[29] The Permanent Structured Cooperation, part of the EU's security and defense policy in which 26 of the 27 national armed forces pursue structural integration.

[Needs Turkish Translation](#), [Other Material](#), [Platypus Nicosia \(Group\)](#), [Decade 2020-2029](#), [2024](#), [AKEL](#), [Undefined Location](#)

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