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Nationalism, Natural Gas, the Bi-communal struggles: Positions for the Federation

Historical note

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Content

As an antifascist collective we consider the history of fascism in Cyprus to be interwoven with the history of nationalism and intercommunal conflict. The genealogy of fascism as well as the hegemony of the nationalist right on the island passes through the rise of the irredentist nationalisms of the 1950s; through the murders of leftists of their own community and members of the other community by EOKA and TMT; through the paramilitary gangs of 1963 and 1967; through the putschists of 1974 and the final realisation of the dream of Turkish nationalism. The political ancestors of fascism in Cyprus are none other than their national heroes, are none other than those responsible for the conflicts, the divisions and the repression of the working class, for the political ruin in which the island finds itself today. The battle against fascism is therefore necessarily a battle against nationalism and all the consequences it has caused.

The battle against fascism in Cyprus cannot be anything except a battle for a federal island. We consider the course towards a federalised Cyprus a necessary stage in the battle against the political hegemony of nationalism and the division of the working class on the island. We are aware of the problems that are contained within both the talks of the political leaderships as well as the within the framework of the 'solution from above'. However, we do not consider this course to be a 'solution' - a solution will require the removal of a problem, the successful outcome of a case. In contrast, we understand the 'solution' to be a process, as a way of jointly confronting the problem with the Turkish-Cypriots and as the start of our own cause. This process must be from an antifascist, anti-nationalist, class-based and ecological perspective. As long as the Cyprus issue exists, then nationalism will flail about in the political rhetoric and thought of the indigenous. The recent collaboration to celebrate the Unionist "referendum" of 1950 by the parties of the "centre", which was on the initiative of the neo-Nazis (with the useful abstinence of DISY) indicates the urgency of demolishing the ethnocentric worldview which desires the cover of the embraces of the 'motherlands'.

As long as the Cyprus issue exists education will continue to result in the learning of ethnic hatred, of irredentist nationalism, of [the slogan of] "I Don't Forget" whose final aim is the ethnic cleansing on the island by every means. As long as there is a Cyprus issue, militarism shall remain the political expression of the true desires of Greek- and Turkish-Cypriot nationalism: the state of readiness for war at any time. The barrels will continue to block our paths, the borders will continue to split our

struggles, the watching posts will continue to hamper the best years of our youth. As long as the Cyprus issue exists, we shall not fight class struggles beyond those of the national.

We recognise that the process for the solution to the Cyprus Problem is moved by geopolitical and economic interests. The discovery of natural gas in the eastern Mediterranean creates, for a segment of capital, the potential solution to the Cyprus Problem an attractive choice with regards to the exploitation of the deposits. The transport of natural gas from Israel to Turkey with views towards delivery to Europe, as has already been proposed, necessarily passes within the Cypriot EEZ, a fact that favours a federal Cyprus. It is noted here that Israel, despite the political rapprochement pursued by Turkey lately, has maintained its alliance with the Cypriot and Greek state. In addition, the cost of transport of the deposits of the Cypriot EEZ through Greece is prohibitive, making transport through Turkey a much more realistic and economically attractive choice.

It is a fact then that for a part of Cypriot, Turkish and also Greek Capital, the solution to the Cyprus issue is an economic and geopolitical pursuit. Furthermore, a potential solution would be a stabilising factor for the West in the troubled Eastern Mediterranean, while also reducing the strategic influence of Russia as well as Europe's dependence on its energy reserves, through the potential cooperation of Israel-Cyprus-Turkey-Greece mentioned above in supplying natural gas to Europe. Let us not forget that with any potential solution the British bases will remain on the island, at least with a reduced area, a fact that legitimates the solution to the British and their allies who use the bases for raids in the countries of the Eastern Mediterranean. The solution is also legitimatised for a segment of G/C and T/C capital for a plethora of reasons, such as opening of the Turkish/European market respectively.

On the other hand, we recognise both that the geopolitical interests of the concerned powers could settle on a plan other than that of a federal Cyprus, as well as that other significant section of capital and the dominant class from all involved sides is against a potential solution. The geopolitical conflicts between Greece and Turkey over the sovereignty of the Aegean, which have been expressed for a while now as a bitter repetition of the Imia issue, make it obvious that not only is the Cyprus problem not the only issue on the agenda between the two countries, but also that no-one can guarantee that geopolitical developments will proceed along a peaceful path on the island. It is obvious that the 'mother countries' are not primarily interested in peaceful co-existence, no more than in partition. What concerns them is the safeguarding and promotion of their geopolitical and economic interests - which could mean anything from the support of a potential plan for the federalisation of Cyprus, to formal partition with trade agreements that allow for the exploitation of the EEZs, to the initiation of plans for a new war.

At the same time, there are also, as mentioned above, parts of local capital and the established status quo that oppose potential federalisation. Whole political careers have been built on the struggle to safeguard the non-solution of the Cyprus problem - north and south of the Green Line. These voices, which will suffer a heavy defeat, are surely the very same that are heard the loudest in the rejectionist front that dominates public discourse. The same is also true for business voices that consider that they have more to lose than gain from the day after a solution to the Cyprus issue.

The main argument that is produced both from these voices of the bourgeois class who have much to lose on a political and/or economic level, as well as from a significant section of the Left (both local and not) is that the Bi-zonal Bi-communal Federation (BBF) is racist because it divides the population on the basis of ethnic origin. This argument is both ridiculous but also dangerous. Ridiculous, because the BBF was historically the result of ethnic hatred and violence and not their cause. That is, the BBF is necessary precisely because nationalist ideology created nationalities and provoked the events of

1958, 1963, 1967 and 1974. It is the consequences of these events that make the safeguarding of each community's autonomy a necessity. On the other hand however, the argument regarding a racist BBF is also dangerous because it is adopted and promoted from the factions that express the most nationalist/racist rhetoric both towards Turkish-Cypriots as well as towards other population groups on the island (LGBTQI+ people, immigrant women etc.) There is therefore a reversal of reality. Although the unitary state is the institutional framework which allowed for the repression of an ethnic group (and the phenomena of the Sampson, Makarios, Grivas type etc.) it is presented as the most just solution because it supposedly does not distinguish individuals based on their ethnicity. That which is implied in essence, however, is the legitimisation and institutionalisation of repression based on people's ethnic origin.

The well-known slogan of "one person one vote", a banner in the Greek-Cypriot anti-federation campaign, primarily hides the authoritarianism that may arise from the principle of the majority. Federalist thought understands that the safeguarding of the autonomy of certain community groups is necessary because the principle of the majority has the potential to permanently nullify their political power and to systematically exclude them. Therefore, the majority is not always right nor is it justified to act as it wills without taking into account the minorities or the ethnic/religious minorities, especially in the context of shaping public opinion and the production of hysterias. This slogan also does not recognise the fact that beyond individual rights there are also collective rights.

No-one is guaranteeing that an upcoming agreement on the basis of a federation will result in solution to all the problems nor do we entertain such illusions. We are not speaking however, as we have said, of the outcome, but of the start of our own case. The Cyprus problem is the result of the historical hegemony of nationalisms and its solution will signify a rupture with this fact, without it necessarily involving overcoming it. In every case, it is our position that it is time that the indigenous people of this island to look to their present and their future independently of the interests of the Greek and Turkish state. The reunification of Cyprus is necessary in order to finally cut the umbilical cords with the so-called motherlands and to overcome the nationalistic ideologies that they imposed. It is inconceivable to have an antifascist struggle that is not bi-communal and to have bi-communalism without an anti-nationalist, federalist consciousness. Its development is moreover a necessity in order to ensure the avoidance of ethnic conflicts and nationalist outbursts. Beyond any kind of agreement at the level of political leadership, it is necessary to build this federalist consciousness, which includes the understanding of the historical developments of the Cyprus question and of ethnic conflicts in conjunction with the desire to overcome narrow ethnic identities in order that we can see Cyprus not as a homogenous nation-state but as what it truly is, a place with many communities.

To come back to our principle position: the process to a federal Cyprus is a necessity because the transition may offer a terrain more conducive towards combatting the nationalism and militarism of the island, towards changing the ethnocentrism in education and refuting the geographical partition, through which we shall be in a position to assert a total change of ecological responses of the island. From Akamas to the Karpas peninsula we will have to struggle to protect the last environmental "lungs" that have been left on the island. In every case, this process will amount to a rupture with the present situation. After this rupture, we hope that other issues that have been hidden all these years by the Cyprus problem will finally be highlighted: issues such as labour rights, ecological issues, the commons, gender issues etc. Our struggles can finally become truly bi-communal, without being divided by borders and armies, with the hope that the class sign will be able to replace the national one - that Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot workers (female and male) will fight for our common interests.

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