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Cypriot Worker—a forgotten episode in the history of the SWP (Demetrios Hadjidemetriou) (Interview)

Historical Note

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Content

Interview: Cypriot Worker—a forgotten episode in the history of the SWP

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During the 1970s and 1980s, members of the International Socialists (IS), later the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), produced a number of publications with the purpose of politically organising different communities in Britain.[1] These publications were either printed in the English language or in a language relevant to the intended readership. While they have not benefited from much research, most publications have had some record of their existence.[2] This record has sometimes been "in passing" treatment in general histories. For example, Flame, the black workers' paper, is discussed in Tony Cliff's autobiography A World to Win: Life of a Revolutionary. A recent interview with Balwinder Rana in International Socialism gives context to the Asian paper Chingari, which was published in Urdu and Punjabi.[3] Both Chingari and Flame have also benefited from national pamphlets published jointly with the IS and SWP.[4]

One publication from that period that seems to have been forgoten is Cypriot Worker—a publication that was produced in Greek and Turkish. The Cypriot Worker star may only have shone brightly for a few years in the late 1970s, but it is significant that, today, nearly 50 years later, a host of those involved remain committed to their revolutionary socialist goals. John Rudge spoke to Demetrios Hadjidemetriou about his time at the Cypriot Worker.

John: Can you tell me a bit about your own personal background, the Cypriot community in London and the political context of the 1970s?

Demetrios: I came to Britain as a student at the age of 16. That was in 1971. I rented a flat with my older brother in Finsbury Park, North London. I considered myself non-political and thought political activists were idiots. The news about the coup in Cyprus on 15 July 1974 reached me in Karpathos, a small Greek island, where I was on holiday. It affected the lives of every Cypriot, and I was no exception.[5]

I made my way back to London as soon as I could and followed the news closely. By the time I arrived, I made two conclusions that I have stood by ever since. One can ignore politics, but politics doesn't ignore anyone. I also concluded that the Cypriot Communist Party, the Anorthotiko Komma Ergazomenou Laou (AKEL; Progressive Party of Working People), was not the answer. My father and my oldest brother were both lifelong members of AKEL, which at that time received over 33 percent of the vote. However, as far as I was concerned, they failed to oppose the coup in any serious manner. That was simply not good enough. Specifically, soon after the coup and invasion, I remember reading a statement by Andreas Ziartides, an AKEL MP and general secretary of the AKEL-led trade union federation. Referring to those behind the coup, he said, "These are the people who destroyed Enosis." Enosis is the possible unification of Cyprus with Greece. Back then, AKEL supported Enosis, the motivation for the coup, and it was not until 1978 that they decided to drop this policy. As a young non-political person, I knew enough to realise how reactionary Ziartides sounded. He was someone claiming to be a communist and attacked the extreme right-wing paramilitaries who engineered a coup and set up a dictatorsip—not from the left but from the right.

When I finally made contact with my family in Cyprus, I found out that my oldest brother Stelios, who was 22 at the time, was missing in action.

I studied chemistry at North London Polytechnic (the London Metropolitan University today) and became good friends with Phaedros Kavallaris, a fellow student, musician and active member of the Cypriot Worker group. Through Phaedros, I became active in the group. We were invovled in Cypriot student politics, demonstrations and the community. In 1976, I joined the IS group, which later became the SWP.

In the 1970s, the Cypriot community in London probably numbered around 100,000, centred largely in a small number of North London boroughs. Many worked in the clothing industry. It was a relatively "young" community that experienced a strong influx from Cyprus at the time of independence from Britain in 1960 and then again with the coup in 1974. The year of 1974 was, of course, a defining one in the recent political history of the country: the extreme right-wing, Greek nationalist coup was followed by the Turkish invasion, eventually leading to the partition of Cyprus.

In terms of left politics, it's worth reiterating a point made by Workers' Democracy, an organisation formed by former members of IS in Cyprus. It concerns AKEL:

"AKEL is a major force in Greek Cypriot politics. It prides itself as the largest non-ruling Communist Party in the world and regularly gets about 30 percent of the popular vote. Non-ruling though it may be, it has successfully assumed the role of kingmaker in Greek Cypriot politics for over a decade. It is also a party which enjoys the support of the working class and has a very substantial influence over the class.[6]"

In September 1972, AKEL officially established a British branch, but its roots in the Cypriot community date back to the 1930s and particularly the late 1950s.

John: How did Cypriot Worker start?

Demetrios: To be honest, it's not entirely clear. As I just said, 1974 was an eye-opener for many of us. Back then, the Cypriot Worker group already existed and people like Phedias Soteriades, Elsa Pylarinou, Phaedon Vassiliades and Jenny Fryda were politically active. Yet, they wanted more serious involvement with British politics. They would talk to people, discuss and debate. Phaedon told me a story that, at university, he was working with someone from the Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP). They sold their newspaper *Newsline* together. When he got involved in the Right to Work Campaign,

this other guy got very angry and told Phaedon off.[7] It was a lesson for Phaedon regarding sectarianism, and it kept him away from the WRP. As things moved on, he got closer to IS, went to Skegness and either joined then or soon after.[8]

I believe Sophocles Rousos joined IS before 1974. But he left for Cyprus before I joined. Phaedon also soon moved back to Cyprus. Sophocles and some comrades had started publishing the monthly Marxist Discussion Bulletin there. The next stage followed with other comrades from Athens and Britain joining in and the setting up of the Workers' Democracy organisation. I contacted Phaedon recently, and he sent me this recollection:

"I remember little about the Cypriot Worker group as I left for Cyprus in June 1976… We had the idea to organise the Cypriot workers in a trade union. As things developed, of course, IS tried to convince us that this was wrong politically and that our task was to organise the Cypriot workers in British unions. Tony Cliff addressed our "group" and he tried to stress the importance of engaging with the politics of the UK, whether working or studying in the country. Otherwise, you may acquire the feature of émigrés: "the hands on your suitcases ready to go back home but after some years you end up 'middle-aged, middle-class bums." Along the way, our mistake was corrected. Our position on Cyprus at the time was "No Partition, No Federation!".[9]"

John: To what degree was the Cypriot Worker more than just a newspaper? And who was involved?

Demetrios: Cypriot Worker was a political group. I joined as a student. After 1974, a new student federation was formed in Britain, which was dominated by AKEL. I joined a faction that was to the left of AKEL. We met as Cypriot Worker with the non-student members and produced a monthly paper with the same name. So, we were organised as a revolutionary political group and met weekly at a comrade's flat to discuss current issues, mainly what was going on in Cyprus.

I can't remember everyone's full names, it's been so long. Apart from those I have already mentioned, Bambos Stylianou, another Bambos, Phedros Kavalaris, Sotos, Demetris Demetriou, Theodoulitsa Kouloumbri, Kika, Meletis and Antroulla Economou were part of the organisation. Later, Ayshe Asim, Yiota Kontopoullou, Daphnos Economou and Xenophon Hasabis also joined. All in all, we had about 30 people.

It's worth recalling that our group was made up largely of Greek Cypriots, although some Turkish-Cypriot comrades also played very important roles. In February 1979, a letter titled "How can Cyprus be Free?", signed by Ali Saffet on behalf of the Cypriot Worker group, was published in the paper of the International Socialist Organization in the United States, *Socialist Worker.* Ali Saffet is Roni Margulies, a leading figure in our Turkish sister organisation.[10] He didn't want to use his real name in public, so we gave him that name. He joined IS independently and worked with us very closely for a while, especially once we started publishing in both Greek and Turkish. It's difficult to describe him as just a member of our group—he did a lot more, especially working among the Turkish Community in London, mainly in Hackney. After the first years of Cypriot Worker, in which meetings took place in Greek, we changed to English.

John: How close were you to the IS group and the SWP?

Demetrios: We were in touch with IS, which in those days was building the Right to Work Campaign. Over time, more members of Cypriot Worker joined IS, and an experienced IS member, who spoke Greek well, came to work with us. A little later, Phil Marfleet, who was the local IS and SWP organiser, became involved. Before a Cypriot Worker meeting, members of IS would meet separately in advance to discuss the issues of the day, then turned up as a group. This really annoyed the others. Both were

moving apart politically, and a split soon took place. We were in a minority and were, in a sense, expelled. However, I argued that our group should continue to publish the *Cypriot Worker,* and the others didn't seem to mind, as they had no interest in maintaining it.

At first, they continued to meet, but I think at some point they got tired of each other and went their separate ways. We, on the other hand, continued to meet, published the *Cypriot Worker,* sold it and were active in the community. When Phil took over, we set up the Cypriot Defence Campaign through his and Pambo's Stylianous initiative. By then, we considered ourselves a group within IS working in the Cypriot community but also being active in local IS branches.

Fairly early on, IS organised a day school for those of us in Cypriot Worker. It was held above the IS bookshop in Finsbury Park, where the first and second floors were used as offices and meeting spaces. Nigel Harris spoke and, whilst I don't remember his subject, Nigel was always a brilliant speaker. It was a joy to listen to him. Cliff spoke on Cuba, and I think there was a third talk.

I still remember that Cliff argued that Cuba, despite its efforts to diversify the economy, was more than ever dependent on sugar production. The topics made not much sense to me. I expected discussions about Lenin and imperialism or Marxist economics. However, from today's perspective, it made perfect sense! The leadership of IS knew we were close to them, as we were involved in the Right to Work Campaign. But they were not sure how influenced we were by Maoist politics and the tactics of the Cuban Revolution, Che Guevara's guerilla war as a way of achieving socialism. Alex Callinicos was not present that day, but around this time I remember him emphasising that Rhodesia was probably the last place where guerilla warfare was still possible.

Later, within the SWP, we were either known as the Greece/Cyprus Fraction or as the SWP Cypriot Worker Group. We contributed to the SWP Internal Bulletin of May 1977 with a piece titled: "Those who can—those who can't do international work". It outlined how and why we recruited to the SWP:

"If we take the job of recruiting foreigners seriously, we have tremendous opportunities for spreading our politics, particularly in the third world and semi-third world countries. In a year and a half we have recruited six Greeks and nine Cypriots. This has been done not on the basis of discussion groups about the politics of Greece and Cyprus, but on the basis of activities like the Right to Work Campaign, the Cypriot Defence Campaign, and on emphasising the importance of work here and now. These activities have led us into activity and discussion about Cypriot politics—but with a real edge from our practical experience. When we go back to our countries we will be going back with a valuable political training and experience."

Our contribution stemmed from the belief that the SWP's international work would achieve more measurable and lasting results if it focused on practical work with foreign students and workers in this country, as opposed to the (impossible-to-measure) interactions between the "international bureaus" of various political organisations.

Certainly, comrades recruited and developed by IS and the SWP went on to help form revolutionary organisations aligned with the Party's politics in not only Cyprus but also elsewhere: the Socialist Workers Group in Germany, the Socialist Workers Movement in Ireland, the International Socialist Organisation in Ghana, and the Revolutionary Socialist Workers Party and marx-21 in Turkey. In today's situation, where it's hard to find revolutionary organisations of any size or influence overseas—and the SWP's politics are even harder to find—perhaps the discussion is still relevant.

John: So, you were known as the Greece/Cyprus Fraction. What was your relationship with the Greek comrades like?

Demetrios: Greece has a proud revolutionary tradition but, of course, the military coup in April 1967 led to the so-called Regime of the Colonels, which imprisoned activists or forced them into exile. One organisation, the Organosi Socialitiki Epanatasi (OSE; Socialist Revolution Organisation), was active in London. Its leading figures were Maria Styllou and Panos Garganas. Both had a friendly relation with IS. Maria was involved in the struggles at the London School of Economics and Political Science and in close contact with Chris Harman. Maria and Panos returned to Greece in 1974, with the fall of the Colonels, but some London-based members of the OSE stayed in Britain to work with the Cypriot Worker group as well as IS and the SWP.

In the Cypriot Worker group, Jenny Fryda and Elsa Pylarinou were important figures from mainland Greece. Alberto Florentin is another Greek comrade who lived in London but left for Greece before I joined. In the late 1970s or early 1980s, he moved to Cyprus and worked with Workers Democracy, our organisation there. For years, he played a leading role and, together with Dinos Agiomamitis, wrote our important book on Cyprus: The Cyprus Problem and the Internationalist Tasks of Greek Cypriot Revolutionaries.[11]

Initially, the OSE never decisively aligned with IS and the SWP since they were influenced by Italian Mao-centrism, notably the Avanguardia Operaia (Workers Vanguard). They moved closer to the SWP in the mid-1980s, and it took about five years of debate, political collaboration, and personal friendship (notably with Chris Harman, Julie Waterson and Alex Callinicos) to join the International Socialist Tendency, our international group. In 1997, they changed their name to the Sosialistiko Ergatiko Komma (SEK; Socialist Workers Party).

I remember a personal conversation with Costas Pittas, a leading member of the OSE. It was in Athens, at one of their Marxism festivals. Their paper came out once every two weeks or monthly, and they were reluctant to produce it on a more regular basis. He told me that comrades from the SWP, particularly Chris Harman and Alex Callinicos, pushed them and emphasised the importance of having a weekly paper. This was around the time when they were considering changing their name from OSE to SEK. It was a significant move, and Costas told me the story as an example of how the British comrades pushed them in the right direction. The K in SEK stands for “komma”, which is party in Greek. So, it was not just a simple change of name, but it signified a change from a group to a party, similar to the change from IS to SWP. This step was important for the Greek comrades. Having a weekly paper was a contributing factor. Of course, the weekly paper played a huge role in the growth of the SEK; comrades had to become more organised and their presence in the movement and ability to intervene enhanced.

Over the years, the comrades in the Britain, Greece and Cyprus met regularly at the Marxism festival in London and later in Athens, where they discussed issues and exchanged ideas. Just like the cooperation between Cypriot and Greek revolutionaries in London, the cooperation between the two in both Cyprus and Greece was key to the development of Workers Democracy. At the same time, the comrades in Cyprus were able to help the Greek comrades to clarify and enhance their position on the Cyprus issue.

John: What was the political programme of the Cypriot Worker group? Were there any key statements around which you organised?

Demetrios: We copied “Where We Stand” from *Socialist Worker*. As we were members of IS and the SWP, politically, we developed at branch meetings, Skegness and Marxism festivals. As for the Cyprus question, we initially argued for a solution from below as opposed to relying on influencing governments. We wanted a return to the pre-partition period, where the two communities, Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots, lived side by side. We later argued for the right of Turkish Cypriots to

self-determination. At some point, we stopped emphasising the big imperialist powers, the US and Britain, the former colonial power, and started to investigate the role played by the local ruling class and nationalist organisations. The latter included the Ethniki Organosis Kyprion Agoniston (EOKA; National Organisation of Cypriot Fighters) and the Türk Mukavemet Teşkilatı (TMT; Turkish Resistance Organisation).

John: You mentioned it in passing, but I have been told that the comrades in Workers Democracy developed a distinctive analysis of the national question in Cyprus that sharply differentiated them from the Greek-Cypriot left. Could you say a bit more on this, and also to what extent that analysis was shared by Cypriot Worker?

Demetrios: Our analysis, both amongst British comrades and in Cyprus, was already developed some years earlier, but the 1988 book *The Cyprus Problem and the Internationalist Tasks of Greek-Cypriot Revolutionaries* published in Greek was critical.12 As I said, it was written by Dinos Agiomamitis and Alberto Florentin, yet published as a work of Workers Democracy. It's just over 400 pages long. An extended extract, containing the most relevant parts for a British audience, was translated into English by Daphnos Economou and sold in Britain as a pamphlet.

Where we differ on the national question from other sections of the Greek-Cypriot left is covered in considerable detail. Some of the points are: most Greek Cypriot leftists see the Cyprus problem as one of national liberation. Their fixation is on how to stop the partitioning of the island, how to get rid of the Turkish army—the accomplishment, in other words, of all the traditional Greek national pursuits in Cyprus. However, in our view, the real problem for the Greek-Cypriot working class does not constitute a national problem in any way. All the tragedies that resulted from the wars until now have contributed to what is the real problem for the working class. The workers on both sides see each other as enemies, and this leads to the strengthening of class collaboration with "their" respective ruling classes in order to confront the "common external enemy". We argue that patriotism isn't the only option open to the Greek-Cypriot left. There's an international tradition that leads to a fundamentally different attitude towards the Cyprus problem. It's neither about the Turkish invasion and partition nor about whether the bourgeoisie is (wholly or partly) treacherous, an imperialist puppet or "incapable" of solving the Cyprus problem. The alternative is the tradition of the internationalist workers' movement, prior to the outbreak of the First World War.

John: Can you elaborate a little on that?

Demetrios: We support the right of Turkish Cypriots to self-determination. Right-wing politicians argue for Cyprus's right to self-determination, but for them, this means a return to the "old days", the right of the Greek-Cypriot majority to oppress the Turkish-Cypriot minority. The left in Cyprus opposes our demand. We see ourselves in support of Lenin's arguments in favour of rights and freedoms of the oppressed minority. We don't prefer a "united" Cyprus to a "divided" Cyprus or the reverse, we don't prefer this or that form of federation or confederation.

Our focus isn't on the role of imperialism but on the responsibilities and actions of the local ruling classes. Essentially, it's their conflict that led to wars in 1963-4, 1967 and 1974. Of course, imperialism interfered for its own interests, but, primarily, it's a domestic capitalist conflict that includes ruling class antagonisms. Still, to this day, I see people on the left condemning imperialism for what happened. It sounds left wing. After all, Lenin wrote a whole pamphlet on the topic, but when we point out that this lets the local ruling class off the hook, they immediately adjust their message.

The book mentions the massacres carried out by the Greek Cypriots over the years, especially in 1974. The worst atrocities took place in the villages of Tochni, where all adult males were murdered

after being arrested and sent to a concentration camp. The other massacre took place in the three neighbouring villages of Aloa, Sandalaris and Maratha. This is the worst atrocity in modern Cypriot history. All adult males were taken prisoners and removed from their homes. Greek-Cypriot paramilitaries, right-wing nationalists, then looted and raped for days the unprotected population: women, children and the old. When the Turkish army moved towards these villages, the paramilitaries murdered over 120 civilians in an attempt to hide their crimes. A mass grave was discovered and the story of Tochni told. As a result, many reprisal killings of Greek-Cypriot civilians followed.

When we exposed this in the book, we were attacked from both the left and the right. The criticism from the right is obvious. On the left, they argued that, by focusing on the negative, we're driving the two communities apart. Things have changed now, and everyone on the left talks about these crimes as a way of attacking nationalism.

We also support the rights of the settlers. These are people brought over from Turkey to settle in the northern part of the island. We think that these are poor working-class people looking for a better life. They can be won over to our cause. Some have lived there for almost 50 years, married (sometimes with Turkish Cypriots), have children and grandchildren. They're as Cypriot as everyone else.

The right wing on the Greek Cypriot side sees these processes as Turkey colonising the north. The left among Turkish Cypriots sees the settlers as a means of the Turkish right-wing regime bolstering its hold as most settlers owe a lot to the regime. We argue that this rejection is one of the reasons settlers remain loyal to the Turkish government—a lot of them joined trade unions and are familiar with left-wing traditions. The left among the Greek Cypriots is split and scattered. This position meets with the greatest opposition.

The pamphlet concludes the chapter "The Internationalist Tradition" with a concise political lesson:

"the so-called "internationalism" of the present day [Cypriot] socialist and Communist parties—that is so agreeable with their patriotic declarations and actions!—is not a new phenomenon. Such socialists who greet with singular "internationalist" fervour every foreign national struggle in which their "own" ruling class stands to lose nothing, and more so if it stands to gain, were also around in the times of Lenin…such "exporters of internationalism" are all those in southern Cyprus and Greece today who passionately support the right of the Kurds and Armenians to self-determination in Turkey, but who cannot contemplate its application for the Turkish Cypriots. Real, not hypocritical, internationalism is applied first in the context of our "own" country, in our "own" fatherland."

We supported this analysis, and I continue to support it. In fact, I wrote a letter to *Socialist Worker* in October 2020 titled "You've got it wrong on Cyprus division", in which I took issue with the paper:

"Your article on Cyprus (*Socialist Worker* number 2725) while informative and interesting, contains a few errors. To claim that the reason the division of the island was due to British machinations—as the headline "How British imperialism split Cyprus" does—while understandable for a British audience, hides the responsibility of the local ruling class. They were in fact the main culprit. The Communist Party wrongly supported Enosis (union with Greece) from 1948 to 1978. It took them four years after the coup and the war of 1974 to reverse this policy. The article fails to mention this, let alone try to explain it."

I would say, from today's perspective, our greatest success was to clarify our ideas and to set up a sister organisation in Cyprus, Workers Democracy. Our position on the Cyprus issue is now known and respected among the left.

John: What were the main activities of the Cypriot Worker group?

Demetrios: We had our meetings, initially with students, and clarified our ideas, we produced and sold the paper, organised, and joined demos. As I mentioned, we were also involved in campaigns such as the Right to Work Campaign. The *Socialist Worker* that appeared on 1 May 1976 advertised a joint meeting organised by the Central London Right to Work Committee and Cypriot Worker on immigrant workers under attack.

As with the SWP's other community and black workers' organisations and publications, we played an important role in local anti-racist and anti-fascist work. Our area, North London, was a hotspot for National Front (NF) activity in the 1970s.[13] Cypriot Worker mobilised against the NF, campaigned against its racist ideology, and supported Cypriots when threatened with deportations in our Cypriot Defence Campaign. Of course, two very significant anti-NF demonstrations took place in London in 1977—Wood Green (which is a part of the Borough of Haringey) in April and Lewisham in July. Our comrades were actively involved in both, and it's worth highlighting a major two-page feature that appeared in issue 17 of Cypriot Worker (July 1977). The feature was published in both Greek and Turkish and consisted of two articles: "National Front—The Politics of Hate" and "How to Stop Them". The first article analysed the NF and what they were trying to achieve. The second article focussed in a particularly forceful way on the political and physical measures required.

Re-reading the articles, I was struck by how good the analysis of the NF was, as well as the emphasis on confronting the Nazis—especially now, that we're experiencing similar issues in Cyprus with the rise of the far-right, ultra nationalist Ethniko Laiko Metopo (National People's Front). Unfortunately, they already have four MPs, and their influence is growing daily.

In February 2023, there were presidential elections in Cyprus, and AKEL, the left-wing party, decided not to put forward a candidate. They consistently poll over 20 percent but instead supported an establishment figure, a right-leaning former diplomat who stood as an independent in order, they believed, to attract a wider audience. However, that candidate talked about kicking out refugees in a fashion similar to the way the NF used to talk about foreign workers. Our arguments from 1977 are still relevant in Cyprus today.

In 1977, the SWP was heavily involved in Wood Green and Lewisham and in the formation of the Anti Nazi League. Our approach to tackling the problem of the growing fascist menace was twofold: a) defending our right to physically confront the fascists, whilst still working with those who don't agree with us; b) taking a hard anti-racist political line (eg no immigration controls) and at the same time working with some of those who support restrictive immigration policies (for instance, the Labour Party). This worked well. In Cyprus today, there's also a need for a united front. We revolutionaries would gladly work with AKEL. The independent candidate, by the way, lost.

The events of Wood Green are described in several publications. Dave Renton reports that "there were Turkish, Greek and black kids fighting against the Nazis".[14] On its 40th anniversary, Keith Flett wrote on how the counter-demonstration was organised: "Turkish and Greek cafes on Green Lanes and West Green Road were leafleted and visited several times to mobilise this section of the community".[15]

Cypriot Worker was regularly advertised in *Socialist Worker*, and the adverts give a good flavour of the published content. Stories ranged from the local (cuts in Haringey, unionisation and the fight for higher wages in sweatshops, police harassment) to the national (hospital cuts, the NF, the fight against deportations) and international (Soweto, Italy, Iran and Portugal). We published news, features and analyses. We sold the paper for 10p, and it had between 6 and 18 pages.

The production was a collaborative effort. We met and discussed what to write. Everyone's ideas were considered. Everyone contributed and wrote for the paper. In the early days, we used Community Press in Balls Pond Road, London, for the printing and later the SWP's print shop. We were printing before computers became widespread. Articles had to be typewritten and pasted on special boards; photos were added later. At some stage, we got hold of an IBM Golf Ball typewriter. It was a great improvement as fonts and language could be changed easily! All in all, 24 issues were published, the last one came out in early 1979.

We produced *Cypriot Worker* monthly and sold it in the Cypriot community in North London. In numbers, this means that we printed 1,000 copies and sold between 100 and 200. On most mornings, we focussed on the the rag trade (in those days dominated by Greek Cypriots) in Saint Anne's Road in Haringey. But we also sold it in coffee shops, outside the Odeon cinema at Seven Sisters Road when Greek films were shown, in Green Lanes and at demonstrations, during student events and so on. It was available in bulk from the IS and SWP bookshop in Seven Sisters Road.

Apart from *Cypriot Worker*, our group also worked with the main IS and SWP publications. For example, in January 1977, we had a feature story in a deportation issue of *Socialist Worker* titled "Why Amber, 5, has to live in hiding". In April 1977, we had a 3-page feature in *Womens Voice* covering various aspects of the lives of Cypriot women in Britain: "The lives of Cypriot women in Britain; arranged marriages, sweat shop working and a new threat—deportation". In the same month, a full page feature in *Socialist Worker*, written by one of our members, Bambos Stylianou: "Hounded by the Home Office: Seven members of this Cypriot family, including a two week baby, are being deported".[16]

John: What was the Cypriot Defence Campaign?

Demetrios: In the aftermath of 1974, over 10,000 Cypriot refugees came to Britain, mainly to London. As we already had a large community here, they had friends or relatives who could help them. The government didn't open the doors, in fact, quite the opposite. They made it almost impossible to come legally. Many came as tourists and tried to stay permanently. So, when their tourist visas expired, they ended up working without work permits or being properly registered. A number of Cypriots were arrested and deported after a certain period in prison. We launched the Cypriot Defence Campaign (CDC) with these six aims:

1. An immediate end to the deportations
2. All Cypriot refugees are recognised as such, not as "long term visitors"
3. All Cypriots are allowed to stay in this country
4. All Cypriots, including students, should be granted a work permit
5. The above rights are granted to all immigrants
6. An end to all immigration controls

We looked to trade unionists, immigrants, and other organisations and individuals to support our campaign. We took the view that, above all, the mass participation of Cypriot workers themselves will build a strong, militant campaign that will bring the community onto the streets. We also made efforts to build the networks that are necessary if we want to be successful—links with other migrant communities and those forces that are prepared to take up the issue of deportations and fight. For example, with the black nurses in the hospitals, the Indian and Pakistani communities and the Irish people, who were victimised by the Home Office.

Sizeable demonstrations were held in the local community and even Archbishop Makarios, the Cypriot president, was picketed when he visited a local Greek orthodox church in June 1977.[17] We also held

open meetings, visited people in jail, wrote leaflets, carried out a petition, produced an open letter and spoke at trade union meetings. A 50-page pamphlet titled *Stop the Deportations* was published and sold for 20p. The pamphlet was trilingual, in English, Greek and Turkish. In the six months before the publication of our pamphlet in early 1977, around 60 Cypriot refugees were deported. At the time of publication, at least 12 Cypriots were in Pentonville prison awaiting deportation. The SWP's *Womens Voice* and *Socialist Worker*, both from April 1977, painted the picture vividly.

As I was re-reading the Campaign's six demands, I remembered an incident regarding the last point, an end to all immigration controls. The split in the Cypriot Workers group occurred in the middle of the campaign. When we were discussing the demands, we were still all together and some non-SWP members objected to this demand. They said that the British state would never abolish all immigration controls. It's unrealistic! This shows their lack of political sophistication and understanding of how campaigns work. However, one of us in the SWP, I can't recall exactly who it was, commented that anyone who didn't support this demand was a racist. It was an unfortunate way of challenging their objection and it confused things. However, I believe it does illustrate how the two tendencies inside the group were drifting apart politically.

John: Does this point to some of the weaknesses in the Cypriot Worker group?

Demetrios: The early split in Cypriot Worker could and should have been avoided. I believe we could have won over more people from the original group and, of course, with half the members, our interventions became more difficult. Whilst not so much a weakness, it's important to highlight an issue that Cypriot Worker faced when attempting to become permanently and consistently present in the community: AKEL. As my comrade Daphnos Economou put it to me recently:

"In London (very much as in Nicosia), we had (and still have) to contend with the ubiquitous influence of the Communist Party, AKEL, with its local branches, regular mass meetings and, at the time, with its two weekly newspapers published in London (in Greek): *Parikiako Vima* (outselling the *Morning Star*) and *Parikiaki Haravgi*; as well as its daily paper published in Cyprus and circulated throughout Britain, day in day out."

John: Can you say a bit more about Workers Democracy in Cyprus in the 1970s and 1980s? It must have been a difficult situation.

Demetrios: Workers Democracy was part of the International Socialist Tendency. The 55-page pamphlet *The Cyprus Problem and the Internationalist Tasks of Greek Cypriot Revolutionaries* formed only a small part of a 418-page-long book that was written and published by members of the Workers Democracy group in southern Cyprus. The pamphlet was printed at the SWP's East End Offset presses and sold through Bookmarks. The publisher's note to the original book is worth quoting in this context:

"This book was written by the group Workers Democracy in southern Cyprus. From 1977 to 1978, some of us published the *Marxist Discussion Bulletin* and subsequently, until 1980 the newspaper *Workers Democracy*. Since then, we have existed as a publishing group with the same name. We have issued two pamphlets on the presidential elections of 1988 and on the strike in the textile industry. We have also published translations of the Socialist Workers Party's *How Marxism Works* and *Basic Ideas of Marxist Economics* into Greek. We have contributed articles about Cyprus to publications of the Greek organisation Organosi Socialitiki Epanatasi. We have produced the first issue of a new magazine, *Diethnistiki Pro(s)klisi* (Internationalist Challenge)."

Politically, we belong to an international revolutionary tradition that combines the revolutionary

internationalist traditions of the Bolsheviks with an analysis of modern capitalism and the modern working class. This tradition holds that the emancipation of the working class is the act of the working class and that the socialist transformation cannot be undertaken by any other force on behalf of the working class.[18]

When Pete Goodwin, the SWP international organiser, wrote a report for the SWP's *Internal Bulletin* of May 1979 titled "Our International Relations in Europe", he stated that there were only three countries in Europe with organisations "with essentially the same politics as the SWP" (West Germany, Ireland, and Cyprus). He listed Cyprus under the name Marxist Discussion Bulletin and quoted their membership as "about a dozen".

John: Why and when did it all end?

Demetrios: The last issue of *Cypriot Worker* was published in early 1979. Many comrades had completed their studies and left Britain. Those few of us who stayed worked within the SWP. Daphnos Economou arrived in London at the very end of that period, in August 1978, so his analysis of the reasons is interesting:

"[It] was a symptom of the downturn per se, generally and specifically… The Cypriot community in Britain had, by that point, settled into "regular life", as people did in Cyprus. And I believe, crucially, our insufficient grasp of the Cyprus problem couldn't take us much further. It took a full ten years to clearly reorient on the issue, through the work of Alberto Florentin and Dinos Ayiomamitis (both based in Nicosia, but from Athens, not London). I participated in the production of the last issue of *Cypriot Worker,* in magazine format. It was intended as a new beginning, but it proved to be the paper's swan song."

Periodisation is crucial, as well as an understanding of the parallel political fermentation that occurred among a young milieu of Cypriot students or ex-students in the mid to late 1970s—in London, in Athens and in Nicosia. They were radicalised by the coup and the war of 1974 in Cyprus and by the simultaneous fall of the Junta in Greece.[19]

Interestingly, it was also the case that the demise paralleled what Tony Cliff analysed as an "downturn" in the industrial struggle. In his autobiography, Cliff associated the downturn with a rise of "movementism". He argues: "As the labour movement went into retreat, there was a massive pull towards the so called 'movements' which tended towards separate issues of oppression for women, blacks, gays and lesbians and so on." As for our community-based publications, Cliff writes:

"The lack of success of *Flame* made us rush to try more and more things without thinking carefully about what we were doing. Inability to face reality led us to undertake a quixotic rush to produce more and more magazines… The number of SWP publications mushroomed: a Punjabi paper called *Chingari*; an Urdu paper called *Chingari*; a Bengali paper called *Pragati*; a paper for black workers called *Flame*; and a youth paper called *Fight*. Of course it would have been brilliant if we could have maintained papers in Punjabi, Urdu or Bengali to relate to workers in these communities who could not read English. But for that we needed first of all serious cadres in the communities… Without that we would be building on sand.[20]"

Unfortunately, Cliff's analysis here leaves more unsaid than said. Yes, of course, we need cadres in communities. But how do we get them? Surely, printing and engaging in a language they understand must be a vital part of that process! *Cypriot Worker* is noticeably absent from Cliff's list of publications (or anywhere else in the IS and SWP history), despite being a publication and organisation with serious cadres rooted in their community.

In a recent article in *International Socialism*, Camilla Royle writes convincingly on the impact the imminent climate catastrophe will have on migration. She quotes an Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) statement: “the greatest single impact of climate change might be on human migration.” She comments that “this means that there is an urgent need for socialists to consider how to respond.” Indeed there is. What Camilla doesn’t mention is that the document she quotes from also says: “Professor Myers’ estimate of 200 million climate migrants by 2050 has become the accepted figure—cited in respected publications from the IPCC to the Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change”.[21]

While Camilla focuses on some of the bigger issues of climate justice, solidarity, anti-racist arguments against borders, there’s something else to consider. The migrants will arrive in a country, they will form communities, they will face racism, hardship, injustice, language difficulties—and much, much worse. Socialists will need to organise these communities, in a relevant and practical manner.

Cypriot Worker, both the group and its eponymous publication, might, on the face of it, appear to be a very minor footnote in the history of IS and the SWP. But its short history shows that we’ve organised these communities before and that it has succeeded, albeit modestly. Anything we can learn from that experience is worth learning.

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Notes

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[2] A paper on *Flame* was recently published, see Myers, 2024.

[3] Rana, 2021.

[4] The *Black Worker* in Britain *Chingari* pamphlet, 1974; *Black Nationalism; Socialism* (SWP/Flame pamphlet, 1979).

[5] The eastern Mediterranean island of Cyprus is just over 1,000 kilometres east of Greece and 80 kilometres south of Turkey. In 1974, its population was around 650,000, of which 79 percent were Greek Cypriots, and 18 percent were Turkish Cypriots. In the mid 1950s, Greek Cypriots started a campaign with the aim of political union with Greece (Enosis, union), forming the Ethniki Organosis Kyprion Agoniston (EOKA; National Organisation of Cypriot Fighters), a guerilla group. Unlike other national liberation movements, EOKA was led by the extreme right winger Georgios Grivas and by Archbishop Makarios. The EOKA campaign failed to achieve union with Greece, but Cyprus gained independence from Britain in August 1960. Makarios was elected the first president and retained this post until his death in 1977. Britain retained two military bases on the island, Akrotiri and Dhekelia. After independence, the Greek Cypriot leaders continued supporting the ideas of Enosis, which led to inter-communal fighting with Turkish Cypriots just before Christmas 1963. This led to the formation of

the Cypriot National Guard, which was trained and controlled by Greek army officers. In Greece, right-wing army officers took power in April 1967. Grivas felt that the road to Enosis was taking too long and formed EOKA B in opposition to Makarios. On 15 July 1974, Greek officers, in collaboration with EOKA B paramilitaries, carried out a coup in Cyprus. The Greek junta backed the coup. On 20th July 1974, Turkey invaded Cyprus, justifying its action as necessary to protect the Turkish Cypriot minority. Following negotiations in the United Nations, Cyprus was split into a northern part controlled by Turkish Cypriots and a southern one controlled by Greek Cypriots. Today, the latter is the de facto territory of the internationally recognised Republic of Cyprus and part of the European Union, while the latter is the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, which is only officially recognised as a sovereign state by Turkey.

[6] Economou, 1989.

[7] The Right to Work Campaign was launched in October 1975 as a response to the fast rising levels of unemployment. In practice, the campaign depended largely on the initiatives of IS members. “Politically it sought to put into practice three main principles. One: That the unemployed had to have a voice for themselves in the struggle… Two: It had to be recognised that the unemployed alone could not fight unemployment. It was necessary to fight for the unity of employed and unemployed, to confront employed workers with their responsibility in the fight for jobs… Three: The Campaign had to be based on direct action as well as propaganda…”—Birchall, 1981.

[8] During much of the 1970s and 1980s, IS and the SWP held an Easter Rally at the Derbyshire Miners’ Holiday Camp in Skegness open to members, supporters and their families. Due to its geographic location, this event involved the vast majority of attendees staying onsite. Unlike today’s more dispersed Marxism event, this made Skegness a long weekend of organisation building and cohesion par excellence.

[9] Personal exchange with Phaedon Vassiliades.

[10] Roni Margulies (1955-2023) was, alongside Dogan Tarkan, a founding member of the Revolutionary Socialist Workers Party, the SWP’s sister organisation in Turkey.

[11] Agiomamitis and Florentin, 1988.

[12] An example of our developing analysis is contained in our February 1979 letter “How can Cyprus be free?”.

[13] The National Front was formed in 1967 out of various factions of the extreme right. In the mid-1970s, they were attempting to take their loathsome ideology onto the streets through provocative marches and the like.

[14] Renton, 2006.

[15] Flett, 2017.

[16] *Womens Voice* was the IS and SWP women’s publication that ran from 1972 to 1982.

[17] At a recent open meeting of the IS History Project, a comrade spoke about his speech at a rally with 300 participants after a CDC demonstration in February 1977.

[18] Workers Democracy, 1988.

[19] Personal communication.

[20] Cliff, 2000.

[21] Brown, 2008.

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Needs Turkish Translation, Needs Greek Translation, Other Material, Decade 2000-2029, 2024, Undefined, Undefined Location, History of the Milieu

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