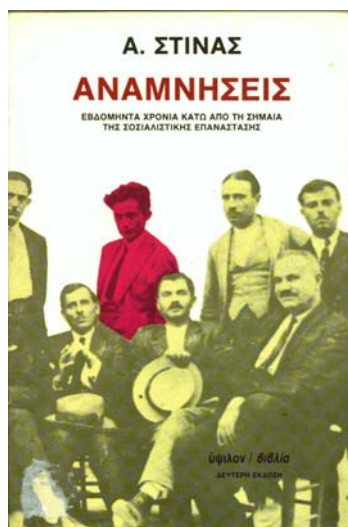


# Revolutionary defeatists in Greece in World War II

Some introductory texts and selected highlights from:  
*Memoirs – Sixty Years under the Flag of Socialist Revolution*

By A. stinas

(translated from the French edition)



Selections from Stinas' *Memoirs*  
**DRAFT v0.95**

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## Translator's Introduction

This document mostly consists of English translations of the introductory sections, Chapter 2, Chapter 5 and part of Chapter 6 of the French edition of the book *Memoirs – Sixty Years under the Flag of Socialist Revolution*, written by the well-known Greek revolutionary A. Stinas. As explained below, it was first published in Athens in 1977 by Vergos editions. It was republished by Ypsilon in 1985. The French edition, titled *Mémoires: un révolutionnaire dans la Grèce du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, was published by La Breche in 1989. La Breche is the publishing house of the French section of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (those interested in Trot-spotting will recognise this as “Mandel’s lot”).

I’ve taken the trouble to translate this material because I think that this book is invaluable both as a source of information about important events in the class struggle and as an expression of the ideas and attitudes of a remarkable individual and the group of revolutionaries which he was associated with. In particular, it is concerned with the practical question of how to maintain a clear class opposition to capitalist war, even while you are directly immersed in its horrors. For Stinas and his comrades “revolutionary defeatism”<sup>1</sup> was not just a slogan or an idea to be debated but, quite literally, a matter of life and death.

Hopefully, this selective translation will be a first step towards producing an English edition of Stinas’ *Memoirs* (preferably thoroughly checked against the original Greek edition, if not translated from it). If nothing else, I hope to encourage those comrades who can at least read French slowly to get hold of a copy of the French edition and read it all...

The book is concerned with the class struggle in Greece between the end of the First World War and the end of the Second World War. Throughout all this time Stinas was right in the thick of the struggle and underwent a rapid political evolution. During the First World War (while still a teenager) he was involved in a local socialist group in Corfu which consisted of young people gathered around the “professional revolutionary” Ilja Jovanović<sup>2</sup> who “taught them the true principles of proletarian internationalism”. Stinas later joined the Communist Party as soon as he was old enough to do so and later declared himself to be a Trotskyist - but only because Stinas and his comrades didn’t know what Trotsky’s real political positions were! In his words: “Officially I was a member of the Fourth International until the middle of 1947. But in reality perhaps I never was.” In particular, Stinas’ group didn’t know about Trotsky’s main position on the Second World War – the “defence of the USSR” – which implied taking sides in the imperialist slaughter. When they found out they were horrified and eventually stopped calling themselves Trotskyists:

“The first information about the position of the International on the war left us literally open-mouthed. We could not believe our eyes and our ears. A British soldier sent us the first publication in December 1944. It was a pamphlet published by the French Trotskyists with

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<sup>1</sup> This is the phrase used by Stinas and his comrades (and still used today by orthodox Left Communists). Personally, I think it can be misleading and prefer the formulation: *No war but the class war!*

<sup>2</sup> Jovanović belonged to the extreme left of the Serbian Socialist Party and had arrived in Corfu with the Serbian army. He quickly deserted but remained on the island until 1920. He was foolish enough to return to Serbia during a “general amnesty” and was arrested and then killed while “trying to escape”.

this very revealing title: *The Trotskyists in the struggle against the Nazis*, that is to say, against the Germans. They justified themselves in front of the Stalinists, who they accused of being agents of the Germans, and produced some proof that they, like all good patriotic Frenchmen, had also fought the Germans.”

The early part of the book gives a clear account of the relationship between the complicated post-First World War bourgeois politics of Greece (coups and counter-coups, military and civilian governments) and the continuous need for capital to suppress the class struggle. Chapter 2 describes the revolutionary opposition to the First World War and then to the war against Turkey. Much of this was carried out by rank and file members of the Communist Party against the wishes and declared policies of their leaders. In fact the unwillingness of proletarians to die for the Greek nation was so intense that it probably goes a long way to explaining Kemal Atatürk's dramatic military successes. This chapter is very clear in showing both the enormous gap which existed between the reactionary leadership of the Greek CP (which was openly parliamentary, legalist and nationalist) and its radical rank and file right from the beginning of its existence, *and, at the same time*, the enormous hold which the Party had over the radical elements of the working class. In late 1923 the party organisation in Piraeus, together with part of the Athens organisation, split from the Party and created the Communist Union which published the newspaper *Communist Tribune*. Stinas himself opposed the split, despite stating that he was in complete political agreement with the break-away faction!

After a brief spell in prison in 1928, Stinas was sent to Thessaloniki by the political bureau of the Communist Party of Greece. He was sent to take charge of the local organisation at a time of frequent strikes and street confrontations. Here he found “the most authentic, the most conscious and the most organised proletariat in the country”. So conscious in fact that:

“While I stayed in Thessaloniki I was unaware of the existence of football. I never heard any mention, good or bad, of that game of kicks which, to the great joy of governments, stupefies so many today.”

The political evolution of Stinas and his comrades was to have an influence way beyond Greece, perhaps including on many of the people who will be reading this text. For example, the group came to include Castoriadis<sup>3</sup>, who became a leading member of *Socialisme ou Barbarie* and the guru of the Solidarity group in the UK.

Like most of his comrades, Stinas became well-known to the secret police and for most of the time between 1924 and 1942 he was either in hiding or in prison. Therefore a lot of the book is concerned with descriptions of prison conditions, which often make harrowing reading.

From May 1940 to October 1942, Stinas was in the notorious prison of Akronafplia<sup>4</sup> (just outside Nafplio in the Peloponnese). In mid-1940 the two main Trotskyist fractions present in the camp were able to organise extensive political debates, producing a written bulletin which was circul-

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<sup>3</sup> It's not clear from the book when he joined, certainly he was involved after the beginning of 1945.

<sup>4</sup> Transliterating Greek personal and place names into English is a problem. I've tried to strike a balance between traditional conventions and giving the English-speaking reader a sporting chance of being able to pronounce them. In the French, this word is rendered as “Acronauplie”. For those who are really curious about it, the spelling is: “Ακροναυπλία”.

ated around the camp. This sounds familiar, doesn't it? Like me, you're probably thinking of the debates in the Soviet prison of Verkhne-Ural'sk described by the Yugoslav revolutionary Ciliga in *The Russian Enigma*...

Perhaps the most inspiring part of Stinas' story is that describing the activities of himself and some of his comrades during the Second World war, after they had escaped from prison and managed to organise themselves as a group in Athens. Operating under the most horrendous conditions – murderous repression from the fascists and the Stalinists simultaneously, and generalised famine – they nevertheless managed to carry on a significant activity, not merely of propaganda (leaflet distribution, graffiti, speeches from rooftops...) but also of more direct participation in the class struggle. During a wave of strikes, demonstrations and other unrest in 1943:

“We actively participated in the pillage of the warehouses. Some comrades forced open one on Mavromikhalis Street, full of pastries of the highest quality. People formed a queue and the pastries were distributed in an orderly fashion, without those who distributed them keeping anything for themselves. We broke open another one, in Vathis, full of bars of soap, which were then distributed in order, to each person in turn.”

The position of Stinas' group on the war was very clear. They were in total opposition to any participation in the war on any side, and particularly denounced the Stalinist/nationalist Greek partisan movement. They were against nationalism of any kind. They were for the struggle for working class needs against the war effort. They were for fraternisation with the “occupation” troops. Stinas particularly denounces the partisans' policy of carrying out killings of individual German or Italian soldiers, something which inevitably led to vicious “reprisals” in which whole villages were destroyed. Stinas regarded the partisans as partly responsible for these actions of the “occupiers”.

The activity of the group is all the more inspiring when you consider just how isolated revolutionary forces were on a world scale at this time. In the words of Stinas at the end of the book:

“Apart from the Bordigists and some anarchist groups and isolated individuals, we don't know of other revolutionary defeatists in the Second World War.”

Nor do we...

George Gordon,  
London,  
January 2004

The translated texts are:

**Preface by Michel Pablo.** An introduction from the famous Trotskyist leader who knew Stinas well in Greece in the days before Stinas discovered he wasn't really a Trotskyist. It's interesting because it honestly describes the difference between Stinas' communist position and that of Trotskyism:

“The ideological evolution of A. Stinas, clearly set out in his *Memoirs*, explains why during the war he adopted a downright hostile attitude to the formidable popular movement of the Resistance, in reality led by the Communist Party, considering it to be a reactionary nationalist movement in the service of imperialism. His uncompromising condemnation of Leon Trotsky's line concerning the ‘defence of the USSR’ and the line that the Fourth International adopted during the war, is also a consequence of that position.”

As you would expect, Pablo regrets the fact that this important period in class struggle history isn't being written up by a Trot!

Michel Pablo (1911-1996, real name: Michalis Raptis) was one of the founders of the Organisation of Internationalist Communists of Greece (OKDE) which was represented at the founding of the Fourth International in France in 1938. From 1943 to 1961 he was the European and then the International Secretary of the Fourth International.

**Forward.** This is by the person who translated the book into French, Olivier Houdart. It gives a brief history of Greece before and after the First World War and some additional details about Stinas' life.

**Stinas' dedication.** Stinas' poetic dedication from the front of the book.

**A Brief Autobiographical Note.** Here Stinas sets out a few details about his life which he thinks the reader ought to appreciate before plunging into the main story.

**By Way of a Preface.** Here Stinas modestly states that his *Memoirs* can't be a substitute for other historical works which still need to be written.

**Table of Contents** (from the French edition). This is just to give you an idea of what all the chapters are about.

**Chapter 2 (complete).** This chapter is concerned with revolutionary opposition to the First World War and then to the war with Turkey.

**Chapter 5 (slightly edited).** This is the part of the book concerned with the period September 1939 to October 1942, when Stinas and most of his comrades were in various prisons run first by the Greek authorities and then by the “occupation” authorities of Germany and Italy. Stinas never misses a chance to point out how the patriotic Greek cops and Greek partisan forces were every bit as brutally anti-working class as the Nazi and Fascist forces. In fact he makes a point of showing how the Italian conscript soldiers often tried to behave humanely towards political prisoners like him.



**Chapter 6 (the first third).** This is concerned with the activities of Stinas and some of his comrades after they escaped from prison in 1942 and formed a revolutionary group in Athens. I have also added a short section which is from near the end of Chapter 6, *Our withdrawal from the ICPG and our break from Trotskyism*, which explains a bit about the later political evolution of the group.

**The USSR and the Struggle for World Revolution.** This is a document produced by Stinas and his tendency in the prison camp of Akronafplia during debates with the more orthodox Trotskyist tendency of Pouliopolis. It appears as an appendix in the French edition. I didn't translate this myself, although I made some improvements – the original version can be found on the *Revolutionary History* website (see below).

## **Further reading**

The Vol 3, No 3, Spring 1991 edition of *Revolutionary History*, entitled “Trotskyism and Stalinism in Greece” has some articles which are relevant to the events described by Stinas. It can be found online at:

<http://www.revolutionary-history.co.uk/>

According to a review of *Memoires* by Alison Peat, “Stinas' opposition to nationalism in all its forms went beyond the ideological and entered the realm of the visceral”. Apparently, this is a problem for some people...

## **Greek Initials, organisations and publications which occur in the book**

**DKKE:** Internationalist Communist Party of Greece; publication: *Workers' Struggle*

**DSE:** Democratic (or Republican) Army of Greece

**EGSEE:** Unitary General Confederation of Greek Workers

**EAM:** National Liberation Front

**EDES:** Greek National Republican (or Democratic) League

**EDKE:** Internationalist Workers' Party of Greece

**ELAS:** Popular Army of National Liberation

**EOKDE :** Unified Organisation of Communist Internationalists of Greece

**EON:** National Organisation of Youth

**EPON :** Unified Panhellenic Organisation of Youth

**ETA:** Partisan Administration

**GSEE:** General Confederation of Greek Workers

**KDEE:** Internationalist Communist Union of Greece (Stinas' group); publication: *Workers' Front*

**KKE :** Communist Party of Greece; publications: *The Radical*; *The Worker* in Corfu; *Worker's Voice* in Thessaloniki

**KOMLEA;** Bolshevik-Leninist Communist Organisation of Greece, archeiomarxist; publication: *Class Struggle*

**KUTV** (Russian initials): Communist University of the Peoples of the East

**LAKKE:** Leninist Opposition of the Communist Party of Greece; publication: *Banner of Communism*

**MOPR** (Russian initials): Aid Organisation for Persecuted Revolutionaries, the "Red Aid"

**OKDE:** Organisation of Communist Internationalists of Greece

**OKNE:** Federation of Communist Youth of Greece

**OPLA:** Organisation for Protection of the People's Struggle

**PASOK:** Panhellenic Socialist Movement

**PEEA:** Political Committee of National Liberation

**SEKE:** Socialist Workers' Party of Greece; publication: *Workers' Struggle*



## **Preface**

By Michel Pablo

I knew A. Stinas when he was still a member of the Communist Party and I was a member of the organisation KEO (Unitary Communist Group). That was at the beginning of the 1930s.

In the *Memoirs* of A. Stinas – of which a large part constitutes a history of the political evolution of Greece during this century, and particularly its workers' movement – the history of the Trotskyist opposition in Greece is sketched out in some detail but very much from his own point of view. A. Stinas never considered himself to be really a Trotskyist, for reasons which, in my view, come from his long career in the ranks of the Greek CP leadership and also from personal reasons.

Stinas was a sort of “Red Monk”, not very sociable and preferring to walk the solitary path of the revolutionary who constantly comes up against the immaturity of a society little disposed to accelerate its rhythm. This frail man, who lived on coffee and toast and kept his material needs to a minimum, from necessity but also by temperament, lived a revolutionary faith and an uncommon courage in the face of “class enemies”.

Uncomfortable in all the organisations which he has associated with and sometimes created, he has in reality been withdrawn into reflection since the end of the Second World War, keeping his distance from the action which he excelled in during a long period of his life.

Much younger than him, it was I who encouraged him to join the ranks of the Trotskyist organisation. First of all he was associated with the KEO, that I had formed with an important fraction or worker cadres from the archeiomarxists<sup>5</sup> in 1930. Afterwards, we formed the LAKKE together, which he talks about in his *Memoirs*. The KEO united the most important archeiomarxist worker cadres of that organisation – such as Mitsos Soulas, Sakkos, Sklavounos and others - and the most brilliant and militant students who dominated the student movement in the University of Athens at that time. We left that organisation, seeing that its ideology, its internal regime and its way of acting towards the Greek Communist Party did not fit with the idea that we had, at that time, of the Left Opposition led by Leon Trotsky.

If A. Stinas quite rightly emphasises the exemplary militancy of the LAKKE that we formed together after the KEO, I have to say that the latter amply deserves the same appreciation. And I hope that some worker militants still surviving from this era and this organisation, such as Mitsos Soulas, will soon publish the memoirs which they have written on this subject.

And while A. Stinas returns to the Trotskyist movement by way of the KEO, he remains above all linked to me. This lasted perhaps three years, during which we became, in action, comrades and friends. I thus had the occasion of observing him from close up, of frequenting his house and

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<sup>5</sup> **Translator's Note** - The archeiomarxists were a fraction expelled from the Communist Party in 1924. They were named after their journal *Archives of Marxism* which originally set out to make the “classics of marxism” available in Greek.

knowing his companion as well. During the whole of that period our partnership seemed to have an exemplary solidity, but for grave personal reasons and also for political ones we were imperceptibly separated. I don't want to insist on the personal reasons nor to judge them. A. Stinas is no longer with us. On the other hand, independently of any judgement on him and his politics, I'd now rather see in him one the many faces of the man of revolution, who is distinguished above all by his faith, his monastic frugality, his courage in the face of the Praetorians of the bourgeois order and the fanatical devotees of Stalinism.

As for the political reasons which have played a certain role in our separation, it is necessary above all to look for them in his instinctive and tenacious aversion towards the person of Pantelis Pouliopoulos. For my part, on the contrary, I was irresistibly drawn to that man, whose very high political level and incomparable human qualities I had begun to appreciate. Pantelis Pouliopoulos remains for me one of the most cultivated, fine and heroic figures that I have had the chance to know in the course of the revolutionary saga of my long life. An old General Secretary of the Greek Communist Party, he was one of the first people in the world to take a position in favour of the ideas of Leon Trotsky and the Left opposition in the USSR. Helped by his great marxist culture and having stayed in Moscow during the Fifth Congress of the Communist International as a representative of the Greek Communist Party, he had been able to familiarise himself with the divergences which existed within the Bolshevik Party and the Third International, and declared himself at the time favourable to the ideas of the Left opposition.

He represents the other branch of Greek Trotskyism, coming directly from the Greek Communist Party in the years 1927-1928, known under the name Spartacus Opposition, from the title of the review that that opposition then began to publish. It is in that review that the principal texts of the Left opposition and Leon Trotsky could be found at that time, along with the best analyses of Greek political life and the line of the Greek Communist Party, already passed over to "Stalinism".

It was therefore very natural that from the moment when I had a better idea of the realities concerning Greek Trotskyism, I began to move away from archeiomarxism and from those who had left it, so as to move closer to the group formed around Pantelis Pouliopoulos. The Trotskyist organisations coming from archeiomarxism mentioned in the *Memoirs* distinguished themselves by the importance of their worker base relative to that which followed P. Pouliopoulos, but the political quality of the latter and the few worker cadres grouped around him seems to me markedly superior.

Separating from A. Stinas, I formed, with P. Pouliopoulos in 1934, the Organisation of Internationalist Communists of Greece (OKDE), which I represented at the founding congress of the Fourth International in Paris, in September 1938.

On the evolution of the relationship between Stinas and Pouliopoulos, both arrested by the Metaxas dictatorship and then detained in the same prisons, I have nothing important to say since I have been in France since 1938. But I want to cite the heroic attitude of P. Pouliopoulos during his long imprisonment and up to his execution by the Italians in June 1943, with two other cadres of our organisation, the worker Xypolytos and the teacher Yannakos. All the testimonies agree, including those of Stalinist militants.

A central figure among the numerous Greek Trotskyist political prisoners, P. Pouliopoulos was chosen to pay with his life for the first important action of the Greek Resistance, the destruction by partisans of the Gorgopotamos bridge. Addressing himself in Italian to the squad of soldiers given the job of executing him, he exhorted them not to commit such a crime against the anti-fascist resisters and their adversaries in the war. When the soldiers refused to be executioners, it was the Carabinieri who were given the task. The ideological evolution of A. Stinas, clearly set out in his *Memoirs*, explains why during the war he adopted a downright hostile attitude to the formidable popular movement of the Resistance, in reality led by the Communist Party, considering it to be a reactionary nationalist movement in the service of imperialism. His uncompromising condemnation of Leon Trotsky's line concerning the "defence of the USSR" and the line that the Fourth International adopted during the war, is also a consequence of that position.

To refute his arguments on these questions would involve a return to a discussion that we have had with a number of people and currents which came out of the Trotskyist movement. But this preface is not the place to do that. I will however insist on a few points, intended for a public little informed about the realities of Greece in that time.

The Greek resistance involved up to 90% of the population of that little country, occupied at the same time by the Germans and the Italians. It was a question of the biggest popular movement that that country had ever known, the bearer of a truly revolutionary dynamic. For sure, with that sort of percentage, it wasn't only workers. In the mountains it was dominated by elements specifically of the poor peasantry of that time and by petty bourgeois intellectuals, mostly members of the Greek Communist Party. In the towns there was a majority of workers and other sectors from the proletarianised or poor petty bourgeoisie of that time.

With a non-Stalinist leadership, such a movement, effectively national, could easily take power by "revolution". By all the evidence – all the evidence known to me – the adequate transitional slogan had to be "All Power to the EAM and the ELAS". The Greek Trotskyists had to orient their line to this real possibility, even if it was difficult for them, if not impossible in some places, to individually participate in these movements. Because it is true that once recognised by the Praetorians of the Stalinist leadership they would be risking their lives.

The argument that it was simply a question of a nationalist movement in the service of imperialism is refuted by two major facts. In December 1944, this movement was attacked jointly by the arms of British imperialism and Greek reaction, which considered the physical destruction of the Resistance to be the precondition for the restoration of bourgeois order in Greece.

Despite the serious defeat of December 1944, the result of betrayal by the Stalinist leadership, this movement was reborn two years later with an unbelievable force and took the form of a veritable civil war which turned the country upside down. The Stalinist leadership then betrayed for the second time a movement which to a large extent appeared spontaneously, and which had had to channel itself towards other forms of struggle. It was a question of a major class conflict that you can't just shrug off by qualifying it as a "Stalinist" movement. This amounts to an abandonment of marxism in favour of simplification, whose motives, even if unconscious, are subjective.

That said, I hope that the publication of the *Memoirs* of Stinas in French, thanks to the work of Olivier Houdart, will mark the beginning of the realisation of a project much more ambitious: to

make better known, by other works and translations, the true history of Greek Trotskyism. It was intimately mixed with the more general history of the class struggle in Greece, which offers a richness and a dramatic texture capable of inevitably arousing, in some of its features, the memory of an ancient tragedy.

20/10/89

Michel Pablo



## **Forward**

Agis Stinas came from the generation of the early communist leaders who went over to the opposition when it seemed to them that the Communist International had turned its back on the world revolution. He was born with the twentieth century, in Spartilla, a village on the Isle of Corfu, in a well-off family (his father was a dealer in olive oil). His real name was Spyros Priftis.

His memoirs, written in 1976, in the evening of a life of struggle, essentially cover the events of the years 1912-1950 in a Greece marked by war: from the Balkan wars, which announced the war of 1914-18, to the civil war, a Greek prolongation of the 1939-45 war.

Stinas lived these events as a spectator and then quickly as an actor, an actor who tried with his friends to change their course. It is that which gives flesh and depth to his story. Placing itself in a non-orthodox perspective, it puts paid to some golden myths, in particular that of the Second World War with its “democratic crusade” and its “Red Partisans”.

The working class of Piraeus and Thessaloniki is the central character here, tobacco workers, dockers, rail workers and sailors; with its militants, from the most obscure, like the socialist humanists of Corfu at the beginning of the century, to the best known, like Siantos, chief of the Communist Resistance or Zachariadis, leader of the Greek CP during the civil war; from the most charming, like the anarchist Speras or the blind “archeiomarxist” Verouchis, both assassinated by the Stalinists, or the Trotskyist leader Pouliopoulos, shot in 1943, to the most sinister, like Ioannidis, the Greek Beria.

But this account is also the story of a professional militant which this epoch gave rise to, who espoused the revolution at the age of 18 and remained faithful to it until the end, testifying by his life itself to the depth of the hopes raised by October 1917 and the Berlin Commune.

Running through this book is an “invigorating spirit”, to take up the terms used by the author, of revolt against the established order, against blind obedience, oppression and nationalism. A revolt which never targets individuals but systems, neither internalised nor deflected, but completely turned towards the subversion of society. More precisely towards the application of this principle: the role of revolutionaries is not to absorb social struggles but to help them go right to the limit of their emancipatory possibilities.

After his break from Trotskyism in 1947, Stinas became the principal representative in Greece of the “Socialisme ou barbarie” current. At the end of his life he moved closer to the anarchists<sup>6</sup>. The last time I met him, in April 1987, in his little ground floor flat in Pangrati, he was delighted that a demonstration was being held in protest against the anti-Turkish campaign and the bellicose bragging of the Papandreou government.

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<sup>6</sup> **Translator's Note** - This is perhaps misleading. According to Yannis Tamtakos, long-term friend of Stinas and member of his tendency during the war, Stinas always called himself a marxist. He “moved closer to the anarchists” in the sense that he became a popular figure with many young anachos who knew that he hated Stalinism and Greek nationalism but, often, didn't really understand what his politics were about.

He died in 1987 following a cataract operation whose risks he had accepted. His obituary in one of the main Athens dailies, *Eleftherotypia*, appeared under the title "Stinas the inflexible". The press also reported this anecdote: contacted by a minister of Papandreou who offered him a pension (Stinas, at the end of a life spent in prison, in camps, in clandestinity or in exile, had neither resources nor a retirement pension), he declined his offer and replied to him, after having thanked him for his concern: "Revolt is a duty, not a profession".

The press also reported that there were numerous young people at his burial: the ultimate revenge on his old comrades from the CP leadership who had all chosen to adapt themselves to Stalinism and to make a career there. What is now the political or human heritage of a Zachariadis, the Stalinist chief who succeeded to power and glory at the end of the war, and was then reviled and dragged through the mud by his own party, dying miserably in exile in the USSR?

\* \* \*

A. Stinas did not limit his political horizon only to Greece, he always considered himself as a militant of an international cause. You can't reduce him to the dimension of "Greek revolutionary". But it is a Greek public which he addresses himself to, with which he shares historical references little known in France.

In 1820, the region which stretched from the Balkans to the Middle East formed a vast political entity under the authority of the "Sublime Porte". But the centuries-old Turkish empire was on its last legs, undermined by revolts and attempts at secession by local potentates.

A political void appeared in the East, from which emerged over a century, thanks above all to the intrigues and wars launched by the big European powers or on their behalf, fifteen or so states and protectorates, of which the first was Greece.

The little political entities, not economically viable, cutting into the flesh of peoples, guaranteed dependence and instability.

When Germany and Italy unified themselves and removed their internal borders, the borders only multiplied in this part of the world, while the apparatuses of rival states created two zones of tension. One was in the Balkans, which the First World War was to start out from. The other was in the Middle East, opening a cycle of wars, terrorism, pogroms and population displacements which we still haven't seen the end of. After a relative stabilisation at the end of the Second World War, the Balkans experienced a revival of nationalist tensions which seemed to be straight out of the nineteenth century.

Not the least of the paradoxes is that the Turkish empire, vestige of the Middle Ages, symbol of immobilisation and of Oriental Despotism, had succeeded to do on a large scale what apparently no Balkan state, the majority of which had socialist pretensions, had managed to do even on a small scale. This was to make people who were destined to become "hereditary" enemies live in harmony. There were however some men, such as the Greek Righas Feraios, from the end of the eighteenth century who defended the idea of a state encompassing all the European possessions of the empire on the basis of equality of all the peoples including the Turks. This idea did not

take shape, but it didn't cease to reappear, even if fleetingly, like during the Young Turk revolution in 1908, which proclaimed in the central square of Thessaloniki in fourteen languages the political equality of all the nations of the empire, to the enthusiasm of the population.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the creation of a "pure" Greek state made no sense because over the centuries the Greeks had spread out around the perimeter of the Eastern Mediterranean. They were present everywhere but were only a majority in old Greece, that is to say barely more than the Peloponnese.

With the Jews and the Armenians they formed the merchant wing of the Turkish empire, the bulk of its bourgeoisie and its intellectuals, and it is notably through the channel of the Greek merchants that liberal and republican ideas began to spread. They were in a position to play a role of revolutionary ferment against absolutism and as federator of the Balkan peoples. Yet this bourgeoisie only played a secondary role in the Greek national insurrection which was proclaimed in the Peloponnese in 1821 by the Archbishop of Patras.

The insurrection, carried out by the notables and the clan chiefs, wanted to be specifically Greek and Christian Orthodox, which limited its scope from the outset, and the imbalance between its forces and those of the Turks made it seek out the support of the great powers and put its fate in their hands. Despite some initial military successes it would have been defeated like all the previous insurrections without a joint Franco-Anglo-Russian military intervention which forced the empire to accept first autonomy and then independence for Greece.

Thus a mini-state came into being, peopled by a few hundred thousand inhabitants, without a city worthy of the name (Athens was only a small town), without roads, in one of the poorest and most backward regions of Europe, ravaged by almost ten years of war, and above all cut off from large numbers of Greeks, who found themselves in Constantinople (Istanbul), in Odessa or in Smyrna (Izmir).

The "Revolution" had given birth to a mouse and accepted without any resistance the installation of a Bavarian monarch (Otto, the son of Louis I of Bavaria).

The monarchy built up the concept of the "Great Idea" which aimed at the reconstitution of the old Byzantine Empire, Greek and Orthodox, around Constantinople, and on the ruins of the Ottoman Empire, an idea which above all would appeal to Russia. The Great Idea became the official doctrine of the Hellenic state, and allowed it to avoid all its internal problems.

When Otto sought to ally himself more closely with Russia, the British, ready to prevent any modification to the balance of forces in Europe and any progress of Russia towards the south at the expense of the Turkish empire, deposed him and installed a Danish monarch in his place in 1863. From that date Greece definitively entered the British sphere of influence.

On this occasion the British gave him the Ionian Islands and Corfu which were dependant on them. Later they forced the Turks to give him Thessaly.

But it is during the Balkan wars (1912-1913) that Greek achieved its present size. In 1912, a coalition of Serbs, Bulgarians and Greeks chased the Turks out of almost all their European poss-

essions. The following year the winners fought amongst themselves over the division of the spoils. Greece got out while the going was good and got hold of Aegean Macedonia, with a majority of Muslims, and Thessaloniki.

Thessaloniki, the natural capital of the Balkans, rebellious against the central power, a mostly Jewish town, became “Greek” and was stripped of its hinterland.

After this Serbia and above all Bulgaria ceaselessly demanded “their” part of Macedonia, and the Macedonian question, with the terrorism of the Bulgarian komitadjis, was made into a permanently open wound.

Put in power in 1917 by the French army, Venizelos thought that only the support of the Great Powers would allow him to realise the Great Idea. He enrolled his country in the war on the side of the Entente powers and the Treaty of Sèvres rewarded him, at the expense of Bulgaria and Turkey, who had made a bad choice of camps. With eastern Thrace, Greece was at the gates of Constantinople, and with Izmir and its region it had a foothold in Asia Minor.

Venizelos then sent troops to the Ukraine against the Soviet revolution and, above all, he sent them to Turkey to bring the nationalist movement of Mustafa Kemal to heel and to be better placed for the carving up of the empire that everyone thought was imminent.

But nobody foresaw the strength of the wave of Turkish nationalism, and that what was supposed to be a simple policing operation against Ankara, Kemal’s capital, in 1921, would be transformed into a crushing defeat. Greece was abandoned by its French and British protectors, who reconciled themselves with Kemal on its back, its army was torn to pieces, and the Greek population of Asia Minor was threatened with massacre, having to leave as quickly as possible a land which it had lived on since time immemorial. In its turn the whole Muslim population of Greek Macedonia was expelled to Turkey.

The Asia Minor littoral and Constantinople were thus “islamicised” by default, and Macedonia was “christianised” by the massive settlement of Greek refugees.

This trauma has remained in memory as “The Catastrophe”. It sounded the death knell of the Great Idea and put an end to the territorial expansion of Greece, which reverted to its frontiers of 1913.

Greece, already incapable of feeding its five million inhabitants, had to receive an extra million in a few weeks, the majority of whom had lost everything. Impoverished neighbourhoods and shanty towns were created on the edges of big towns. It is thus that Athens and Piraeus, linked together by these neighbourhoods, in the evocative names of New Smyrna or New Ionia, came to form a single agglomeration.

Inter-war Greece presented all the aspects of under-development. You could list them forever: malnutrition (the tourist guides of the time spoke of “frugality”) ; malaria in the inshore undrained areas (the country held the European record for consumption of quinine per inhabitant) ; child labour (the Ministry of Labour officially listed the active population starting from ten years old) ; emigration (above all to the English-speaking countries, since the wars had prevented

emigration to the previously more hospitable shores of the eastern Mediterranean) ; illiteracy (particularly amongst women) ; the split between the “purist” Greek used by the authorities and the press and the “vulgar” Greek used by the ordinary mortals made access to culture and information even more difficult.

Some villages and whole islands only lived on the money sent by expatriates. The country had to import most of the wheat which it consumed – the Second World War immediately reduced the population of the towns to famine by cutting the trade routes.

The indigenous bourgeoisie, particularly the ship owners, did not invest their profits in Greece. Modern equipment in the ports or the railways was the work of foreign capital, and more suited to their needs than those of the country – the first railway constructed in Greece was built by the French company which ran the mines at Laurion, to transport ore to the port which it was exported from. The road network was only really developed along the coast and the mountainous majority of the country remained landlocked and isolated.

In fact the only sector touched by modernity was the army and the navy, the first formed by France, the second by Britain. The army regulated political life. There were countless coups aimed at “modernising”, “Europeanising” or “stabilising” Greece. A task which always had to start again. Each party had its fraction in the army and the navy, but the malicious gossip was that each party was only an outgrowth of a fraction of the army.

But there had existed for a short while another modern formation, modern in its objectives, its mode of organisation and its base in the workers. This was the young communist movement – the Communist Party and the archeiomarxist party – young in all senses of the word, at a time when you could lead the Communist Party at the age of twenty five!

Paris, August 1989  
Olivier Houdart

\* \* \*

The book was published in two volumes in Athens in February and December 1977, under the title *Memoirs – sixty years under the flag of socialist revolution* by Vergos editions.

It was reissued in facsimile in 1985, by Ypsilon editions, in one volume. The French edition differs slightly from the Greek edition in the following points: the repetition between the two volumes has been removed and texts have been moved to appendices. The “Debates of Achronafplia” and the “Reply” to P. Pouliopoulos have been placed at the end of the book whereas in the original they appear inside Chapter 5, so the appendices of the French edition do not appear in the Greek edition.

I am particularly grateful for the help of my friends Phedon Metalinos and Michel Volkovitch.

## **Stinas' Dedication**

To those who in the hellish nightmare  
of the second world imperialist war  
when the socialist ideal had sunk in an ocean of nationalist hate  
found the strength to struggle against the current,  
to boldly reveal the fraud of the antifascist war,  
that war of bandits  
the stuffed against the starving  
for the sharing out of the world,  
to fight without hesitation  
for the peoples to cease their fratricidal combat  
and turn against their exploiters  
and who, isolated, and only here, in Greece  
in terrible conditions  
when death struck at each step  
have continued the heroic tradition of Luxemburg  
and of Liebknecht, with the most profound emotion I dedicate these Memoirs

## A Brief Autobiographical Note<sup>7</sup>

Very young, from the age of fourteen or fifteen, I was influenced by socialist ideas and at eighteen I dedicated myself to the movement for the liberation of the working class.

I took my party card in May 1920, the day of my twentieth birthday. According to the statutes you had to have reached twenty to join, but for a long time I had fought actively for the principles of the October revolution and to purify the Corfu socialist group of its elements which were foreign to socialism.

I fought in the ranks of the Communist Party, and in more responsible positions, until the end of 1931. Then I passed over to Trotskyism. Like many others I had the illusion that it represented the revolutionary wing of the movement. Officially I was a member of the Fourth International until the middle of 1947. But in reality perhaps I never was. There was not much of a relation between what the groups I belonged to defended and what the Fourth International defended. This appeared clearly during the war, when the International crumbled to dust.

In March 1935, after intense ideological struggles, instead of the so called “Left Opposition” a political group was created which distinguished itself from other tendencies, groups, organisations and parties by its programmatic principles, its means and forms of struggle, its combativity and the devotion and moral courage of its members. I take complete responsibility for the theses and action of this group, particularly during the war and the Occupation. It has maintained itself and conserved its autonomy up to the present day. And, amongst the few old revolutionary groups, it remains the one (with the precious help of Castoriadis) which most pushes back that which, in the old theoretical arsenal of the movement, prevents the separation of the revolution from the Stalinist counter-revolution, and which puts into practice, without internal conflicts or splits, that which is generally called “the spirit of the French May ’68”.

Studies and articles of mine have been published in the following journals and periodicals: *Rizospastis*<sup>8</sup>, *Voice of the Worker*, *Jeunesse ouvrière*, *The Revolutionary Exile* (Isle of Anafi, 1926), *The Tobacco Worker*, *The Struggle Against Tuberculosis*, *Avanti*, *Banner of Communism*, *Permanent Revolution*, *Bolshevik*, *New Epoch*, *Workers' Front*, *Bulletin of Achronafplia*, *Workers' Fight*, *Internal Bulletin of the KDKE* (International Communist Party of Greece), *New Beginning*, *Pavement*, *Socialism or Barbarism*.

I've written some pamphlets: *Critique of the Resolutions of the Fourth Plenum of the CPG* (1932), *Chronical of the Group* (1950), “*Workers' Parties*”, “*Workers' States and the Movement for the Liberation of the Working Class*” (1965), and I wrote the prefaces for: *Socialists and*

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<sup>7</sup> Where there are references to titles of publications here in English it should be assumed that they were published in Greek. — *Translator's Note*

<sup>8</sup> *The Radical*, a daily created in 1916 whose editor belonged to the Greek CP from its foundation. It became the party's official organ and remains so to this day.

*War, Lenin, The Russian Revolution, Luxemburg, and Modern Capitalism and Revolution*<sup>9</sup> by Castoriadis<sup>10</sup>.

Until 1926, I signed with my real name: Spyros Priftis. Starting from 1926 I was under the pseudonym A. Stinas. Other pseudonyms: Agis, Diros, Korphiatis, Philippou.

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<sup>9</sup> This is its English title, as published by Solidarity in the UK in 1974. - *Translator's Note*

<sup>10</sup> Stinas has certainly written numerous other texts since, including a book about the Greek resistance called *EAM-ELAS-OPLA* and published in Athens in 1984. *Translator's Note* – according to Greek comrades, this details, amongst other things, the horrific atrocities committed by the anti-fascist forces against the working class.



## By Way of a Preface

Memoirs cannot replace history. The history of the workers' movement in Greece and the struggles of the working class up until today, still hasn't been written by anybody. Kordatos, in his *History of the Workers' Movement*, gives a good glimpse of Greece before the First World War. All those who are interested in the workers' movement must read his book. But it stops in 1918, the epoch of the founding of the Communist Party and of the General Confederation of Workers. The histories which the Greek CP produces from time to time, to celebrate itself and to exhibit its titles of ownership over the working class, made up of falsification and counterfeiting, are only fables and calumnies. The historians "of the left" preoccupy themselves with the trials of Karaïskakis or Androutsos<sup>11</sup> and the "failed" bourgeois-democratic revolution. To read them you would think that the workers' movement did not exist in Greece.

These *Memoirs* can't therefore fill the current void. I do believe however that they will serve the movement and those who struggle. The young workers and the students will come to know about events, situations and personalities which are unknown to them. And perhaps it will cause them to reflect, will incite them to compare yesterday with today, the socialism for which the masses have struggled with that promised by the two CPs<sup>12</sup>, PASOK<sup>13</sup> or Mavros<sup>14</sup>.

They cover the period going from the First World War until today. They are memories of the historic epoch of the movement, when the social terrain was overturned by the revolutionary assaults of the working class following the First world War.

Memories of the reflux and decline of that movement, a decline inevitably accompanied by the degeneration and decay of its "official representatives", the political and trade union organisations. Memories of the second imperialist carnage, of the Occupation and of the actions, under those conditions, of individuals, groups and parties.

Memories of the camps and prisons.

Memories, finally, of that brief period when everything in the movement was pure, real, limpid, clear and crystalline, then from that historic epoch when blood, tears, mud and poison seeped from every hour and every minute.

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<sup>11</sup> An allusion to some episodes of the Greek war of independence.

<sup>12</sup> A split took place in 1968 at the beginning of the dictatorship of the colonels, giving birth to a second Greek CP which took the name of "internal" CP, that is to say it was led from inside the country (the leadership of the Greek CP had been in exile in Eastern Europe since 1949).

<sup>13</sup> Panhellenic Socialist Movement, the party of Andreas Papandreou.

<sup>14</sup> A politician of the centre left.

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## **Chapter 2**

# **The Awakening of the Popular Masses**

***The first revolutionary impetus***

In March 1917, thirty two months after the declaration of war, the most prodigious revolution of our century broke out in Petrograd, and then spread like lightening across the immense country. Like all true great popular uprisings, no party, no individual, nobody had decided it, provoked it, proclaimed it or led it. Completely spontaneous, it was the fruit of the maturation of history and caught all the “chiefs”, of every political nuance, completely unawares. The Tsarist edifice crumbled to dust. The republican and socialist bourgeois parties formed a provisional government with the principal objective of convoking a constituent assembly. But it did not possess any real power. The real power could be found in the hands of the soviets, those councils elected by the workers, the soldiers, the sailors, the peasants, in the regiments, on the ships, in the factories, the mines, the ports, the neighbourhoods, the villages, true democratic organs of the revolutionary people. Their members, elected and revocable at any moment, had to be accountable to their electors, were responsible to them and depended on them directly.

This social organisation, which subjected representatives to the permanent control of their constituents, realised for the first time in contemporary history true democracy on the scale of the whole of society. Neither bosses, nor theoreticians, nor parties, nor any authority had imagined or foreseen it. It was the work of the masses, inspired by their class instinct.

In the country in revolution there were meetings, assemblies and councils every day. The masses enthusiastically debated every question. Their critical spirit, their intellectual and organisational capacities flabbergasted the “wise men”, politicians, “specialists” and “professional revolutionaries”.

On 7 November the Second All Russian Congress of the Soviets abolished the provisional government and seized power. The Bolsheviks formed the first Soviet government, then called the Council of People's Commissars, with Lenin and Trotsky at its head.

After a brief interval, a powerful revolutionary jolt responded in echo to the first proletarian revolution. The world war was transformed into a war of peoples against their governments. In Germany and in Austria-Hungary centuries old thrones collapsed like a house of cards. Everywhere, in Europe as in America, there were revolutionary uprisings, massive economic and political strikes, factory and land occupations. The masses occupied centre stage and turned the world upside down.

The white armies, organised, armed, financed and thrown against revolutionary Russia by the French and British imperialists, and the associates of Denikin, Yudenich, Kolchak, Wrangel and the others, were torn to pieces in the first battles with the insurgent people. The direct military intervention of the imperialists met the same fate. All these armies, no matter how well equipped, were defeated, not only by the heroic resistance of the Russian workers and peasants, but also thanks to the echo which revolutionary slogans found amongst their own soldiers. The mutiny of the French Black Sea fleet and the fraternisation of its crew with the workers of Odessa is well known.

As for the Greek soldiers, those sons of the people that Venizelos had sent to the Ukraine to be

killed for the interests of the Tsar and the Russian, French and British imperialists, they broke ranks during the first confrontation with the partisans of Grigoriev, who had called on them to fraternise beforehand, and they seized the first opportunity to hastily cover, in record time, the distance between Nikolayev and Rumania.

The soldiers who had taken part in this expedition told us about the arguments exchanged on this occasion and the appeals of the partisans before the attack:

“Why have you come here?”

Then the Greek officers responded:

“Our country has sent us”.

“To do what? To defend what? The interests of the Tsar, the capitalists and the Russian landlords? The interests of the British and French imperialists? Your duty is to make war against those who have sent you here. Join us!”

“Our duty is what is fixed by our country. And we speak the language of Leonidas<sup>1</sup>.”

“And we speak that of the oppressed and exploited of the whole world, that of the Greek soldiers, workers and peasants.”

The impetuous partisan attack dispersed the army. In the flight and the disorder, the officers removed their braid. They knew that officers would not so easily slip through the hands of the partisans. In contrast, the soldiers were welcomed with open arms. And these soldiers told us of all the enthusiasm and passion of that people in revolution.

Another episode, recounted by the soldiers of Görlitz<sup>2</sup>, made us quiver with emotion. There, soldiers and male and female workers fraternally mixed together took over the streets. Red flags flew everywhere. It was joyful. Spartacist soldiers, sailors and workers came to find them in their barracks, spoke to them of revolution, of socialism, of the fraternisation of peoples, of workers' power. Finally, they called on them to go against the orders of their officers and elect their own representatives.

Everything, at that time, gave the impression that the days of the old world were numbered. Labouring humanity lived the greatest moments of its history.

In March 1919 the Founding Congress of the Communist International was held in Moscow. It was the third international union of workers' political organisations. The decision for the foundation was taken during the war, at Zimmerwald and Kienthal. Few parties took part in this congress. Most of the congress participants represented minorities of parties or secessionist groups.

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<sup>1</sup> The Spartan king who was killed at Thermopyles resisting the Persians (480 BC). A patriotic and military symbol in Greece.

<sup>2</sup> At the start of the war, Constantine had ceded Kavala, in Macedonia, to the Central powers. The Greek garrison of the town had been interned in Görlitz.

But, in the revolutionary tempest which swept Europe, in the ferment, the general boiling over and under the pressure of their worker members, many among the old socialist parties adhered to the Communist International and were therefore represented at its Second Congress one year later.

***The founding congress of the Communist Party of Greece and the General Confederation of Workers***

The founding congress of the Confederation<sup>3</sup> took place on 21 October 1918, and that of the Communist Party (under the name Socialist Workers' Party<sup>4</sup>) on 4 November, in a time ruled by terror and martial law. Venizelos not only authorised them but granted them every possible facility. Obviously this was not out of an interest in the political and union organisation of the workers in the country, but because he hoped to use them for his own ends.

The promises made to the peoples by the three "Big Powers" during the Second World War had already been made by governments during the First. We knew the "14 Points" of Wilson: freedom, democracy, self-determination, protection of minorities, etc. But whereas at the end of the Second World War the masses waited passively for the realisation of these promises made so freely by their governments and parties, they rose up at the end of the First, occupying the whole political terrain and threatening to overturn the established order. Every day Moscow hurled its thunderbolts and provoked explosions and conflagrations. To save itself the established order had to make concessions to the masses, and promise them serious and substantial social reforms.

The socialist parties, which a large fraction of the masses in revolt still had faith in, made guarantees of the realisation of these reforms. Everywhere the capitalists themselves pushed them to the front of the stage. Their representatives had strength and authority at the "peace" conferences. All this explains why Venizelos had authorised and facilitated the foundation of the Communist Party and the Confederation. He thought that he could assure the sympathy and support of the big European socialist parties for his territorial demands on Macedonia and other regions by presenting them through the mediation of the party and under the cover of a "socialist line of argument". He had already obtained an initial relative success with the mission of Sideris, Curiel and P. Dimitratos at the allied socialist conference of February 1918<sup>5</sup>.

No serious debate preceded the founding congresses of the two organisations. The only obstacles which had to be surmounted were the personal differences between leaders. This was a task tailor-made for Benaroya.

Around two hundred delegates took part in the foundation of the GSEE, representing between seventy and eighty thousand workers. Without any serious objection the congress recognised the principle of class struggle, that is to say, the idea that the workers formed a class distinct from that of the capitalists, and opposed to it, and that they would defend their interests in fighting

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<sup>3</sup> General Confederation of Greek Workers (GSEE).

<sup>4</sup> Socialist Workers' Party of Greece (SEKE).

<sup>5</sup> An anti-bolshevik conference held in London by the socialist parties favourable to the Entente. The three Greek delegates, led by Venizelos, had agreed to defend the territorial demands of Greece.

them and not in collaborating with them. The principle that the unions must guard themselves against any bourgeois influence was also accepted by the great majority. This idea implied that the workers had to create their own political party. The recognition of these principles went without saying. It also went without saying what the colour of the flag would be. The first articles of the statutes affirmed that the flag of the union was the red flag of the international working class and that the international red First of May was its official festival.

A little anarcho-syndicalist group around Speras, Koukhtoglou and Fanourakis strongly opposed themselves to the principle according to which it was necessary “to guard against all bourgeois influence”. They insisted that the union movement must preserve itself not only from bourgeois influence but more generally from all political influence, implying the Socialist and Communist parties as well.

The first Executive Committee of the Confederation comprised eleven members. Amongst them, three, G. Papanikolaou, E. Evangelou and A. Benaroya, belonged to the CPG; two, A. Hatzimikhali and I. Delazanos, were attached to the Socialist Centre of N. Yannios<sup>6</sup>, and the others, including E. Machairas, who was elected secretary, to the liberal movement.

Inevitably the Executive Committee very quickly split into two tendencies, which each convened their own Second Congress: the majority, around Machairas, in Piraeus, the three from the CPG, in Athens. The great majority of unions took part in the Athens Congress, recognised as the only legitimate one. Very quickly the organisation maintained around Machairas, the agent of the Venizelists, dissolved.

The Second Congress took place in Athens in September 1920. Only two tendencies confronted each other: the great majority, members and partisans of the CPG, and the little anarcho-syndicalist group of Speras. This Congress recognised the Communist Party as the sole political representative of the working class, and decided on reciprocal representation, that is to say that one representative of each organisation would participate in instances of the other at all levels, central and local. That is, participation of one representative of the Central Committee of the Party in meetings of the Executive Committee of the Confederation, and the other way round, and the same operation in the provinces, this time at the level of the union offices and the regional organisations of the Party.

This created many problems for Evangelou, Secretary of the GSEE for many years. He was seen as very malicious for turning against the ministers and the bosses. While *Rizospastis* remained the organ of just the CPG, its attacks against the ministers did not prevent him from discussing with them. From then on, with the newspaper being also that of the GSEE, it would be difficult for him to pretend that the Confederation had nothing to do with its content. One day, Spyridis, Minister for the National Economy, agreed to the demands which he had put to him. But the next day *Rizospastis* caricatured Spyridis on the front page and violently attacked him. Furious, the Minister asked Evangelou: “What does this say, is this your way of thanking me?” But, Evangelou succeeded in convincing him that the Confederation had no responsibility for... that page of the newspaper.

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<sup>6</sup> Yannios and his Socialist Centre were situated on the right of the socialist movement.

Speras expressed himself in a vehement and opinionated way against reciprocal representation, defending the autonomy of the union movement and insisting on the risks that this real domination exercised by the CPG imposed on the working class. I witnessed this Congress, and the passion with which Speras defended his opinions, his astonishing eloquence and his convincing arguments impressed me more than anything else.

I met him again in prison in 1938, in the transfer section of Piraeus. He was there for a breach of common law. We spoke with emotion of the heroic epoch of the movement. He mentioned his past and spoke, full of enthusiasm and passion, of the action of the anarchists in Spain.

His name can be found on a list of worker cadres murdered by the OPLA<sup>7</sup>. They killed him because he had had differences with the CPG twenty five years before.

The organisations and socialist youth of Athens, Piraeus, Thessaloniki, Volos, the organisations of Corfu and Halkis and the journals *Workers' Struggle* and *Avanti* took part in the founding congress of the Communist Party. Yannios represented his group there, but he was in disagreement from the start and withdrew.

Three principal tendencies defined themselves clearly enough: the right (A. Sideris, P. Dimitratos), the centre (N. Dimitratos, A. Benaroya and the delegation from Thessaloniki) and the left (D. Ligdopoulos, F. Tzoulatti, M. Ikonou, S. Komiotis).

The Congress recognised and proclaimed the general principles of socialism and sent a message of support to the Russian Revolution, but on the decisive questions of the moment, those on which revolutionaries and reformists across the whole world opposed each other, it was the points of view of the right and the centre which won and were voted for. Thus they recognised “national defence”, the “League of Nations” and “popular democracy”.

N. Dimitratos, D. Ligdopoulos, M. Sideris, Arvanitis and Kokkinos were elected to the first Central Committee. The CC put Ligdopoulos in charge of *Workers' Struggle*, the official press organ of the party.

The Second Congress was convened in April 1920. Its most significant decision was to join the Communist International, including certainly the unreserved acceptance of its principles and the resolutions of its Congresses.

Georgiadis wrote the reports there. The word “communist” was added between brackets to the initial title “Workers' Socialist Party”.

N. and P. Dimitratos, Y. Kordatos, G. Doumas and M. Sideris were elected to the new CC.

These very serious decisions would be quickly forgotten by the same people who had presented and voted on them.

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<sup>7</sup> Initials of “Organisation for Protection of the People's Struggle” (“opla” means “arms” in Greek). This was the political police created by the CP during the Occupation. OPLA hunted down and murdered opponents of the party line.



Of all the work and debates of the Congress, only the declaration of Spyros Rallis, representing the Corfu organisation, remained in the memos for a long time. The order of the day was the tactics of the party. Specifically the immediate action to be taken. A pamphlet by Lossovsky on immediate action and organisation by enterprise had been distributed. The president invited the Corfu representative to give his opinion and to vote. And Rallis, who had had a bit to drink, got up and declared, pronouncing every word: "In conformity with the mandate received by the Corfu section, I vote for immediate action and civil war". Speaking immediately, Sideris (also from Corfu) asked him: "Tell me, comrade Rallis, since when have you become so thirsty for blood in Corfu ? There hasn't been a murder there for a century."

### ***The war in Asia Minor, the Kemalist movement and the position of the CPG***

The last great deed of the "glorious" epoch of Venizelism was the transportation of the army, and the war, to Asia Minor. The Greek troops set out for Izmir in May 1919. So began the most tragic adventure of the country and its people, and the most costly.

In the beginning the war was limited to clashes with irregular formations of partisans. But Kemal, from the far end of Anatolia, denounced the capitulation of the sultan, galvanised and enthused the Turkish people and called for resistance against the invaders by every means. Very quickly groups of partisans formed themselves into a powerful well-equipped regular army. The ineluctable character of the defeat and collapse of the Greek army took on the appearance of a physical law.

On the Greek side, according to the criteria habitually and generally admitted, this war was reactionary, the invasion of a foreign territory, an invasion whose main reason was to safeguard British interests in the oil fields of the Middle East. The Greek army gave its blood, playing the servile and degrading role of gendarme of the colonial interests of British imperialism.

The Russian government and the Communist International had characterised the war led by Kemal as a war of national liberation and had "in consequence" judged it as progressive, and for that reason supported it politically and diplomatically and sent him advisors, arms and money. If we consider that Kemal was fighting a foreign invasion to liberate the Turkish soil, his struggle had a character of national liberation. But was there anything progressive about it? We believed this and supported it then. But how can we defend the same thesis today? For something to be progressive in our era and to be considered as progressive it must contribute to the raising of the class consciousness of the worker masses, to developing their capacity to struggle for their own emancipation. What has the creation of the modern Turkish state contributed to this? Kemal didn't just aim to expel the foreign invaders from Turkish territory, but also to create a purely Turkish state by the liquidation of national minorities, millions of Greeks, Armenians, Kurds, Cherkess etc. He achieved this objective after his victory, threw the Turkish Communists into the jails where he hanged them, and then finally turned his back on Russia, establishing cordial relations with the imperialists and giving himself the job of protecting their interests. The correct policy, in line with the interests of the proletarian revolution, would have been to call on the Greek and Turkish soldiers to fraternise, and the popular masses to struggle together, without letting themselves be stopped by national, racial and religious differences, for the republic of workers'

and peasants' councils in Asia Minor. Independently of the policy of Russia and the objectives of Kemal, the duty of Greek Communists was definitely one of intransigent struggle against the war.

The Kemalist movement was a real headache for the theoreticians of the Communist International. It didn't fit into any of the historical categories determined by Marxist theory. To speak only of national liberation meant nothing. Because this is not a social definition. What is the class nature, the social content of the movement? Is it a bourgeois-democratic revolution? But all the businesses in Turkey were Greek, Armenian and Jewish. That was the bourgeoisie. And this bourgeoisie, Kemal dealt with by fire and iron. After his victory, it wasn't possible for a single vestige of them to remain on the whole of the Turkish territory. In addition, the big companies, the banks, railway companies etc. were French and German, and Turkish only in name. That is to say, a Turkish bourgeoisie did not exist. So, how to define the movement? "A historical anomaly"? "A bad turn of the dialectic"? (It is Trotsky who introduced these curious definitions into Marxist literature). In the end, as the movement was decidedly resistant to any classification, it entered into the archives under the label "Kemalist movement".

### *Venizelos falls, the monarchists regain power, but the war carries on*

When Venizelos returned to Athens, the Treaty of Sèvres<sup>8</sup> in his pocket and crowned with the glory of a martyr after his attempted assassination in Lyon<sup>9</sup>, he was praised to the skies. Meeting in the Athens stadium, the mayors and presidents of the localities proclaimed that he had earned the recognition of his countrymen. How could there be any doubt that he would gather under his name the great majority of the people at the elections? Despite the advice of some of his friends, he called the elections for 1 November 1920. The United Opposition<sup>10</sup> came away from the voting with absolute power.

The explanation for the crushing defeat of the "creator of Greater Greece" is not difficult to find. The popular masses had, by voting against Venizelos himself and his party, rejected the war and the terror. In France and Britain the Prime Ministers Clemenceau and Lloyd George, victorious in the war, had met the same unfortunate fate.

At this time I found myself in Thessaloniki. As the results were announced, massive demonstrations formed spontaneously, there was huge participation by soldiers and the peasants from the surrounding villages came into town, holding candles and shouting "*Christ is risen*". The *gyparaioi*, the Cretan gendarmes, all the truncheon wielders... were nowhere to be seen.

A certain number of party members allowed themselves to be carried away by the current and participated in these solemn processions. We convened a whole series of meetings to deal with this problem and many members were expelled. With similar demonstrations of joy and enthusiasm across the whole country the popular masses greeted the defeat of Venizelos and the victory of the United Opposition.

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<sup>8</sup> A treaty signed in August 1920 between the victorious powers and the Turkish empire, which consecrated its dismemberment; it's notable that Greece received the region of Smyrna (Izmir).

<sup>9</sup> In fact at Lyon station in Paris; an attentat carried out by some monarchist officers.

<sup>10</sup> The monarchists.

In December the same year a plebiscite returned Constantine to the throne.

The CPG stood election candidates in the main regions of the country. The local organisations proposed the candidates, who were finally designated by an extraordinary electoral congress. The electoral programme was elaborated at this same congress (September 1920). Massive rallies and meetings in Athens, Piraeus and Thessaloniki testified to the vitality and success of the campaign. The slogan “hammer and sickle” resounded in the working class neighbourhoods and the trade union centres. The presence of the party was very visible. It got a hundred thousand votes, a significant figure, if we take into account the fact that the population was then less numerous and that women did not have the right to vote. And without any doubt these voters were workers. But the same workers voted simultaneously for the United Opposition, believing that a vote only for the Communists would be taken as a demonstration of support for Venizelos. The electoral system allowed for this double vote (a system of balls: there was one ballot box per candidate, and you voted by putting a black ball or a white ball in each one of them).

During the plebiscite for the return of Constantine, the party called on the people to abstain. But, in Thessaloniki, we called on the workers to vote against, and in favour of the republic. This brought us immediately into conflict with the monarchists.

The popular joy didn't last long. The United Opposition had denounced Venizelos over the years, and the war and the terror with him. They had publicly, formally, categorically promised that they would bring it to an end and that the people would finally enjoy freedom and peace.

It became apparent very quickly that all these promises of peace and freedom were nothing other than the usual pre-electoral trickery. In its turn the new government used violence and terrorism against its opponents. Para-state organisations appeared everywhere. The government imposed new taxes and seized half the value of the currency in circulation by a forced loan. The hundred drachma bill became worth no more than fifty. And, most importantly for the people, the war in Asia Minor continued with a redoubled intensity. In March, the classes were called under the flags again. The Sakarya<sup>11</sup> campaign, led by Constantine and designed to raise his prestige, cost rivers of blood and ended in a pitiful defeat.

### ***The masses reply with strikes and combative demonstrations***

The illusions began to crumble, and with them the fanaticism born from the opposition between royalists and Venizelists, which had confused everything and so held back the class struggle, faded. The masses began to recognise their flag and to gather around it. The surprise, the bitterness born from the deceit and betrayal of the United Opposition turned to anger, to a resolve to struggle.

The year 1921 is rich in struggles which clearly display their class character. On 10 February the sailors went on strike. The ships moored in the ports only left when the demands of the strikers had been satisfied. At that time the sailors formed one of the most combative and best organised

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<sup>11</sup> An Anatolian river to the west of Ankara. The objective was to take Kemal's capital, Ankara.

battalions of the working class. The headquarters of their federation could be found in Piraeus, in a building visible from a long distance by the crews of the ships entering the port. It was agreed that a flag should be raised there in the event of a call to strike. Many sailors abandoned their ships and threw themselves into the sea before even dropping the anchor, just on seeing it. And for the whole duration of the strike, they remained in the area ready to intervene if the ship owners tried to use scabs.

At this time Angelis was the secretary of the sailors' federation almost permanently; he didn't understand a lot about politics but he was faithful and devoted to the party.

On 15 February there was a general strike in Volos, combative demonstrations and violent confrontations with the police lasting two days. The exasperated demonstrators wrecked numerous factories and shops. Finally "order" was re-established and some people were arrested. Thus A. Benaroya, K Theos, Th. Apostolidis, Y. Papanikolaou and many others from amongst the thousands of fighting workers were arrested, imprisoned and brought before the courts for rebellion.

The same month the railway workers went on strike across the whole country. The government replied by a massive number of arrest warrants, conscripting the strikers and sending them to the front. Their ardour and determination was only reinforced by this. Despite the pleas of the government, which asked for a train to be put in service to transport the Patriarch of Antioch from Kalamata to Athens to bless the marriage of the crown prince, the strikers refused. The strike ended with a certain degree of success.

On 18 April (the First of May according to the new calendar, but Easter according to the old one which was still in force then<sup>12</sup>) in Thessaloniki, the workers celebrated their international day with gatherings and demonstrations in various neighbourhoods, despite the police ban. The same day, a convoy of soldiers heading for the front mutinied, refusing to board and joining the workers. Martial law was declared and A. Papadopoulos, Ch. Tzallas, A. Dimitratos and S. Priftis were arrested and put in front of the exceptional military tribunal of Adrianoupoleos.

In May, there was a strike of the Athens-Piraeus electric railway workers. The trains were immobilised on the tracks, and one blocked the underground station of Omonia in Athens.

The government arrested many strikers and sent them to the military tribunal. Eleven of them were sentenced to eight years in prison and sent to the Akronafplia fortress.

In Corfu in December a rally of olive producers, demanding only the free extraction of oil, transformed itself in the afternoon into a combative demonstration against the war. The roar of blunderbusses and dynamite accompanied the cries of "down with the war!". A section of soldiers joined the angry peasants. The authorities were terrified. The prefect was trembling so much when he appeared at his window to speak that his false teeth fell out. Later that evening the gathering got out of hand and the police re-established "order".

The following episode is very indicative of the state of the peasants' spirit: at that time I had

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<sup>12</sup> The Julian calendar, which is thirteen days behind the Gregorian calendar, was only replaced by the latter in 1923.

deserted from the army and at that very moment I was hiding in the town. When the rally turned into a demonstration against the government and the war, I naturally slipped into the mass of demonstrators. Besides, there I was safer from discovery by the police or the military authorities. On Telegraph Square, now Theotokis Square, surrounded by peasants, I tried to make a speech. But I was wearing a tie, and I didn't really have the manner of a peasant, certainly not that of a peasant of the era. Worse, I was used to workers' meetings and began with: "Comrades!". It was impossible to say another word. Cries of protest came from all around: "Down with the stiff collars!", "We are not comrades!", "Down with the politicians!" Following me, one of our peasants spoke and took up the speech that I had started to make. His dress, his face, his hands, his language were those of an authentic peasant. This time the peasants enthusiastically greeted, acclaimed, applauded the orator and his speech.

Such are the most notable events of this first year of anti-Venizelist and monarchist power, or at least those which still live in my memory after so many years.

The most conscious, the most combative, the best organised workers of that time, in Athens and Piraeus, were the sailors, the mechanics, the cigarette makers, the tram drivers, the postal workers, the typographers, the food industry employees, and finally the electricity workers (in production, power station service and lines). These, after a series of victorious strikes, secured serious gains (according to the standards of the time). Apart from high wages (relatively) and tolerable conditions of work, their solidarity fund (intended first of all for the sick) was financed by the company, without being taken from their wages, and without any right of control by the company or the state. The president of the union was on leave of absence with a full salary for the whole of his term of office. This meant that the company paid him without him working.

Generally, all the electricians were active members of the union, and most of the technicians and power station workers passed through the party at one time or another. Two of them, M. Sideris and G. Papanikolaou, are counted among its founders and were members of its Central Committee. Their strikes, always launched without warning, count amongst the most grandiose and impressive events of the era. Athens and Piraeus would be plunged into darkness, the trams and the electric railway stopped in their tracks. In the power station they made sure that the cables were tangled up in such a way that only they knew how to untangle them, and they put signs everywhere saying: "Deadly danger". No one dared to venture in there, even the most qualified. The strikers gathered in front of the power station or in the union offices, ready to intervene.

This incident with Venizelos, which I believe is not very well known, illustrates very well the strength of the workers. The head of the union committee insistently demanded to be received by Venizelos at an ungodly hour: it was night time and the "revived" Chamber of 1915<sup>13</sup> was in session. Visibly irritated, Venizelos received the committee in one of the rooms in parliament, but the committee had just begun to express its opinion when he interrupted with a "rejected without discussion" and headed straight out. He had hardly uttered these words when the lights of parliament went out, along with all those of Athens and Piraeus. Calmly and imperturbably, Papanikolaou, the president of the union, a boy who was fast on his feet, took a candle out of his pocket, lit it and said to Venizelos, very solemnly: "Sit down, Mr. President, so we can continue

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<sup>13</sup> A chamber favourable to Venizelos, elected in 1915, and reconvened after the reinstallation of Venizelos in Athens by the French army in June 1917. Also called the "Lazarus" chamber.

this discussion". Venizelos stayed, the demands were accepted, and only then did the lights come back on.

Nevertheless, these workers, most of whom passed through the party, ended up a few years later in the most conservative wing of the movement. When the enterprise passed from Poloyorgis to the Power company the gains of the workers were legally guaranteed in all the official documents of transfer and in the contract between the public authorities and Power. But this only applied to the workers who worked in the enterprise before the advent of the new contract, and not to those hired afterwards by Power. Power immediately took on hundreds of scab workers on starvation wages and without any of the privileges enjoyed by the old workers. Not only did the union not try to make them beneficiaries of the advantages of the old workers, but it refused to have them in its ranks. All the attempts by the party to change the position of the union failed. I myself, as the secretary of the Piraeus region in 1927-1928, brought up the question many times in front of the numerous enough fraction of electricians, but they resisted inflexibly. These people had assured themselves of a privileged position in relation to other workers and they had no intention of risking it for reasons of solidarity. The duty of a revolutionary party was to exclude them, to denounce them and to stigmatise them in front of the working class. This did not happen.

### ***The action of the CPG members and the policy of the central committee***

Indisputably the CPG organised in its ranks in that era cadres who were the most combative, the most devoted and the best pick of the working class. Everywhere, in all the fights it experienced, they were in the front line. Members of the party had been arrested at Volos, Athens, Piraeus, Thessaloniki and elsewhere. In the army, its conscripted members – most of its members found themselves under the flags – had developed a very serious and responsible antimilitarist and antiwar movement. There existed a Communist cell in almost all the frontline units. These cells were connected with each other and their activity was coordinated by a central committee whose authority they all recognised. Propaganda material (leaflets, newspapers, pamphlets) circulated everywhere and was sent to the front from bases created in Thessaloniki and Dedeagach<sup>14</sup>. The railway worker strikers who had been mobilised and sent to the front served on the railways there. They were in charge of communications and the transport of material. Pantelis Pouliopoulos was the brain and the spirit of this Communist organisation in the army. Everything happened without the knowledge of the Central Committee and against its will.

The party in no way had a stable line and concrete objectives. Its confused and opportunistic politics undoubtedly presented pro-peace and "pro-worker" aspects but never went beyond that stage. Here and there articles burst out under sensational titles "The Brothel State", "We answer by the word of Cambronne", but we always waited for a revolutionary policy which would rise to the level of the critical issues of the war.

### ***Thessaloniki 1920-1921***

I arrived in Thessaloniki one cold morning in October 1920, after a lengthy voyage on board an

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<sup>14</sup> Today Alexandroupolis.

old tub of a boat. I sat at a table in a cheese shop next to the sea, drank some milk and then asked the owner to direct me to the trade union centre. He helpfully left the shop with me and showed me an imposing building on top of which flew an immense red flag.

From the customs office to the White Tower, and from the shore up to the Agiou Dimitriou strip, everything had been burnt. The pile of mines dating from the fire of 1917 threw even more into relief the only two big buildings which were still standing in the area, the governor's palace<sup>15</sup> and the trade union centre.

Thessaloniki enjoyed a long socialist tradition. Before 1912, the Federation had been the Turkish section of the Second International (it had been admitted in November 1909). Rakovsky had visited it in 1910 and had spoken at a public meeting held in the *Krystall* café. When the town became Greek, the Federation immediately took the initiative of unifying all the socialist groups in the country and creating of a single socialist party. At the founding congress of the party its representatives situated themselves politically in the centre.

The majority of its members were workers and Jewish intellectuals, influenced by the reformist ideas of social democracy and the democratic traditions of the old workers' movement. Starting in 1919, when the Federation became a section of the party, a good number of Greek workers joined it, particularly cigarette makers and tobacco workers. The party organisation worked closely with the trade union centre and had its offices in there. The centre could be found in Agiou-Dimitriou, between the church of Agios Dimitrios and the governor's palace. It was a building with three floors, but it was one of those old hotels which were almost as tall as buildings with several floors today.

On the ground floor was the restaurant and the music and conservatory rooms. On the first floor was the buffet, a big room for meetings and, around it, the offices of the party, those of the organisation of bakery workers, carpenters and cobblers, the library and the reading room. On the upper floor, were those of the executive of the trade union centre, the tobacco workers, the employees and the youth. On each floor was a big veranda looking out onto Agiou-Dimitriou street. The building was surrounded by quite a high wall setting out a vast courtyard behind it and to its left. Every evening the rooms were full of workers and everywhere, apart from in the reading room, debates were taking place, passionately but in a comradely atmosphere, on all the problems of the movement. The reading room was also full of workers of both sexes who were calmly engaged in study. Here we wrote in chalk on a blackboard fixed to the wall, in the form of "war reports", the victories of the Red Army in Poland, in the Ukraine, in Siberia. The first thing workers looked at when they came was this board. Groups existed in all the Jewish quarters, and every evening crowds of young men and women gathered, following the conferences and participating in the debates.

The secretary of the local party organisation was Sargologos, and that of the union centre was Gr. Papanikolaou.

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<sup>15</sup> Thessaloniki, Macedonia and Thrace, only integrated into Greece since 1913, had a special status and were placed under the authority of a governor.

*Avanti*, the party daily in the Jewish language<sup>16</sup>, had quite a large distribution, as did *Workers' Voice*, put out every week by the union centre and the party. Workers made up the great majority of the members, particularly those in tobacco and cigarette making. Among the Greek speaking members, only the doctor Evropoulos and the journalists Kastrinos and Riginos were intellectuals. Among the Jewish members on the other hand, there were a lot of them, and some of a very high level, with a solid Marxist formation: Abraham Cohen (he went to America with Trotsky), Roza Cohen, Alberto Carasso, Moïssis Carasso, Ventura, Arditti, Nephoussi and others. Many Jewish members worked in the press and some wrote articles. At the assembly of the organisation some comrades and I raised this problem. Was it possible to be a communist and at the same time to write for the bourgeois press? The assembly decided that it was not compatible and called on those concerned to stop. Those who did not obey were expelled.

Every three months the members of the party met at the Ordinary General Assembly. Criticism and debate on the most burning problems of the movement followed the report of the local committee and the control commission. Most of the members participated and the debates took place on a very high level. All the speakers freely set out their opinion whatever it was. There were no taboos, we did not have to conduct ourselves like robots and nobody had their name dragged through the mud because they disagreed. These assemblies lasted several days (in fact just the evenings, after work). At the end we took the decisions and elected the members of the local committee and the control commission.

Pamphlets were sent out quickly, along with *The Marxist Review*, and their content gave us material to debate for days. At that time the unions organised the majority of the workers in Thessaloniki. The cigarette makers and the tobacco workers were all active trade unionists, and you couldn't find a single one amongst them who defended the bourgeois parties. They were Communists, Socialists or anarchists (mostly the cigarette makers). But all felt themselves above all to be workers, with a high level of class consciousness and a strong sense of solidarity.

The various tendencies within the workers' movement could express themselves without any hindrance. When Sargologos (secretary of the local party organisation) tried to stop members of the *Communism* group from selling their journal in the union centre, it was disapproved of by all the workers, Communists or not, and *Communism* was sold freely.

The party enjoyed the confidence and respect of all the workers organised in unions. The Socialist and anarchist workers who forcefully opposed the Communist leaders of their union considered it their duty to defend the party in their neighbourhoods when it was criticised by the bourgeoisie or the petty bourgeoisie.

The workers had confidence in the leadership of their union and obeyed it, quite simply because they had freely elected it. But for the most serious problems it was definitely the assembly which decided.

In all the tobacco processing factories there were committees elected by the workers and each "salon" had its representative.

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<sup>16</sup> That is to say, in Ladino, a language derived from Spanish spoken by the Jews of Thessaloniki, descended from the Jews driven out of Spain in the fifteenth century by the Catholic Isabelle.



In the neighbourhoods and the workers' cafés, in the houses, every day there were debates about the movement.

When the *International* was played by the orchestra or sung by the choir at the Centre, all the workers stopped what they were doing, took their hats off, and stood to attention.

At that time (October and November 1920), all the members of the party and hundreds of non-party workers were primarily absorbed by electoral agitation and propaganda. I myself took a very active role in this, distributing leaflets, putting up posters, painting the hammer and sickle on walls, making speeches in the neighbourhoods.

I want to emphasise some events which illustrate the high level of class consciousness of the workers of Thessaloniki.

We knew about the "Balfour declaration", the official promise made to the Jews by the British government during the First World War that it would set them up on the soil "of their fathers". The Jewish community and the Thessaloniki synagogue had called the Jews together to celebrate the news. The gathering took place in the morning, and behind closed doors. The afternoon of the same day masses of Jewish workers and intellectuals took to the streets, waving red flags, with these slogans: "It is not in the state of Israel but in the world socialist society, united fraternally with all the peoples of the world, that we, the Jews, will guarantee our lives, our security and our well-being", "Long live the world socialist revolution", "Down with Zionism".

There is something we should note here. It was not only the Jews of Thessaloniki but millions of Jews across the world who put all their hope in socialism and struggled for it. The socialist and revolutionary parties could count within their ranks a large number of Jews, out of all proportion to their numbers in the population. The greatest theoreticians of Marxism, Marx, Luxemburg, Trotsky, were Jews.

How can these same Jews, the most authentic internationalist revolutionaries, have been metamorphosed into nationalists? How could Zionism, originally an insignificant sect of religious fanatics, transform itself into a mass movement? How could millions of Jews who lived with the grand vision of a world society of free producers decide to make the creation of a little national state their aim in life? Were those who employed a language against Israel little different from that of Goebbels ever able to ask these questions?

The movement for the foundation of the state of Israel, which at the start only gathered an insignificant number of fanatical bigots in quest of a utopia, became a matter for large masses of Jews in the years before the Second World War and the Hitlerian genocide. When already the hope of a social emancipation within a global community had begun to evaporate. When it had become clearer that the realisation of the age-old dream of the oppressed of the whole world looked more like a hideous nightmare. Then came the war, and the camps, the crematoria, genocide, the holocaust of Warsaw with the benevolent neutrality of the Russians, the disgraceful attitude of France and Britain towards the refugees. The whole world participated in the pogrom. In an era when the socialist ideal had drowned in a sea of nationalist hatred, how can we not understand that all of the Jews should fix on the aim of finding a corner of the planet where they

could settle, or at least die defending themselves with guns in their hands. But people already lived in the place where they settled, poor people like them, workers and peasants. Thus, with the blessing of the two superpowers, the conditions were created for a permanent war between Jews and Arabs. Can't those on the left who call for the destruction of Israel, that is to say the achievement of the work of Hitler, not imagine another politics? Haven't they ever thought about the fraternisation of peoples, their common struggle against their respective governments and for the republic of workers' councils in the Middle East?

At this time the lot of the cigarette makers posed a problem for the working class. By way of a response to their last strike, the industrialists had replaced them with machines. It was the first time that cigarette making machines had been used in the country. As well as protests, motions etc., the trade union centre decided to call a mass demonstration which all the workers of Thessaloniki took part in with their wives and children. The workers swamped the streets of the town, demonstrating massively in solidarity with their brothers. At the head of the human wave was a big sign: "Give bread to the cigarette makers". Finally, they were compensated on several occasions, but each time "once and for all".

One morning in February 1921, we were told at the union centre that a pogrom was being prepared against the Jews. Word had gone round that they had kidnapped a little Christian girl with the aim of killing her and using her blood in their religious rites. The criminals, adventurers and bigots had begun to gather, to shout, to insult the Jews, and were openly pushing for a pogrom. The union centre buglers sounded the alarm and called the workers to stop work and to get together. It was an alarm known to the workers, and when it rang out they had to immediately stop whatever they were doing, arm themselves with whatever came to hand and rush to the union centre. Some young people headed for the factories and the workers' neighbourhoods. In less than half an hour, thousands of workers had assembled in front of the union centre and an enormous human mass set off in the direction of the pogromists, with a sign at its head: "Hands off the Jews". The whole bunch of vagabonds, thugs and cretins, along with the traders and priests who had stirred them up, scattered at the sight of the popular torrent. Following this we formed a committee and demanded that the Governor General arrest the instigators. They were arrested and imprisoned. Two months later, we met them again in the new prison, when it was our turn to be granted its hospitality.

A gathering of bakery workers, called outside the union centre because of some decision by the government, suffered a savage attack from a powerful group of thugs from the Macedonian Royalist Youth. Many were injured in the clashes, and I myself suffered a serious blow to the head. After breaking up the gathering, the thugs, shouting and pushing barrel organs in front of them playing the monarchist anthem *The Son of the Eagle*, headed towards the union centre. But in the meantime, informed in an instant, all of workers' Thessaloniki rushed from the factories and the neighbourhoods with improvised weapons, iron bars, axes, clubs, to defend the centre and their comrades.

The centre was the target of daily attacks from royalist thugs. They went around in cars, shouting crude insults, firing shots, but fleeing chaotically when the workers marched out of the building. At this time the police left us alone, but they left the henchmen of the Royalist Youth alone as well. The liberals had disappeared from the scene and no one mentioned them.

***The struggle against the war***

At the end of 1920 and at the beginning of 1921, Communists came from numerous other towns and gathered in Thessaloniki. We were all young and thoroughly impregnated with the principles of the Russian Revolution. Thessaloniki, the heart of the movement, attracted us like a magnet. Here are some names which come back to me from that time: Y. Ioannidis and Kaltekis (the first, a barber, the second, a cigarette maker, sought refuge here, hunted since the February events in Volos), M. Papadopoulos, Mikhailidis, Zissiadis, Avgoustis, Alekos, Dimitratos (tobacco workers), St. Arvanitakis (cigarette maker), Kypridimos (bakery worker), Tomoglis (building worker), Stefanoudakis (electrician), Sfontilis, Seitanidis, Palaistis, Yamoyannis and myself (employees), Spanakis, Zogas, Vintsilaos (soldiers), Strakos (sailor in Karambournou).

The best known were: Yannis Ioannidis, very well known in the movement since he refused to put party cards in circulation with a photo of Benaroya. "Cards with his photo will only circulate when he is dead, and on condition that he was revolutionary right to the end", he had said, and the party cards were not distributed in Volos. The same Ioannidis later turned into the most resolute and sinister Stalinist bureaucrat. As for Aristidis Dimitratos, it was indeed he who became the Minister of Labour under Metaxas and then Karamanlis. Sfontilis (Pyliotis) and Vintsilaos were in the *Communism* group. Pyliotis evolved a bit like Ioannidis. Khristos Seitanidis, who later led the group Towards the Masses, was executed under the Occupation by the Italians. Stelios Arvanitakis was for some years the principal spokesman for the most extremist tendencies in the party. He was killed by OPLA during the Occupation for having committed this sin. Alekos G. (I don't remember his family name any more) killed a grass and was sentenced to life imprisonment. Tomoglis was killed in a police station during the general strike of August 1923.

We met up with each other very quickly. In agreement on ideas, we strengthened our links and decided to organise the fight to purge the party of opportunists and to take in hand the struggle against the war as we understood it, without taking account of the official leadership and what it was able to decide.

The twenty one conditions were then discussed in all the Communist parties, conditions that had to be accepted unreservedly by those who wanted to be admitted into the Communist International. We called for their acceptance without reserve. One of them made provision for the immediate expulsion of all those who had stood for the defence of the nation during the war. For us this condition had a decisive importance. Most of the other ones dealt with the discipline of the parties in the International. This discipline, for us, went without saying. There is only one revolutionary movement, worldwide and indissoluble.

To extend and coordinate our action across the whole country, we then tried to enter into contact with comrades of the left known from the other party organisations. I was put in charge of this task. So we established contact with Serres (Hatzistavrou), Volos (Theos, then in prison), Athens (Ikonou), Corfu (Rallis) and with the front.

Our struggle enabled us to overturn the old local leadership of Sargologos, and worker comrades close to our views entered it again (Papadopoulos, Tzallas, Ikonou, Paschalis). But it was in the editorship of *Workers' Voice* that our victory was most complete. The editorial committee comprised the journalist Riginos, the doctor Evropoulos and myself, and I was appointed

director.

As Riginos and Evropoulos were mostly there for reasons of protocol, the editorship of the journal fell entirely to me and through me certainly to our fraction. Thus, *Workers' Voice* became an authentic revolutionary organ, an organ of intransigent struggle against the war.

The respective editorial committees of *Avanti* and *Workers' Voice* were elected by the assembly. The local committee did not have the right to dismiss them, only the assembly could do that. Thus the editorial committee enjoyed a certain independence.

At the same time, as a fraction, and not as a party organisation, we organised the sending of propaganda material to the front. Every week we prepared packages with *Workers' Voice*, pamphlets and leaflets, which were sent to Smyrna, *poste restante*, in the name of Raoul Avgeris. Our organisation in the army then picked them up and shared them out to the various units. (I knew Raoul Avgeris – this obviously wasn't his real name - in Corfu in 1924. He was a pupil at the urban police school, which had just been created. It was the very same person who had been in contact with us. Constantin Bastounopoulos, *alias* Costis Bastias<sup>17</sup>, was also once a pupil in that school. He also acted the leftist and was linked to progressive literary circles. He had a bust of Liebknecht on a table in his room.)

Apart from these regular dispatches, we noted from weekly publications the addresses of soldiers and NCOs who wanted to correspond with young ladies. We wrote to each one saying that it was all well and good to correspond with girls, but that he mustn't forget the other much more important and serious problems: why was he fighting? Why was he putting himself in permanent danger being killed or maimed? What was the sense of this war? Who had an interest in it? etc. In this way we made contact with numerous soldiers and afterwards put them in contact with the organisation inside the army. During the mobilisation of March 1921, there wasn't a single reservist assembly point where we were not present, making speeches and distributing leaflets. There was almost no surveillance on the part of the military and police authorities. The official authorities of the party obviously had no responsibility for all this antiwar and antimilitarist work. Everything was done on our initiative and took place under our responsibility.

### ***In front of the Adrianoupoleos military tribunal, for high treason***

In 1921, Easter Day fell on 18 April according to the old calendar; but it was also 1 May according to the new one, the First of May which the workers of the country celebrated, with all the workers of the world. The police, using the pretext of the Christian celebrations, banned all workers' gatherings. We (the union centre and the party) decided to go outside and ignore the Easter of the Christians and the police ban. On Good Friday, while the services were taking place, thousands of leaflets were distributed calling the workers to meetings and demonstrations for the Sunday, Easter Day. On Holy Saturday the issue of *Workers' Voice*, with more red than ever before, called on its front page for workers to take to the streets.

On Good Friday, Ar. Dimitratos, secretary of the Communist Youth, was arrested. On Saturday

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<sup>17</sup> Later a journalist and man of the theatre close to the authorities.

at mid-day, it was my turn. In the evening the door of the nick slammed shut on Ch. Tzallas, secretary of the bakery workers' union and member of the local committee of the party. On Easter morning they brought us A. Papadopoulos, secretary of the party organisation.

The police and the military government had taken exceptional measures to prevent the workers' demonstrations, without result. In various parts of the town gatherings and demonstrations formed, red flags flew, cries of "down with the war" and "fraternisation of peoples across borders and countries" rang out, shaking the whole town. Confrontations with the mounted police broke out in Koule-Kaphe, in Tsinar, in the Jewish areas, and above all, soldiers destined for the front in Asia Minor refused to get on board, mutinied, smashed portraits of the king to bits, fraternised with the workers and joined them. The same day, martial law was proclaimed.

The police handed us over to the military authority, and we were transferred from the nick to the military prison of Toumbas. There the soldiers showed their sympathy in all sorts of ways, greeting us, throwing us cigarettes and fruit, showing us leaflets. The examining officer brought charges against us of high treason, inciting the people to revolt and soldiers to desert, and sent us before the emergency military tribunal of Adrianoupoleos.

A few days later, chained up and escorted by six men commanded by a sergeant, we were taken to the station for Adrianoupoleos. Some thugs from the Macedonian Royalist Youth were waiting for us there. They were standing there to yell, to shower us with obscenities and take us to task. But the escort, with bayonets fixed on their rifles, pushed them aside with kicks and bayonet prods. The soldiers, along with their sergeant, were very nice to us during the voyage. The train only went as far as Karagatch. From then on the line was destroyed, and we took the road to Adrianoupoleos partly on foot and partly by truck.

A pleasant surprise was waiting for us. Barely had the soldiers taken us to the transfer section, and completed the formalities of our handover, when the two sergeants who had accepted us shook our hands effusively and put us in a room in the section and not in the prison. They sympathised with the CPG. One of them had discovered revolutionary ideas and had been influenced by them when he had been following Benaroya on behalf of the Security Police.

Two or three hours later, the second lieutenant Vlahos, accompanied by a few soldiers of the telegraphists' battalion, came to visit us and told us, after greeting us, that "The battalion is entirely ours. After discussing your case, we have all entered into an agreement and we are ready to free you if ever the tribunal sentences you to death or to a severe penalty." The two sergeants present at the discussion assured us of this as well. Shortly afterwards it was the turn of lieutenant Konstantinidis to pay us a visit. At midday the soldiers provided us with a whole lamb that they had roasted in their unit. This stay in Adrianoupoleos passed in quasi-freedom, and the soldiers never ceased visiting us (I came to meet up with one of them again in Akronafplia camp in 1940).

The soldiers, Vlahos and the sergeants did not carry out their decision. The tribunal declared itself not competent because martial law had been declared after the events of Easter, when we were already in prison. After the tribunal had made the pronouncement we stayed in Adrianoupoleos for another two days, just to visit the town and its curiosities. At least to me, nothing made any particular impression apart from the mosque of sultan Selim and the women in rags who

swept the streets. Redirected to an ordinary court, we returned to Thessaloniki escorted by just three gendarmes, and not handcuffed.

Locked up in the cellars of the Governor's palace for four days, we drafted a protest against the persecution of Turks and Slavs by the Greek authorities, expressing our sympathy and our solidarity towards the persecuted minorities and criticising the attitude of the Central Committee of the Party which, although told about it by the comrades in the army, had not published anything or done anything.

The soldiers and the two sergeants had given us plenty of concrete examples of the ferocious persecution of the ethnic minorities of Thrace by the Greek government. Our testimony was published by *Rizospastis*, which was not yet the Party organ. From the cellars of the palace, which were the most foul prisons I have known, we were transferred to the new prison. Kordatos came to visit us after a few days, in his double capacity as a lawyer and a member of the Central Committee. We were ready to clash violently with him. But, in the visiting room, in front of this reserved man, who grasped our hands with obvious emotion, our anger and hostility evaporated. He agreed with us about the protest we had sent, and spoke to us sadly about the poor situation prevailing in the CC.

### ***In Yannina***

At the end of July 1921, we were freed. I didn't know the legal reasons for our release and I didn't try to find out what they were. A few days later I left for Corfu. I presented myself to the office of that place, which sent me to Yannina, in a half-battalion of the tenth regiment of infantry, stationed in Akraios. Two days later, for the first time I came into contact with the comrades of the local group of the Party and with F. Bratsos (a member of the CPG), from the offices of the headquarters of the gendarmerie of Epirus, Ar. Papadatos, a warrant officer (also a party member) and St. Yannoulatos, a second lieutenant (who had been excluded from the party for indiscipline and anarchist tendencies). We organised ourselves to intervene politically. Stationed at Akraios there was the half battalion of the tenth (where I served as a private and Papadatos as a warrant officer), a half battalion of the twenty fourth infantry regiment and the first and second mountain artillery sections.

Our first need was to establish friendly relations, which would allow us to make individual propaganda, and at the end of one month we had created groups in all the units. Pamphlets and leaflets circulated everywhere and provoked discussions. Some evenings, after secretly leaving the barracks, we met in the ruins of Velisarion, thirty or forty soldiers, to draw up a balance sheet of our activity and decide on actions to follow. Some soldiers joined the Party after their demobilisation. Sympathetic drivers transported our propaganda material to the border<sup>18</sup>. It is true to say that there was no surveillance on the part of the military authorities. We regularly visited the trade union centre and had discussions there with the workers.

I wrote to the Central Committee to inform them of our activity and to ask them to send pamphlets, anti-war leaflets and a duplicator. The response arrived very quickly, signed by P. Dimi-

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<sup>18</sup> In the units stationed on the Albanian frontier.

tratos. He formally disapproved of our action, which according to him was dangerous for us and for the Party, and enjoined us to stop it. Needless to say we did not obey him.

### ***Deserter***

At the beginning of October 1921, our unit received the order from the army corps to select four educated soldiers for the recruitment centre in Corfu. I was part of this batch and, like the three others, I received my movement order for Corfu. There, the register was entrusted to me.

We were two soldiers employed in writing who had the same surname. Shortly after we had taken up our functions, the captain Nikolouzos called us together and asked us which of us two was a Bolshevik.

“It is me that you are speaking to us about, Captain”, I said to him.

“What does that mean”, he said to me, “Are you one or not?”.

“I was a citizen, but now I am a soldier.”

Another day, the commander of the recruitment office came into our room and said: “Is there anyone here who can explain to us what the word *soviet* is supposed to mean, hey! Priftis?” But I answered that I didn’t know.

It seems they had received some information about me, whether from the Security Police, or, more probably, from the mayor of Corfu. I had made the journey from Thessaloniki to Corfu in the same bus as him, a car drawn by horses, as one travelled in those days. I was going back to my village, and he to Dassia. We began a discussion which obviously ended in accusations and insults. When the mayor tried to pull off the hammer and sickle insignia which was pinned on my tie, I grabbed him by his bowtie and we came to blows. However, nobody took any particular measure against me in the recruitment office, and those who pushed me into discussion were more trying to make fun of me. Every day, after the officers had left, we stayed in the offices and, with soldiers from the other companies, we debated the situation, the war, the workers’ movement, communist theory.

At that time N. Dimitratos passed through Corfu returning from Russia via Italy. He spoke to us about contacts he had had and about the situation of the country, but he appeared rather disillusioned.

In mid-December 1921, a day when I was “on duty”, the postman turned up, before the arrival of the other soldiers and the officers, and gave me an urgent telegram from the army corps. I opened it without thinking so as to make a note of it. I remained holding the pen in the air as I read its content: “Send escort soldier Priftis Spyridon - stop – Confirm execution telegraphically – stop - army corps”.

I put the telegram in my pocket, took up my gun and my bag and returned to my village.

I then lived the life of a deserter in wartime, until the end of August 1922, eight months in all.

The life of a hunted beast. The detachments of Gounaris<sup>19</sup> combed the villages, as those of Venizelos had done five years before. They didn't smash the jars of olives and the barrels of wine, but made their quarters in the houses of the deserters, transforming them into barracks, sleeping there, killing the chickens, lambs and pigs to eat them, making the parents of those they were hunting serve them. The villages and the mountains were filled with deserters. Soldiers who obtained a permit (most often the wounded) no longer quickly rejoined their units.

Obviously the gendarmes chose to put themselves in the most comfortable houses, and mine was one of them. Very often ten to fifteen gendarmes invaded the house, running into the rooms to be sure of a place to sleep, setting out their possessions and their guns, and then setting about devouring everything which can be eaten, drinking wine until they've had their fill, throwing themselves like foxes on the hens and like wolves on the lambs. My mother and father were obliged to serve them, to cook for them, to wash their dishes and to remove their rubbish from the garden. In winter, they had to provide them with wood non-stop, if not they would warm themselves by burning anything which came to hand, chairs or tables.

### ***The conference of February 1922***

The situation of the monarchist authorities worsened by the day. All their desperate attempts to guarantee a loan from abroad had failed. Everywhere the government came up against a categorical refusal. The great allies, those on whose account and for whose interests they had begun the war in Asia Minor, abandoned the country to its fate and ended up by turning towards Kemal. They understood that he was not the dangerous revolutionary that they had once believed, but a nationalist leader which it was possible to get along with. This was sufficient for them to sacrifice their old ally and faithful agent Greece. That's what they did. It was a long time since the Turkish *ataman* chief of the partisans. Kemal had become the chief of a large army – powerful, organised and supplied with the most modern weapons.

The Greek army was falling to pieces and no longer had even salted herrings to feed it. Its morale had fallen to zero. From hour to hour the number of deserters grew. You could no longer count the soldiers in cushy jobs, offspring of the bourgeois class and "string pullers", who lounged about in the cafés of Athens carrying out some so-called special mission, while the sons of the people were dying on the plains of Anatolia.

The discontent and indignation of the popular masses was obvious. There wasn't a day without a strike or demonstration. The collapse of the front was only a question of time.

A revolutionary party worthy of the name had to prepare itself and prepare the masses for the inevitable revolutionary crisis. What was the policy of the Central Committee of the CPG?

At its second congress, in April 1920, the Party condemned and rejected the social democratic theses of its founding congress (popular democracy, national defence, League of Nations), adhered unreservedly to the Communist International and accepted its programme and its principles. But the closer we got to the revolutionary crisis, precisely conditions which would

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<sup>19</sup> The monarchist Prime Minister at the time.



allow the character of the party and its real attachment to its principles to be proven, the more it trampled them underfoot, ending up by completely rejecting the revolutionary programme.

At the beginning of the month of February 1922, the central committee called an extraordinary conference. The following lines summarise the spirit of the resolutions that it took up under such critical conditions: "The Party, going through such a period of organisation and propaganda, needs a long legal existence... The intensity of the Party's offensive cannot go beyond the limits of the political resistance of the working class and the general capacities of the movement". In the language of the class struggle, this means that the Party has to keep its political activity within the limits defined by the state and not give any pretext for police intervention. This means that it is necessary to contain workers' struggles, to restrain them within a framework defined by bourgeois legality. And if, despite its efforts and good intentions, strikes, demonstrations and clashes with the police spontaneously break out, if, without its permission, the workers break the limits of bourgeois legality, thus perturbing the legal conditions so necessary to its existence, it must logically put itself on the side of law and order against the troubles that are "fomented by elements foreign to the working class, adventurers, provocateurs", etc.

Such a theory obviously can't stand up to any serious examination and contradicts historical experience. Not only is it not the Party which sets the pace of the class struggle, but, and this has almost the status of a law, all the great class struggles in history have broken out when no one, party or individual, was expecting it. Besides, who can measure the limits of the political resistance of the working class, and according to which criteria? When a revolutionary organisation has to limit its activity to propaganda, it is not in its nature and still less can it fix the term of this activity. The march of the class struggle takes precedence over everything. The organisation must therefore always be ready to pass from the propagandist stage to that of agitation and immediate action when the conditions change. Only the panic which gripped these unlikely "revolutionary" leaders in the face of the approaching storm can explain these resolutions.

Another resolution at the same conference, according to which the decisions of the International had only a "historic significance" for the Party and therefore did not commit it to anything, in fact placed it outside the Communist International.

Only two delegates expressed their opposition: the lawyer Vangelis Papanastassis and the building worker Alevizakis, representing the Piraeus organisation.

Kordatos, Georgiadis, Papanikolaou, A. Sideris and Petsopoulos formed the new central committee.

It would however be wrong to think that these shameful resolutions expressed the opinion of the party members, quite simply because, in their great majority, the mass of the class youth, the lively and revolutionary elements were either conscripted or were deserters and fugitives. These members, where they were, particularly in the army, carried out a courageous action against the war on their own initiative. This is something which the legalist leaders of the Party would pay somewhat dearly for, even though they had nothing to do with it.

In June 1922, the five members of the central committee, the trade unionists Evangelou and Angelis and the journalist Strangas were arrested and imprisoned.

In view of the seriousness of the charges against them, in the context of a war, they risked the death penalty. These people were afraid, and to prove their innocence and to get out of prison there was no degradation and humiliation to which they didn't submit. They used means which were the most contradictory not just to their quality as revolutionaries but, quite simply, to their human dignity: petitions to influential personalities of the regime, to friends close to the government, to the king etc.

***The collapse of the front, the “military revolution” and the revolutionary crisis in Greece***

The general offensive of Kemal began on 13 August 1922. It was remarkably well organised and we know its tragic result. The front gave way on the first attack. The army dissolved and the retreat of the first few days quickly turned into a disorderly flight. All the equipment was abandoned. The dead, and even more so the wounded and those taken prisoner could be counted in the thousands. With the army the Christian inhabitants of Asia Minor also fled in their thousands, terrorised, abandoning all their goods. Everywhere there were massacres and burning. Everywhere bodies and smouldering ruins. And to crown this drama, the indescribable horror of the burning of Izmir.

Who was responsible for this unprecedented crime against the country and the people? The Liberals, who sent the army, or the monarchists, who continued the war? All were, without doubt. It was the bourgeois class in its entirety.

Then came the military “revolution”, the abdication of Constantine in favour of the crown prince, the overthrow of the authorities by that same revolution, the putting on trial for treason of the monarchist government, the sending to the revolutionary tribunal of the most responsible ministers, Gounaris, Stratos, Theotokis, Protopapadakis and Baltatzis, and of the chief general, Hatzianestis, their condemnation to death and their execution.

All this is well known. Some have lived it, others have read about it or heard about it. And yet the most interesting thing is precisely what everyone avoids mentioning: the situation amongst the popular masses and their reaction to the events.

The country was in ferment. Everywhere anger and indignation were being expressed. The roads were full of armed soldiers who no longer obeyed anybody. Thousands and thousands of refugees, penniless and starving, invaded the ports, the streets, the squares. The authorities, stricken with paralysis, no longer had any real existence. In Redestos<sup>20</sup>, the authorities were abolished, red flags appeared in the demonstrations. The “revolutionary” government, racked with anguish, tried to disarm the soldiers, granting them freedom in return for their weapons. There were more and more appeals to the masses and the army for order, discipline and national unity. The primary mission of this “revolution” was clearly to safeguard the capitalist regime. To appease the desperate mob, it threw them the heads of five ministers and the chief general, and in unison the pathetic leaders of the CPG, released from prison in the interval, scattered themselves about to explain that in the face of national disaster it was necessary to put away the flag of class struggle.

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<sup>20</sup> Now in European Turkey and known as Tekirdağ.

But the class struggle obeyed its own laws. The masses, guided by their class instinct, did not concern themselves unduly with the national disaster and were hardly concerned at all about the crisis of power of their exploiters.

The explosive materials which ceaselessly accumulated were not slow in spontaneously combusting. A strike wave swept across the country. The refugees demanded bread and housing. Many violent strikes led up to the general strike of August 1923. In all the industrial centres thousands of workers took to the streets. Everywhere there were clashes with the police. Ferocious fighting in Piraeus caused eleven deaths and hundreds of injured people. The army office there was besieged by the masses in revolt. Some of the troops fraternised with the strikers. The government sent some Cherkesses against the workers. A state of emergency was proclaimed across the whole territory, the workers' unions were made illegal. In Thessaloniki, Tomoglis was murdered in cold blood in the gaols of the Security Police.

The military government finally succeeded in re-establishing "order".

### ***The CPG in the events***

In May 1923, two months before the general strike, the central committee (then in prison) had called a meeting of the national council. At this council some people had declared that the resolutions of the February conference were annulled, but it was recognised immediately that the council, not being a representative body, did not have the authority to change theses and resolutions of conferences and congresses. This prevarication allowed them to avoid any debate on the situation and on the tasks of the Party. The council was content to take a series of decisions on Party organisation, education, conferences and publications. Despite this, most of the debates were about the innumerable capitulations of the old and the recent central committees.

Like rats leaving the ship just before it sinks, the leaders abandoned the Party just before the storm.

In September 1923, one month after the general strike, an extraordinary electoral congress was organised. This congress, also using its narrow competences as an excuse, avoided all debate on the situation and on the formidable events of the previous month and limited itself to preparation for the elections, the designation of candidates and the elaboration of an electoral platform which, moreover, did not distinguish itself in any way from the electoral programmes of the reformist parties. Maximos, Apostolidis, Stavridis, Tzallas and Akrivopoulos were elected to the central committee.

The "revolution", become the government, gave the order to liberate the imprisoned leaders of the CPG. The Party was therefore blessed once again with its "leadership" elected by the February conference.

The central committee then called an extraordinary congress for October. The resolutions of that congress had perhaps no precedent in the political history of the world. The collapse of the front had created a revolutionary situation in the country, and the "revolutionary" party of the working

class, the party supposed to prepare itself for precisely such circumstances, declared with alacrity in its resolutions that it was not the place for it to occupy itself with programmatic questions, and that any debate on the setting out of new tactics would serve no useful purpose. Finally, it decided that the theses of the February conference could serve very well as the provisional basis for the activity of the Party.

The congress also decreed the exclusion of Petsopoulos. Georgiadis, A. Sideris and M. Sideris submitted a motion to that effect, because of the tactic that he had put into practice: “a changing mixture of ultra-communism, chauvinism and reformism”, etc. This motion provoked some discussion, the creation of a commission of enquiry, and everything ended up with his exclusion. But I am sure that the real reasons rested rather on his attitude during a rally in Sofia. At this huge rally in the biggest square in the town, Petsopoulos, after having saluted the Bulgarian workers in the name of the Greek workers, then hugged and kissed the Turkish representative in front of the crowd of assembled workers and the two men, the Greek and the Turk, while Greeks and Turks massacred each other in Asia Minor, denounced the war, proclaiming with a loud voice the solidarity, the common interests and ideas of the Greek and Turkish workers and called on the two peoples to fraternise and to join together in the fight for socialism.

The Greek ambassador in Sofia had immediately informed his government.

This internationalist position of Petsopoulos obviously didn't fit in at all with the policy of “legal existence” and the appeal to “put away the flag of class struggle”, and risked compromising the Party in the eyes of the “officer patriots” or even of provoking the intervention of the police and the courts. There lies the real reason for his exclusion. The central committee elected by this congress comprised Kordatos, Lagoudakis, Mangos, Sargologos and Yamoyannis.

The circumstances experienced by the country after the collapse of the Asia Minor front and the army revolution were precisely those which violently propelled a revolutionary party on to the scene. Yet in no way or at any moment did the CPG assert its presence, even in the most elementary way. It was nothing other than a pathetic side-kick of the military government. Its leaders were in permanent contact with the officers, and in their “memoranda” which came from the “Commander” who was with Plastiras<sup>21</sup>. What they asked from the military was even more moderate and measured than what was demanded by the officers and the Republican Union of Al. Papanastassiou. It didn't propose even the shadow of an independent class politics.

When the working class entered into struggle, despite the advice of the central committee of the CPG, opening a front against the army revolution, the Party, if it did not openly take the side of those who machine-gunned the workers in Piraeus, deployed all its effort to sap the morale of the masses in struggle and to break their combativity. During the general strike it played the role of fireman and scab.

To justify its strike-breaking attitude, it declared that the conflict between the working class and the army ran the risk of being exploited by the monarchists. It was for that reason that it did everything in its power to restrain the workers and contain their struggles. It is a policy as old as the workers' movement, which the workers always pay very dearly for. This is because the

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<sup>21</sup> The chief of the military junta which had come to power.

opposite is true: the workers' struggle bars the way to reaction while capitulation opens it.

The proletarian organisation of Piraeus finally saved the honour of communism in Greece. Seeing that the central committee acted as scabs, the Piraeus organisation detached itself from the Party, and, with part of the Athens organisation, created the Communist Union and published the newspaper *Communist Tribune*. This organisation did everything it could to help the workers in struggle, its members were in the front line of all the battles, and by its newspaper and its slogans it stimulated courage and maintained confidence in the victorious outcome of the struggle. Its main slogan for the sailors was "Take over the ships".

The Communist Union, by its politics, its action and the blood of its fighters, wrote one of the most brilliant pages in the history of our workers' movement.

Kordatos, in his *History of Greece (1900-1924)*, doesn't say a single word about this split, nor about the Communist Union. He presents the *Communist Tribune* as the personal organ of V. Papanastassis, and the latter as an agent of the Security Police. Here Kordatos engages in deliberate falsification and distortion of the facts. He settles accounts, by a really dirty calumny, with history, which contradicts him, and with those who took on what neither he nor the other theoreticians of the conference of February 1922 had the courage or the stature to take on.

At that time I was serving with the 1/10 Company in Corfu. I presented myself there just after the rout, like hundreds of other deserters. In Corfu as everywhere, the revolutionary situation was evident. On our own initiative we then opposed the antimonarchist slogans of the liberals, the Republican Union and the agrarians of Dendrinis with the slogans of the proletarian revolution: "It is capitalism in its entirety which is responsible for the war, famine and destruction, and not just one of its camps" ; "The refugees should be put up in the houses of the rich".

We openly spoke in the army buildings, in the cafés, in the street. Every evening we gathered a crowd of soldiers in the Party local offices. We debated, we sang the *International*, *The Labour Song* and a detoured version of *The Son of the Eagle*: "From the cannons of the fleet we make hammers to smash the heads of the bourgeoisie, and from sabres we make sickles to harvest...".

During the general strike we were all confined to barracks, required to remain armed at all times, with full cartridge belts. But beforehand we had convinced most of the soldiers to choose targets other than the heads of the workers if we were to receive the order to fire. Some soldiers, in groups or individually, approached me to give me their hand, addressed me with smiles or winks of the eye and whispered to me "We are ready".

When we received the order to assemble the soldiers who knew how to knead bread to replace the bakers on strike, everyone refused to break the strike, agreeing only to make bread for the army, although many had declared their profession as baker. We had done some good work. We also did what we could to help the refugees looking for assistance and a roof over their heads, calling on them to occupy the houses of the rich. Once we, a few soldiers, took the head of a group of refugees and all together we pushed back the gendarmes and occupied a wing of the royal palace.

During the left split in Piraeus and Athens and the formation of the Communist Union, the comrades who had taken on its leadership, all workers and people that I knew for the most part,

wrote to me, persuaded that the Corfu organisation was going to follow their example. I replied that I was in complete political agreement with them but that it was necessary to avoid a split in so far as it was possible. That did not stop us from distributing *Communist Tribune*, which was an authentic proletarian journal.

## **Chapter 5**

# **In the fascist galley**

(the whole chapter, slightly edited)

### ***In Aiyina***

In September 1939, we, Pouliopoulos and I, were incarcerated in Aiyina. All the Stalinist detainees in the prison were then exalting in and celebrating the victories of the two partners in the Pact: the carving up of Poland, the occupation of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia by the Russians, and of Belgium, Holland, Denmark and Norway by the Germans, the fall of France, the tragedy of Dunkirk.

By way of a everyday amusement they competed to see who could invent the most stupid jokey remark against France and Britain: about Gamelin and his “military talent”, about de Gaulle and the “Free French”, about Churchill and his appeals etc.

At the end of two months, with his sentence completed, Pouliopoulos was transferred to Akhronaflia. Then I was alone for a long time in the midst of hostility, animosity and incredible stupidity. Finally the archeiomarxist Tzikas arrived. Then Ioannidis (or Yovanis) arrived a few days after. He was a school teacher from Amyntaion in Macedonia, a member of our group, a militant of the most hardened variety. He was lame from the consequences of an unfortunate attempt to escape. In the room where they were passing judgement on him in Thessaloniki he was sitting near the window which overlooked a tree. He believed that if he jumped out he could reach it. He gave it a go. But the branch which he hung onto broke and he fell to the ground, where the gendarmes picked him up and took him to the hospital on a stretcher.

These two militants met their death under the Occupation. The Stalinists murdered Tzikas, even though he had proposed to them that he fight with them within ELAS. Ioannidis was relegated to the Isle of Aī Strati till the end of his sentence. He refused to “sign” when the majority of exiles had done so and preferred death from hunger when the Germans forbade the inhabitants of the isle from selling goods to the exiles.

### ***Return to Akronafplia***

In May 1940, I was summoned to the secretariat of the prison where they let me know that I had served my sentence and that I must get ready for the next morning. Then the same old procedure began again: I was released, but with handcuffs, and a sealed letter to the authorities of Akhronaflia (with the strict note “Attention, extremely dangerous”) and an escort of two gendarmes. Two or three days in the transfer section of Piraeus, and from there the ferry to Nafplio. In the camp they sent me to the First Wing this time.

In our group there was Makris, Rigas, Remboutsikas, Voursoukis and Krokkos. Panayotidis and Skaleos were dead, Tsoukas had been transferred to the mental hospital and Mantas had signed, with the agreement of the other comrades, so as to go and reconstitute the group on the outside. But the war began and he was mobilised and killed. From the Pouliopoulos group, there were, apart from Pouliopoulos, Yannakos, Xypolytos, Tournopoulos, Kh. An., Kh. Soulas, Mitsis, Paraskevas and Loukas. There were the archeiomarxists Hatzichristos, Saoussopoulos, Berachia, Pierakeas and Il. Papadopoulos. Phlorias was dead and Christophas had been transferred to an island. Finally, there were Seitanidis and Iliadis.



The camp was as I had left it two years before, with its secretariat, its room bosses, its male nurses, its postmen, its workshops, its various officials and its severe discipline.

The humour of the Stalinists had obviously changed. Like their comrades in Aiyina, they rejoiced in the victories of the two partners of the Hitler-Stalin pact and celebrated them. But, during the invasion of Finland by the Russian army, they foamed with rage about the relentless and victorious resistance of the Finns. Why, they cried in a righteous anger, wasn't the little country being reduced to ashes, why weren't the cities being bombed?

### ***The assassination of Trotsky***

In August 1940, agents of the GPU assassinated Trotsky in Mexico. Stalin had finally achieved his goal. First of all he had literally exterminated the family of Trotsky. His first wife (...). One of his daughters (...) The other committed suicide (...). Their husbands also died in Siberia. Their children disappeared. (...) All his personal friends, his secretaries and his parents met the same end. (...)

No man had ever been persecuted with such rage as Trotsky was by Stalin. (...)

We organised a political commemoration in the Third Wing together with the Pouliopoulos group, with Pouliopoulos and myself as orators.

### ***The war between Greece and Italy***

The Greco-Italian war began in October 1940<sup>1</sup>. We learnt about it from the appearance of the black-out. Two or three days later the camp authorities themselves made public the poisonously chauvinistic letter of Zachariadis<sup>2</sup>: "To this war which the Metaxas government is leading, everybody, we must dedicate all our strength...", etc. The leadership of the Self-help Group called assemblies for each wing. All the Stalinists were without exception for the "defence of the fatherland". They solemnly declared themselves in agreement with the letter of their chief and signed a petition to be mobilised and sent to the front.

For our part we spoke up in the assemblies, during the few minutes allotted to us, condemning the treason with all our strength, denouncing the chauvinist politics of the CPG and the Zachariadis letter, defending the principles of revolutionary internationalism and the transformation of the war between peoples into a war of peoples against their exploiters.

In the assembly in our wing it was D. Paparigas who represented the Stalinist leadership and its

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<sup>1</sup> Mussolini sent an ultimatum to Greece on 28 October 1940, demanding numerous territorial concessions, including Crete and Corfu. Then he immediately invaded Greece from the north west, setting out from Albania which he had annexed in April 1939.

<sup>2</sup> From the depths of his prison Zachariadis had sent to Maniatakis this "open letter" to "the people of Greece" on 31 October. The minister immediately had it published in the press (on 2 November). The leaders of the CPG who were still free believed it to be a fake and denounced it as such.

chauvinist politics. He did not respond to the basis of our critique, any more than he responded to our questions: isn't the nation and the fatherland that calls the people to shed their blood for it bound up with capitalist society? Is capitalism or is it not responsible for wars? In what way is this world war to be distinguished from the previous one? Isn't it also a war between brigands, the stuffed against the starving, for the dividing up of the world? Was the position of Lenin during the last war correct or not, and if it was for that time, why isn't it anymore today, what has changed?

Papargas didn't answer. What could he answer? We were defending precisely what he had himself defended over the years. By way of a response, at the close of the assembly, he attacked us by accusing us of... trying to weaken the confidence of the people in the CPG, the "party of the working people" etc.

The nationalist policy of the CPG was in complete contradiction with its own principles, with the essence of its programme, and with all of its action up until 1932. It went back on everything it had stood for.

The Communist parties had been founded in the revolutionary wave which had followed the world conflict, when the peoples cursed the war and those responsible for it: men, classes and the social system. It was the very policy of transformation of the imperialist war into revolution which separated them from the old social-democratic parties. It is on the basis of this that Lenin differentiated himself: at Zimmerwald he opposed himself to the majority because they refused to put into their proclamation that principle which he judged essential. "The struggle against the war", he said, "presented in such a general and abstract manner, without an appeal to its transformation into a civil war, is nothing but a trick".

The first proclamation of the Communist International began with the words: "Remember the war". One of the twenty one conditions whose unreserved acceptance was indispensable to form a section of the Communist International was the exclusion from the party of any cadres who had pronounced themselves for the defence of the fatherland during the war. During those years being taken for a patriot was the worst insult for a communist. It amounted to being accused of treason.

We will cite a few passages from Lenin's *The proletarian revolution and the renegade Kautsky*.

"From the point of view of the proletariat, recognising 'defence of the fatherland' means justifying the present war, admitting that it is legitimate. And since the war remains an imperialist war (both under a monarchy and under a republic), irrespective of the country - mine or some other country - in which the enemy troops are stationed at the given moment, recognising defence of the fatherland means, in fact, supporting the imperialist, predatory bourgeoisie, and completely betraying socialism. In Russia, even under Kerensky, under the bourgeois-democratic republic, the war continued to be imperialist war, for it was being waged by the bourgeoisie as a ruling class (...)"

"If a German under Wilhelm or a Frenchman under Clemenceau says, 'It is my right and duty as a socialist to defend my country if it is invaded by an enemy', he argues not like a socialist, not like an internationalist, not like a revolutionary proletarian, but like a petty-bourgeois nationalist. Because this argument ignores the revolutionary class struggle of the workers against

capital, it ignores the appraisal of the war as a whole from the point of view of the world bourgeoisie and the world proletariat, that is, it ignores internationalism, and all that remains is miserable and narrow-minded nationalism. My country is being wronged, that is all I care about - that is what this argument amounts to, and that is where its petty-bourgeois, nationalist narrow-mindedness lies. (...)”

“The socialist, the revolutionary proletarian, the internationalist, argues differently. He says: ‘The character of the war (whether it is reactionary or revolutionary) does not depend on who the attacker was, or in whose country the ‘enemy’ is stationed; it depends on what class is waging the war, and on what politics this war is a continuation of. If the war is a reactionary, imperialist war, that is, if it is being waged by two world groups of the imperialist, rapacious, predatory, reactionary bourgeoisie, then every bourgeoisie (even of the smallest country) becomes a participant in the plunder, and my duty as a representative of the revolutionary proletariat is to prepare for the world proletarian revolution as the only escape from the horrors of a world slaughter. (...)’<sup>3</sup>”

All this is very clear. Lenin wrote so as to be understood. He did not use the smallest word which could lead to confusion. Revolutionary defeatism was the most fundamental principle, the most essential one of the CPG, at least until 1932. How can this have transformed itself so abruptly, without the slightest condemnation, without the slightest critique of this principle, into an “authentic” Greek nationalist party? We will return later to its metamorphosis and its “patriotism”.

### ***The “Provisional Leadership”, or the management of the CPG by the Ministry of Security***

The Greek army had already pushed back the Italian invasion and taken the offensive, taking the war onto Albanian territory. The popular masses celebrated the victories. The Stalinists as well. But they also rejoiced when the armoured columns of Hitler pulverised armies, towns and borders.

It is then that the Stalinists of Akronafplia disavowed their central committee with great shouts and recognised the “Provisional Leadership” as the authentic leadership of their party. They openly accused the members of the central committee of being traitors and in the pay of the police, and were full of praise for the militant virtues and the faith in the party of those who made up the Provisional Leadership.

We witnessed things directly then. We only came to learn a long time afterwards what had really happened. It appears that their central committee (Papayannis, Mathessis, Kanakis, Ktistakis)<sup>4</sup>, in its resolution<sup>5</sup>, concluded that the passage of the theatre of operations into Albania had removed all defensive character from the war and that it had transformed itself into an act of Greek aggression. In consequence, according to them, the duty of the CPG was to take from then on a position against the war and to denounce it.

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<sup>3</sup> This translation comes from the Lenin section of [www.marxists.org](http://www.marxists.org)

<sup>4</sup> A small group of cadres who had escaped capture had taken the initiative of forming a central committee at the end of 1939, after the arrest of all the principal leaders of the party. It was known under the name of “the old central committee”.

<sup>5</sup> On 7 December 1940.

This policy was without doubt in agreement with that of the USSR and the Communist International at the time. The Germano-Russian pact was in full force. Communist parties could not, by their politics or their actions, put Germano-Russian friendship in peril. Italy was an ally of Germany, and what was good for the latter became consequently good for the former.

The central committee was therefore in total accord with the official policy of the CPG after the Pact, that policy set out with such clarity and even more cynicism by the manifesto of the CC of the CPG in *Rizospastis*, 2 May 1940, and already cited here.

But this pacifist and anti-war policy of the Papayannis central committee could create problems and have displeasing consequences for the government, the regime and the conduct of the war. Maniadakis then decided to do what no other police force in the world had succeeded in doing until then: to fabricate for himself a “central committee” and provide the leadership of the CPG. His personal experience had given him the exact measure of the moral courage and the political firmness of the leading cadres of the CPG (as was shown by the success of his plan). Thus the “Provisional Leadership” was born from the Security Police.

Its principal cadre was Yannis Michailidis, a graduate of KUTV, a member of the political bureau of the CPG and a close friend of Zachariadis. They were both imprisoned in Corfu when Zachariadis gave him the order – at least he was asked to sign so that he could take in hand the leadership of the party and purge it of dubious elements. He went over to the service of the Security Police and executed his boss' order very well, but under the direction of Maniadakis.

The Provisional Leadership grouped together with him Tyrimos, an MP for the CPG, secretary of the Athens organisation and member of the political bureau, Manoleas, MP, Moschos, *kutvist* and member of the central committee, Tatassopoulos, who had signed the “agreement on common action” of 6 October 1934 for the CP, and some others. In a proclamation they denounced the members of the Papayannis central committee as traitors and agents of the Security Police and declared that consequently, to preserve the party and save its honour, they would take the initiative of constituting themselves into a provisional leadership, demanding their recognition by the party members and cadres. And those, at least the ones who were in the camp of Akhronafliia, solemnly recognised that central committee manufactured by Maniadakis as the legal leadership of their party. The event was without parallel in political history.

The Tsarist Okhrana, that police force which was so effective in persecuting the revolutionary movement, was able to place its own men in key positions in revolutionary organisations. Azev, for example, in the combat group of the Socialist-Revolutionaries, Malinovsky in the central committee of the Bolsheviks and in their parliamentary group, and some others, in almost all the revolutionary organisations. Yet they never succeeded in, and they were not capable of, taking in hand the leadership of one of these organisations, and, moreover, making its own members accept the policy. That success of the Security Police, unbelievable, incredible and without precedent, could only have been obtained with the Stalinist party and the cadres which it had formed.

Of the members of the old central committee, I knew Papayannis. He had been a member of the regional party committee for central and western Macedonia, of the organisation bureau and of the union committee during the years 1928-1931. Devoted, active and capable, he was the

principal trade union cadre in Thessaloniki for a long time, and also the secretary of the trade union centre. He was a waiter. After the “liberation” he took an active part in the left-wing trade union movement without this old accusation against him ever being brought up again<sup>6</sup>. It is obvious that he was the victim of slander.

Arrested in mid-1941, he was transferred to Akhronaflia. The Stalinist leadership isolated him in a little room, on the corridor between the first and second wings. The wing chiefs made it known to us that it was a matter of a “dodgy element” and that all contact with him was forbidden. The next day I went to visit him. But he told me himself that it was necessary to respect the decision of the “leadership” and made me conform with this as well.

As for Damianos Mathessis, I learnt some years later that he was a man of absolute trust in the CPG as well as the International. I knew him. More exactly I saw him at the Fourth Congress and at the Second and Third Plenums of the party. He did not belong to the central committee and did not participate in the debates. But he was responsible for the delegates of the International, for hiding places, housing etc.. I cannot formulate an opinion on the very serious accusations brought against him. He obstinately rejected them himself. In reality there is no concrete proof. V. Nefeloudis<sup>7</sup> spoke of “suspensions”. What is said by Solon Grigoriadis in his *History* (Volume I, page 182) proves nothing and rather pleads in his favour. Mathessis was linked, he tells us, to a group of officers<sup>8</sup> with lieutenant V. Venetsopoulos at their head, known to Solon Grigoriadis. These officers wanted to join the CPG, but Mathessis prevented them, telling them that the leadership of the party was in the pay of the British and perhaps also the Germans. Finally, S. Grigoriadis himself revealed to the officers that Mathessis was the “grass supreme. From an agent of Maniadakis, he had become an agent of the Gestapo”. And the officers, despite the attempts of Mathessis to hold them back, moved away from him and joined the CPG.

One is thus entitled to ask why he didn't hand them over to the Gestapo.

I once questioned Haïtas about the responsibilities of Mathessis in the party. He replied: “Let it go, it's nothing to do with us”.

### ***The gangster methods of the Stalinists, tolerated by the camp bosses***

Among the six hundred detainees in the camp it wasn't difficult to notice those who were in quarantine. Their punishment was total: absolute isolation, not the slightest relation was allowed with them. What crime could they have committed to merit such an inhuman punishment? We could never know.

Those who knew held their tongue. The punished even more than the others. They even avoided all contact with each other.

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<sup>6</sup> When the leadership of the CPG reconstituted itself in July 1941, it refused to come out in favour of either the Provisional Leadership or the old central committee, both accused of being composed of grasses.

<sup>7</sup> Member of the political bureau from 1931 to 1938.

<sup>8</sup> Mathessis was an officer himself. The story takes place during the German occupation.

Nevertheless, three of them, Gakis, Paris et Kapenis were in permanent contact and separately formed an amicable group. Stamelakos joined them afterwards. He was a leading union cadre of the party, the secretary of the Federation of Shoe Workers, he had been at one time secretary of the Unitary General Confederation of Greek Workers (EGSEE).

It seemed that they were reproached for some political opinions which they had in common, opinions contrary to the line of the party. Which ones? We never knew anything about them. (...)

One day, suddenly, completely unexpectedly, a mass of thugs descended on them, screaming like savages and literally beat them to a pulp. (...) They threw them unconscious, half dead, bloody and with their clothes in tatters, at the entrance of the camp where the guards came to collect them.

I had personal experience of the sudden and massive outbursts of the screaming cops (...). But I had read pity and even shame in the eyes of some of those doing the beating. The faces and the eyes of the thugs of Ioannidis and Bartzotas expressed only a frenzied madness and sadistic pleasure.

Their work accomplished, they sat down to catch their breath and said, as they had been ordered: "After all, we only want to dispatch them back to their masters". They meant the camp governor and the Minister of Security. But if their victims had really belonged to the Security Police, would they have dared to subject them to such treatment? The Stalinist leadership religiously respected the rules of the camp. (...)

I would add that if the Ministry of Security had needed informers in the camp, they would not have been those who had divergences with the "leadership" and the "line". They knew that their least severe punishment was to be isolated, and that they would have put themselves in a situation where it was impossible to accomplish their work. (...) If there were grasses in Akhronaflia, it was only perhaps (...) among the "Stalinist fanatics" who gravitated towards the leadership, and among the thugs.

Gakis and Kapenis met a tragic end. Here is what Yannis Manousakas wrote on the subject, on page 152 of his book *Akhronaflia*: "To finally close this sad chapter, I consider it my duty to say a couple of words about their end. At the start of the Occupation, Gakis received an order from the Volos organisation to join the resistance. Shortly afterwards, because of his skill and courage, the partisans recognised him as ELAS chief for the Pelion. But when Bartzotas and the others were freed from Sotirias<sup>9</sup>, and Ioannidis freed from Petras<sup>10</sup>, they sent an order to the Thessaloniki organisation to kill Gakis. They also killed Kapenis who they found in the region of Agrinion, where he was the EAM official for a village. They put out a rumour that ELAS had captured them while they were serving as soldiers in a German unit and that it had killed them. So, Bartzotas and Ioannidis did not leave them, even after the iniquitous death which they had reserved for them, to find a little rest in the soil of their country, where, I am sure, history will show that they struggled for the people and progress and that they died with full honours".

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<sup>9</sup> Sanatorium where the detainees were sent who were known to have tuberculosis.

<sup>10</sup> Same as 9.

In a footnote on the same page he adds: "In 1956, when I was locked up in the Alicarnassos prison, a venerable septuagenarian came to my cell one day. It was Yorgis Roghas, from Volos: 'I have come, comrade Yannis', he told me 'in the hope of going to find the Party one day and denouncing the tragedy that the putting to death of Gakis has been in the Pelion command.' He added that when the members of the command took up the defence of Gakis, several of them were murdered. The old man spoke after the Twentieth Congress and the Sixth Plenum<sup>11</sup>, which gave militants the right to speak for a little while".

I only knew Stamelakos and Gakis a long time ago. Stamelakos was the ordinary type of paternalist Stalinist. Neither better nor worse than others like him. Stavros Gakis was on the contrary incontestably a militant. I knew him in Thessaloniki in 1929. The political bureau had sent him there with P. Ikonomidis. He was devoted, active and competent militant.

### *Hostages of the Germans*

In April 1941, the Germans set themselves the task that the Italians could not accomplish: conquering the country<sup>12</sup>. They declared war on it and invoked the usual pretexts. Metaxas died<sup>13</sup>. The Prime Minister, Koryzis, committed suicide shortly after the German invasion. King George took on the presidency of the council himself. The armoured columns of Hitler moved forwards crushing all resistance. The dictatorship's generals surrendered and the army was disbanded. The New Zealanders<sup>14</sup> did not have the strength to contain the fascist columns which descended, sweeping aside everything in their path. The only thing they could do was to flee Greece as quickly as possible.

Nafplio was one of their ports of embarkation for the ships for Crete and Egypt. Each evening, under a complete black-out, the port filled up with transports and war ships which the New Zealand soldiers got onto. During the day, every day, swarms of German planes bombarded the port, the forts and the railway station. Some ships burned, others exploded.

Every day we lived a nightmare, in a permanent anguish about being blown to bits. But the situation was more favourable for our escape. In a state of panic, the camp garrison no longer left their improvised shelters. It was absolutely possible for us to escape, and without a single victim. The garrison, in the psychological state it was then in, would not have had the strength to oppose it.

We were always posing the question of our collective escape, everywhere finding an echo in the mass of detainees. It was the only subject of conversation. You heard it on all sides: "Why don't we flee? Are we going to wait for the Germans to come and take us?" The Stalinist detainees were exasperated by the passivity of their leadership. In response to the outcry the Stalinist leadership dispatched a committee to the camp governor to ask him to grant us our freedom. After endless discussions with him the committee, satisfied enough, told us that the governor had

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<sup>11</sup> Those of the CP of the USSR where Khrushchev denounced Stalin and the "cult of personality".

<sup>12</sup> The Greco-Italian front stabilised itself in Albania. Two months from the invasion of the USSR, Hitler had decided to lance the boil on his southern flank, all the more because the British had landed troops in Greece. He attacked on 6 April 1941, setting out from Bulgaria.

<sup>13</sup> From an illness, 29 January 1941.

<sup>14</sup> The New Zealanders were mostly in the British Expeditionary Force.

assured them that he would open the gates and let us go when the government had abandoned Athens. "It is, he said, the order that I have received from the Ministry of Security". To prove to the committee that the government was still in Athens he had put them in telephone contact with Maniadakis. Persuaded of the sincerity of the governor, the committee denounced proposals for escape as adventurist and dangerous, recommending calm, discipline, confidence in the leadership and... reinforcing the Stalinist guard so as to prevent any attempt at individual or collective flight.

This is what this committee, made up of men enjoying the absolute confidence of the party leadership, declared. But was it the truth? We believed it was then. We couldn't read the newspapers and had no means of knowing what was happening outside. Today we can be sure that everything in its communications was false. It was absolutely impossible, when the last New Zealand soldiers were getting onto the ships and running away, when Nafplio was being savagely bombarded, that the government could still be in Athens. Their supposed intervention with the governor to free us was a lie. The assurance received from the governor that he had the order to open the camp gates after the departure of the government from Athens was a lie. The telephone contact with Maniadakis was a lie. These were all lies that they had invented with the governor to prevent any escape.

Two or three days later German paratroops seized Nafplio. Armed, they surrounded the camp.

If the dictatorship is guilty once for handing us over to the Germans, the Stalinist leadership is guilty a hundred times. We want to make it clear here that the majority of the detainees of Akhronaflia were shot. None of the leading cadres were, because, evidently, everything was arranged for them to escape.

Their shameful and criminal attitude can first of all be explained by their fear of a probable confrontation with the garrison, but above all by the illusions which they harboured about the attitude of the Germans, who were still allies of the USSR at that time. They awaited them as friends, as their own.

Once, the mass of Stalinist detainees did become discontented and irritated with their bosses, who were so obviously responsible for handing them over to the Germans. But it didn't last long. The Stalinist leadership quickly persuaded them that the Germans would in any case free them. They believed it, there's no shadow of a doubt.

At the beginning of May, a few days after our handover to the Germans, two German officers and a dignitary from the Bulgarian embassy<sup>15</sup> came into the camp with a list of names of twenty seven "Slavo-Macedonians" and freed them. We all knew that these twenty seven were Communists. Those who made up the list, the Bulgarian embassy (more exactly, the Bulgarian security police) had assured the Germans, were not Communists but Slavo-Macedonian nationalists. This guarantee from the embassy was enough for them.

The Stalinist leadership felt no need to politically explain such a strange event and on the contrary they rejoiced in it, presenting it to the mass of detainees as proof on their part of the

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<sup>15</sup> Bulgaria, allied to Germany and Italy, had its own zone of occupation in the north-east of Greece.



good intentions of the Germans.

This had reinforced their certainty about a liberation in the near future and they had begun their preparations. Every day we were subjected to their aggressions and provocations: for us there was no question of their Hitlerian friends and allies liberating us. We all had to prepare ourselves for the firing squad. They spoke and conducted themselves as if they were from then on the masters or the associate masters, with the Germans, of the situation. Those reading these lines must understand that nothing is in the least bit exaggerated.

From the day that the German troops seized the country, all of us, the political prisoners, became hostages. They told us it, and we knew it. The collective executions must have started in 1942. The hostages were promised death, the Greek gendarmes guarded them and handed them over to their executioners on behalf of the occupation authorities.

The German paratroops only disarmed the camp garrison for a few hours. They very quickly agreed things with the governor. It wasn't difficult. There was only the obstacle of language between them. They found some interpreters and they found that, beyond the differences of speech, they spoke the same language. The gendarmes got back their arms, and the governor his position.

A lot has been written, more or less everywhere, about this dramatic period of the Occupation. We will confine ourselves to one point: the strict guard, very strict in fact, of the warehouses of goods for the army maintained by the Greek police. A guard against who? Against the Greek people. On behalf of who? The Germans. When a few people set about opening the warehouses at Kokkinia they were confronted by the guns of the police.

How many of the thousands of people who died of hunger in the terrible winter of 1941-1942 would have been saved if the population had been left free to share out the goods in the army warehouses and merchants' shops, after most of it had been taken by the Germans?

Some of those who describe, "with their pen drenched in tears", the shame, emotion, etc., who direct the people to the sight of the swastika flag floating over the Acropolis, present, filled with "national pride", the fact that there was no looting or vandalism as an example of civic responsibility.

### ***The attack against the USSR***

In June 1941, without any warning, Hitler abruptly unleashed his troops against the USSR. The Stalinists were struck dumb. Their hopes and dreams had flown away. In the communications of the first few days the German high command didn't give any concrete information. Not only did this lead to the most fantastic rumours being spread by word of mouth, but also the Stalinists circulated an information bulletin "from reliable sources" about the victories of the Russian army or the bombing of Berlin by hundreds of Russian planes. When the truth became known about the lightning advance of the Germans towards Moscow, the Caucasus, Leningrad, the millions of Russian prisoners, etc., the Stalinists remained paralysed. But they didn't waste any time in persuading themselves once again that all this could only be part of a brilliant plan by Stalin.

It goes without saying that the USSR and the Stalinist parties of the whole world then put a new record on. Hitler became the enemy of humanity. He aimed, by fire and iron, at the submission, the reduction to slavery, the annihilation of nations and peoples. Britain and France, from being imperialist states, were transformed into peace-loving democracies. From now on they defended civilisation, democracy and so on. Stalin dissolved the Communist International and Ioannidis, in Akronaflia, declared that this event was the “most important for the workers’ movement since the *Communist Manifesto*” (those who collect the comments of great men mustn’t forget this one).

The aggression of Hitler against the USSR was a painful surprise for the Stalinists of Akhronaflia. They incontestably believed that the alliance was solid and long-lasting, and perhaps even that the two partners in the Pact would dominate the world together. (...)

What was important for Hitler when he signed the pact was to protect his rear, in the East, so as to be able to launch his armies without danger against the West. Stalin gave a guarantee of his security and it is perhaps the first time in his life that he remained true to his word. (...)

Stalin guaranteed the security of the Eastern frontiers of Hitler, but he also supplied the aid necessary to his murderous work. Moreover he put the Communist parties at his disposal. An assistance surely unbelievable and un hoped for by Hitler.

The policy of the CPs at that time was to facilitate the work of Hitler, who they considered to be a faithful ally of Stalin. In France, the CP achieved this with its “*why*”. In every country they tried to do the same thing. In Greece as well this is what the CPG set out to do. Its manifesto of 2 May 1940 testifies to this. It declared very clearly that for its own safety, to preserve peace and its prosperity, the country must act like Bulgaria and Yugoslavia. But these two states, at that particular time, were allied to Hitler.

Another tragic event revealed the lying character of this fifth column policy (...). In Yugoslavia on 27 March 1941, the army and the people overthrew the regent and denounced the pact with Hitler<sup>16</sup>. The new government actually demanded aid and intervention from Russia. By way of aid Russia refuelled Goering’s aircraft so that they could reduce Belgrade to ashes.

### ***The debates in Akhronaflia***

Towards mid-1940, when a large enough number of members of the two Trotskyist groups which then existed found themselves in Akhronaflia, we decided to organise a debate on the most essential problems of the movement at that time: fascism, war, the defence of the USSR, the struggle on two fronts, the united front, etc.

The two groups were the Internationalist Communist Union and the Unified Organisation of Internationalist Communists. I belonged to the first one, Pouliopoulos to the second.

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<sup>16</sup> Yugoslavia, already in Hitler’s sphere of influence, only formally adhered to the Tripartite Pact (signed on 27 September 1940 by Germany, Italy and Japan) on 25 March 1941, which led to the overthrow of regent Paul and the government two days later.

These debates took place orally at common meetings and in written form in a bulletin which was circulated and read by all the members of the two groups. My own writings covered around five hundred pages, and those of Voursoukis, Krokko and Makris at least as much. It was possible to preserve all the bulletins and send them out of the camp. We confided our writings to a member of the Unified OIC to whom the other members of that group had already given theirs.

Almost forty years have passed and they have always been in their hands. During this whole period they have published and distributed a number of polemics by Pouliopoulos and others directed against us without making known our real opinions and, even worse, citing falsified and truncated passages from my articles. Militants and workers have therefore not had the right to learn for themselves what a group of revolutionaries stood for, in the most nightmarish conditions, in the camp of Akhronafli.

I have had in my hands for a little while, since 16 June 1977, the copy of two of my texts: *Our divergences with the Unified OIC* and *The USSR and the struggle for world revolution*. There is still a lot more of my studies and the whole of the articles and studies of Voursoukis, Krokko and Makris. These three militants are dead. The first one was murdered by the Stalinists and the two others were executed by the Germans. The Trotskyists themselves also did the work of the executioners. They executed their ideas.

These debates don't only have a historic interest. The problems that we tackled then continue to have a vital importance for the revolutionary movement. We are publishing the essential points of these two studies<sup>17</sup>.

We then also belonged to the Fourth International and we considered ourselves as Trotskyists. The reader will notice that, if we use in one way or another the same traditional terminology and refer to the principles of the Fourth International and Trotsky to defend the correctness of our ideas, our conclusions and the tasks that we set ourselves are diametrically opposed to them. We believed ourselves to be orthodox and consistent Trotskyists and that the opportunists and more or less social-patriotic ideas of the Unified OIC were foreign to the principles and programme of the Fourth International. Subsequent events have demonstrated the contrary. The OIC only expressed and defended the ideas of the Fourth International and Trotsky. Social-patriotism, opportunism, and the most incredible confusion existed in their "principles" and their "programme". The essential thing for us was that, during the war, in those conditions where the endurance and the firmness of individuals and organisations are subjected to trial by fire, the Fourth International crumbled to dust. Its sections, almost in their totality, whether because of the slogan of defence of the USSR, whether because of the supposed progressive character of the movements of national resistance, found themselves on the side of the Socialist and Communist Parties, in the service of the world's executioners.

## ***Famine***

The camp had some stocks of flour when the German occupation began. So for the first months

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<sup>17</sup> These two texts are published at the end of this volume [i.e. the French edition].

we had bread and it wasn't too difficult for us to find dried beans. But the stocks became exhausted. The camp administrators told us straight out that they couldn't do anything for our subsistence, that they had nothing. The Germans and the Italians had stated from the beginning that they had no responsibility for our supplies and that they had no obligation in that regard. We had to get by on our own.

This event is not very well-known and it seems that those who speak and write about Akhronaflia haven't given it much importance. We were prisoners or hostages. They had locked us up in a strictly guarded prison building, awaiting the firing squads. Those who had locked us up and those who guarded us and those for whom they guarded us declared that they were in no way concerned with our subsistence. We were condemned to death by hunger. I am not aware, and in any case I have not read or heard anything about, whether a similar situation has any precedent.

In the beginning we managed to get a large enough amount of beans and potatoes from Tripolis, but without oil or bread, and without salt. But all this disappeared from the market very quickly. We sent out SOS calls in all directions. Those who had family or relations in the villages wrote to them to ask for help. From Macedonia there came to Nafplio whole "convoys", as they were called by those leading them, of horses and mules laden with household utensils and foodstuffs, primarily wheat flour, *trachanas*<sup>18</sup>, pasta etc. Most of the people were originally from Pontus<sup>19</sup>. They showed the greatest solidarity. Undoubtedly these people are among the best.

Once every twenty four hours we would eat some dry beans or some noodles, without oil or salt. Often we remained completely unfed. Two or three times, we rose up, desperately, and the Italians<sup>20</sup> gave us some pasta.

Hunger reduced us to wrecks. Discussions had stopped. We remained sprawled on our beds so as not to use up calories and we were no longer capable of thinking of anything but the next mid-day, of our next handful of chickpeas, *trachanas* or gruel. Something peculiar: those who had gastric problems were cured. When, two or three times, a handful of olives made up the whole of our meal, some of those who had solid teeth collected the stones and, transforming their mouths into a grinding mill, ate them. This included those who had previously suffered from stomach problems and had been on a light diet.

I will mention here two facts which say a lot about the gendarmes, our compatriots, and the Italians, the foreigners, and about human and class solidarity. The Italian soldiers often passed or threw us cigarettes from the top of the walls which dominated the square. Because they weren't short of them. The sympathy and the pity could be read on their faces. You could say that perhaps they were Communists. But with the following episode we are talking about fascists.

I had to sign a document, and for that I had to go down into the town to find a notary. I received authorisation. The gendarmes who escorted me had kept my handcuffs on during the journey, but also at the notary's place, so that I couldn't sign. Two Italian soldiers, with the uniform and

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<sup>18</sup> A dried up gruel of semolina and milk curd.

<sup>19</sup> i.e. the Greeks of Pontus (Black Sea Region) expelled in 1922 who had been established in Macedonia.

<sup>20</sup> Nafplio, with the Peloponnese, made up part of the occupation zone of the Italians.

insignia of the fascists, watched the scene. Furious, they came forcefully into the office, showered the gendarmes with abuse, and made them take off the handcuffs. When they left one of them tapped me amicably on the shoulder and said: "*Signore, tutti i uomini siamo fratelli*" ["Sir, all men are brothers"].

What is said about this by the Greeks who never stop talking about their common history, national solidarity and all that blather?

### ***The hungry camp nevertheless had its well-fed occupants***

Six hundred men were condemned to death by starvation, apart from certain detainees who never knew famine: the cadres of the CPG.

With the authorisation of the governor they were assembled in a special wing, an extension of the Second. They had opened a door between the two sections and fifteen or twenty of them went through it under the pretext that they were ill. They were also exempted from forced labour.

These gentlemen did not know hunger and they ate plenty and well. Two or three times a day the orderlies passed by the multitude of their starving supporters who lay on their beds with covered plates of I don't know what delicacies destined for the chiefs. We knew that to attain the heights of the Stalinist hierarchy you had to abdicate any human sentiment (if you had any), but didn't they take account of the impression that this cynical provocation would produce on the mass of their supporters? No. The masses had to learn that only the cadres and the chiefs were called upon to survive. And, judging from their attitude, they seem to have assimilated, integrated and become habituated to that. Perhaps never have slave owners had such a contempt for the life and dignity of their slaves, and the slaves supported such contempt and degradation on the part of their masters.

### ***The International Red Cross in the camp***

In December 1941 an International Red Cross steamer full of provisions destined for the camp dropped anchor in the port. Hundreds of sacks of beans were transported from its holds to the camp stores. The representatives of the IRC told us that, taking account of our number, they had themselves fixed a ration of 225 grams per individual per day, and assured us that, well before they ran out, the steamer would return again to the port with new provisions.

The Red Cross nuns visited us in the cells and themselves distributed raisins, biscuits, blankets and, above all, pullovers. Humanity, nobility, gentleness and kindness lit up their faces. What a contrast between these brave women believers and the Bolsheviks that the "leaders" had designated to escort them, and who stood at their sides, rude, severe, ferocious. They asked the questions and gave the responses, because no one other than them had the right to speak. "We are not a herd", "whoever you are you can't say anything without it being approved by the top", "that is what Lenin and Stalin taught us" etc.

One of the nuns was from Corfu. Getting around the restrictions, I asked her if she knew what

was happening in Corfu. She replied that the situation was even worse than in the rest of Greece, because the Ionian Islands, annexed by Italy, were not considered as occupied, and the Italian government had not authorised the Red Cross to provide aid.

The pullovers had been knitted by the women, particularly the village women, for the soldiers. After the debacle, those which were left had been given to the Red Cross. Most of them had a coin and a little greeting card stitched into a corner. In the one I received there was a twenty drachma piece and the card said "God be with you".

***By way of a gift, the Stalinist gangsters attack us***

The Red Cross representatives had clearly declared, in front of all of us, that they had themselves fixed our daily ration at 225 grams per person. But from the day of their departure, the well-fed Stalinist leadership, in concert with the governor, decided to reduce it to 130 grams, arguing that this was war and that it was possible that the Red Cross, despite what was said, would be late and that we had to have reserves.

We protested immediately and very energetically. The donations of the IRC were to be shared out honestly to each one of us, and it wasn't the business of either the camp authorities or that of the Group. We kicked up a real fuss, threatening to immediately telegraph the IRC.

This was the first of two incidents which provoked a savage aggression of the Stalinist thugs against us. The second was the refusal of Voursoukis to do his forced labour.

On the New Year's Eve of 1942, the chief of the wing told Voursoukis that he would be doing forced labour the next day. He told the chief that there must be an error, that his turn hadn't come yet. We knew the response in advance: that the 15-20 people in the special wing were ill and exempt from work. And Voursoukis and all of us explained that these gentlemen were in very good health, ate well, had their comforts and that they even did their exercises every morning. If they need to be served they can contact an employment agency and take on a maid from outside. We were not disposed to serve them as domestics. They persisted and provoked a series of incidents.

On New Year's Day (a memorable day) were formed a committee to go and discuss and protest with Aridas, the secretary of the Group in the second wing. We had not even opened our mouths when a mass of thugs, already gathered around Aridas, threw themselves on us screaming. The attack spread to all the wings. The camp was turned upside down. Our revolt was so serious for them that they had not taken account either of the garrison nor of the Italians who were in the offices of the camp authority. It has to be said that they were hardly afraid of any intervention from that side. The risk was really very serious for them: our constant demands for food and our "lack of respect" for the well-fed scumbags of the special wing risked making the mechanism of the robots seize up.

They "sat" quickly and took the decision to exclude us from the Self-help Group. Their decision was read out in a very official tone in the wings by "Death's Head" (Lykouris).

For sure the governor heard all the noise. The next day he called Pouliopoulos and I to his office. He knew all about us. And he was violently hostile to us. Above all it was because we were not patriots like the others. We had not signed the Stalinist petition to be mobilised and sent to the front to defend the fatherland. We had also refused to participate in the celebrations of 25 March and, during a theatrical presentation of the Group which was attended by the governor and other “officials”, when everybody was set to sing the national anthem, we stood up to leave singing the *Internationale*. The affair of the provisions had brought his exasperation against us to its height. He entirely rejected any responsibility for any incidents against us because, as was reported to him and as he himself could testify, we were not disciplined and did not respect the rules of the camp, and what’s more we wanted to eat all the beans so that the camp wouldn’t have any reserves (provocation). He added that the hatred of the Stalinists against us was justified because we were anarchists and had no country. We replied that this hatred of which we were the object was a great honour for us, and proved the correctness of our ideas and our policy. Their hatred is the same as that of exploiters and the privileged against revolutionaries. Finally, he told us that for his tranquillity and ours he would send us to another wing. Thus we were sent somewhere else. And with us the archeiomarxists, Seitanidis, Iliadis and two of those who were ostracised.

For sure we took all the provisions to which we had a right, down to the last gram. But we didn’t have any cooking utensils. The Stalinists refused to give us what there was, despite the fact that the Group’s utensils had been bought with our money. Finally, as best we could, we managed to procure an incredible collection of oddments. Then we had to find a cook. The first to offer himself was Paraskevas. He had, he told us, knowledge, practice and skill. More as a joke than to check his skill, we asked him if you proceed in the same manner for pasta, dry beans and fresh beans. He answered straight away, without the slightest embarrassment, “No”: you immediately put pasta and fresh beans into cold water before heating them up. Whereas, on the contrary, when you throw dry beans into the saucepan the water must be boiling. Finally, it was Makris, a cake shop worker, who was put in charge of the kitchen.

225 grams of beans, even without bread, without oil and without salt, is better than nothing, and it satisfied our hunger, after so many months of clear soup from the Self-help Group.

### ***In the transfer section of Piraeus***

When the occupation authorities decided to empty Akhronafliia and to transfer the detainees elsewhere, they began with us. The reason for this preference was that the place where we were locked up had not been intended to serve as a prison. This was lucky for us. If we had remained a bit longer at Akhronafliia, none of us would have survived. A little after our transfer, the first collective execution of camp detainees was carried out as reprisals<sup>21</sup>.

Of the seven who were then executed by the Italians, four would have been executed in any case by the Stalinists: Seitanidis, adversary of the CPG since 1924, Thoïdis, Tsourtsoulis et Kastanias, all three excluded from the CPG and placed in permanent quarantine. Who made this selection? Was it by chance? The three others were Berketis, Anagnostopoulos and Koskinas. There was only one logical explanation: this selection was made by the leadership of the camp and the

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<sup>21</sup> The reprisals of the Germans and the Italians against the actions of the partisans.

Stalinist leadership together. If we had still been there the governor would not have needed to ask the Stalinists who to hand over to the Italians for the firing squad. He knew who they had designated, those who he had already isolated as anarchists, agitators and people with no country, and he would have them ready for the first batch.

In mid-March 1942 they ordered our transfer to Piraeus. We had an appalling journey from Nafplio to Piraeus, tied up and packed tightly like sardines in a lorry. The behaviour of the gendarmes in our escort (Greek gendarmes in the service of the occupation authorities) was bestial. (...)

(...) They handed us over to the transfer section and we were locked up in the cells. There, for the first time, we saw with our own eyes the atrocious drama that the people lived in the first period of the Occupation. It wasn't men who occupied the cells, but skeletons, shadows, human ghosts. Most, if not all of them, were accused of stealing from the occupation authorities. But no one was a professional thief. At that time everyone stole. The visitors had the same ghostly aspect. In the arms of the women who came to see their detained husbands there was nothing but a pile of bones. One could only distinguish in this little pile two big eyes filled with distress and reproach. Reproach towards the great executioners who had bloodied the whole country in such a small amount of time, but also towards the whole of humanity which had tolerated it, reproach for the generations and centuries to come.

Each time the wife of an imprisoned baker appeared in the visitor's room, all the detainees, from behind the barred openings, cried out: "Madam baker, just a crumb of bread!" From a plate of beans (without oil, obviously) that you were passing to someone a bit of broth (that is to say, cold water) fell onto the foul ground while they were passing it through the grill of the cell. Everyone immediately fell on the ground to lick it up. Every day people died of hunger. The corpses were dragged away by their feet, to where the municipal lorry collected them, like so much rubbish.

Many days later, perhaps on the intervention of the Red Cross, every twenty four hours they gave us half a ladle of a soup whose colour made you think of maize, but it wasn't. Some said it was the shavings of a tree from Ethiopia. In any case, we threw away more than we ate.

An Armenian lay on the same blanket as a boy from Chios, in the darkest corner of the cell. At mid-day, as well as his half-ladle of soup, he took that of his friend from Chios who, he told us, couldn't get up. It's only when he began to stink that we realised that he had been dead for several hours. Once, they brought to us three people who had stolen, killed and eaten a donkey. They all died in a few hours.

Lice swarmed. (...)

We must have been something like seventy political prisoners. In addition to us, who came from Akhronaflia, some exiles arrived from the islands of Folegandros and Gavdos, all Stalinists, apart from Tamtakos, who was a member of our organisation. The occupation authorities had decided to gather together all the politicals at Haïdari and Larissa. But the camps were still not ready and that's why they provisionally kept us in the transfer section of Piraeus. A provisional arrangement which lasted a long time. We stayed in that hell until mid-July 1942, that is more than three months. We protested continuously and the Red Cross transmitted our protests to the occupation



authorities and the government. They finally decided, while waiting for the camps to be ready, to send us to various police stations in Evia<sup>22</sup>. The whole time we were in Piraeus, comrades outside visited us every day, morning and afternoon, bringing us whatever provisions they had managed to gather. It is thus that a contact was re-established which had been broken for some years.

Tamtakos managed to escape. An escape organised in a very intelligent fashion – several days passed before the gaoler was aware of it. But he and the gendarmes then became enraged. As well as insults, swearing and threats, they took measures to make our lives more difficult. Yet the Greek gendarmes knew that we were hostages at the disposal of the Germans and generally destined for the firing squad.

When Voursoukis tried to flee and failed, because the waiter in the section café knew about it and informed the gendarmes, they beat him and locked him up in handcuffs. Pouliopoulos and Yannakos had been admitted to hospital.

### ***In Evia***

In mid-July we were on our way to the railway station, around seventy political prisoners, tied up and escorted by a crowd of gendarmes. In the morning they had taken us for disinfection in the bath and the steam room, but when the commander of the escort gave the order to leave, our clothes were still in the steam room. We retrieved them as best we could and wore them crumpled and sopping wet.

Some horrible wagons were waiting for us at the station. We protested and refused from the start to board, but when we saw a detachment of Germans preparing their machine guns, we hurriedly got into them. They shut us up in the wagons in the unbearable heat of July, and only opened them again on arrival at Halkida.

There, in the transfer section, during the formalities of handover and reception, some of us suggested that the bugs in the cells could be counted in millions and that we risked being “devoured” by them. We asked the sergeant-gaoler to remain in the courtyard and to let us lie down there. Faced with his refusal, we refused in turn to enter the cells and grappled with the gendarmes. Remboutsikas gave the sergeant a punch in the head which knocked him back two metres. Finally, they made us enter by force and locked us up thanks to the intervention of armed Italian mountain troops. The bugs didn't wait for the night to throw themselves on us in their thousands. (...)

Yet, apart from the bugs and the beastliness of the sergeant, our stay in the transfer section of Halkida didn't pass too badly. Of course the section didn't give us anything to eat, and it was impossible to find what there was in the market. But the bishop of Halkida took care of that and we received a large enough quantity of peas every day. We cooked them ourselves and ate them. Skarimbass<sup>23</sup> came to visit the section. He saluted us one by one with a great deal of emotion, recommending courage and patience to us and gave each of us a packet of cigarettes and a box of

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<sup>22</sup> A big island in the Aegean Sea connected to the continent by a movable bridge next to Halkida.

<sup>23</sup> A well known poet and writer of the left.

matches.

At the end of July we were transferred to various police stations on Evia. They sent me to the one at Konistres, a village around an hour from Kimi, possessing a telephone and telegraph and a few shops. It was in some way the commercial centre of the region. Each Sunday there was a fruit and beans market.

The inhabitants behaved well towards me, as did the sergeant and the gendarmes. With the sergeant's permission I rented a room, and on the order of the bishop of Karystos they gave me the same ration that the International Red Cross provided for children: gruel and raisins almost every day.

I established friendly relations with a barber from Piraeus who lived with his brother-in-law, an old atheist and two close sympathisers, one from the same village, the other from Passas, a little village inhabited almost entirely by workers in the lignite mines. They competed as to who could provide me with the most raisins and figs.

I passed my days in discussion with them, often openly, in the café. The sergeant was tolerant and didn't care. The old man (who was called Mitsos Karalis) was famous. He knew very little about the revolutionary movement but he was a convinced atheist and he'd read a lot, particularly the authors that Marx and Engels had described as vulgar materialists (Büchner, etc.).

Bishop Panteleimon of Karystos (who then lived in Kimi) had taken on a real affection for all the exiles of the region. In addition to organising the provisions and medicines of the IRC, with which he helped the exiles and condemned men, he also seems to have been linked to the Allied secret services. A short time after our escape he also left for Egypt and returned with the government<sup>24</sup> and the Rimini brigade<sup>25</sup> as the Metropolitan of the armed forces. In the persons of these two bishops, that of Halkida and that of Karystos, we had known two men who demonstrated affection, sympathy and real concern for us. Kordatos and Dante were wrong when they placed them completely on the side of reaction, for one, and completely in Hell, for the other.

### ***The escape***

In mid-October, after two and a half months of staying in Konistres, I decide to escape. I made it known to my friends and to the bishop. He suggested that I travel to the Middle East and hide myself in a secure place and wait. I refused, but without revealing my disagreements with the patriots. He gave me sufficient beans that I could set out with a full stomach. Apart from that, after having stabbed my leg with a needle so that you could believe it was a dog bite, this generous priest signed and sealed a letter in which it was written: "I have been bitten by a rabid dog and I must immediately be presented at the anti-rabies centre". "You will show this document in case of a raid" he told me "I have predated it so as to make the danger more pressing and therefore the treatment more urgent". He hugged me and wished me *bon voyage* and good luck. It

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<sup>24</sup> The Greek government in exile, which was in Cairo.

<sup>25</sup> The Greek brigade formed in Egypt which participated in fighting in Italy in 1943-1944, notably in the taking of Rimini.

wasn't necessary to show the paper. But I was profoundly moved by the ingenuity and audaciousness of this bishop.

I sent a note to Voursoukis, Makris and Krokko telling them in advance of my decision, according to the agreed manner and calling on them to do the same. Voursoukis escaped the same day as me. Makris and Krokko, I don't know why, didn't escape. Two days afterwards they were transferred, like all those who didn't escape, to Larissa, and were later executed: Makris at Kournovo on 22 June 1943 and Krokko on 1 May 1944 at Kaisariani. Soulas, Xypolytos and Mitsis, members of the Unified ICO, didn't escape either. They met the same fate. Xypolytos was executed at Kournovo, and Mitsis and Soulas at Kaisariani.

It has been said enough times that comrades in Athens provided us with money and false papers. This is a lie as far as we are concerned. Not only did we not receive them, but those who did receive them did not even feel obliged to inform us that a collective escape was prepared. It is entirely by chance that our own escape happened at the same time.

I took to the road later, after midnight. After two and a half days walking with bare feet I arrived in Thiva. The whole time I only fed myself with a half eaten quince and the skin of a watermelon. I scanned the already picked vines in the hope of finding just one bunch of grapes. But in vain. Who knows how many had already been there before me. The journey from Halkida to Thiva was more tiring than that from Konistres to Halkida. A little after Halkida, the Thiva road is straight and interminable, for kilometres and kilometres, without a single tree by the side or even a telegraph pole for shade to rest under. I suffered terribly from the sun and from thirst, my tongue stuck and my breathing short. This agony lasted for hours. It is a miracle that I didn't collapse from sunstroke on the way.

I had not foreseen this danger when I left, otherwise I would have taken a bottle of water and something to protect my head from the sun. From Konistres to Halkida, the road had been pleasant and I had always been able to rest in the shade, in that tropical vegetation in the south and centre of Evia. Water was always abundant. But there was nothing to eat. The only thing that I feared when I set out was crossing the Halkida bridge. I knew that the carabinieri carried out checks very strictly, and I supposed that this would be reinforced even more, in one way or another, when the exiles' collective escape had become known. On the dawn of the third day of my escape, arriving in view of the carabinieri post, I prepared the paper which the bishop had given me. But no one stopped me or asked for anything. I greeted them and they greeted me. "*Bongiorno Siniori, bongiorno Siniore*", and I passed.

At the road blocks, the Italians, like the Germans, only checked the buses and lorries and those on board. They didn't pay any attention to pedestrians, particularly pedestrians like me who had bare feet and were dressed only in ragged trousers. At Thiva, I drank my fill of water and never has any drink seemed to me to be so sweet and delicious. Midday was long gone when I climbed into an old lorry which was going to Athens. Arriving at Dafni, where there was a German check point, I got off and set out on foot for Piraeus. I hoped to go to the house of the barber I had known in Konistres. We had talked about my escape and he had given me the address of his house. He had left Konistres a few days before and was in Piraeus.

It began to get dark. The road seemed interminable to me. I walked for hours, without knowing

how to get my bearings, with the impression of being completely lost, in the total darkness imposed by the black-out, at an hour when it was strictly forbidden by the occupation authorities to be out of doors. I groped my way from wall to wall, avoiding even the back roads for fear of falling upon a German or a police patrol. I stopped at each instant and put my ear to the ground to listen for possible foot steps, remembering that they had told me to do that in the army. It must have been well past midnight when, without having met a living soul, I finally arrived in Kastella, at the address that I had been given by my friend from Konistres.

Even today I still can't explain how I managed, in that darkness, to go from Dafni to Kastella. I had never made that journey before. I advanced like a sleep-walker, without trying to orient myself consciously. Did instinct guide me? There are such aspects of ourselves that we can't explain. I knocked. A man appeared at the window, I told him who I was looking for and, to my misfortune, he told me that the barber had moved house a few days before. I thought for a moment to tell him who I was and ask him for asylum for one evening. But I was too late. Terrorised, he had already shut the window.

In despair I headed towards Faliro. On the way I saw a rather large isolated house, surrounded by a low wall. I climbed over it and jumped inside. An enormous dog ran to me, but without even opening its mouth. I stroked it and a little later my eyes closed with the dog in my arms. I woke up early in the morning and set out on foot for Athens. The only address which I remembered after so many years was that of a comrade who kept a cake shop in Kypseli. I found her and she led me to another friend's house where, for the first time in months, I ate a well cooked meal in someone's home. There they gave me socks, shoes and a jacket and they told me where I could find Tamtakos and the other comrades, and I went to find them.

Then began a life and an action which belonged to history and which will remain immortal, despite all those who try to cover them up or discredit them.

## **Chapter 6**

# **In the Struggle for Socialist Revolution**

(the first third plus an additional small section)

### ***The reconstitution of the group***

We, the militants who were in Athens (all those who escaped: Tamtakos, Voursoukis, Aravantinos, Rigas, Kallergis, Stinas) got together the next day and reconstituted the group. Our position in regard to the EAM and its army, as toward the nationalist movement in general, was strictly determined by our position in the face of imperialist war. There was no divergence there at all.

Two days later, with a typewriter and a duplicator which we had managed to get hold of, Tamtakos and I worked all night on printing the first publication of the group, in a hovel in Aigaleo. This was without exaggeration the first clear and limpid voice of socialist revolution in the nightmarish conditions of the second imperialist war, perhaps not only in Greece but in the whole world.

Our voice found an echo. Rapidly, old militants and young workers and students gathered under our flag. Those who were dispersed in the provinces descended on Athens, beginning with Tsoukas.

Our activity became bigger every day. Tracts, flyers circulated by the thousand. Slogans covered the walls. The cries of the *khonia*<sup>1</sup> resounded in the night. People heard, saw and read other slogans than those that they had come to expect from the Stalinists and other nationalist organisations. In place of the slogans of nationalist hatred were those immortal slogans of fraternisation between peoples, of the transformation of the fratricidal war between peoples into a war of peoples against their exploiters. The workers read the wall slogans and the tracts with an undeniable sympathy: "It is capitalism in its entirety which is responsible for the carnage, devastation and chaos, and not just one of the two sides!"; "Fraternisation of peoples and soldiers against the executioners who are killing the peoples!"; "Fraternisation of Greek workers and Italian and German soldiers in the common struggle for socialism!"; "National unity is nothing but the submission of the workers to their exploiters!"; "Only the overthrow of capitalism will save world peace!"; "Long live the world socialist revolution!"...

At the end of the fourth or fifth month, the group got hold of some typographical characters and a hand press. Its journal, *Workers' Front*, its tracts and its leaflets were printed from then on. Its voice, the voice of revolution, resounded in all the working class districts of Athens, Piraeus and Thessaloniki. A voice loud and clear.

During all that period of intense activity of the group, Mastr. and Sm., two old proletarian militants who had not previously belonged to our tendency, joined it and were on its central committee. Apart from the escapees, such as Thymios and Stam., all the members were young, boys and girls. Kids of eighteen went from the EPON<sup>2</sup> and the school benches into our ranks in the full understanding of what they were doing, in full understanding of the ideas and the risks. They came to fight and die with us. The enthusiasm, the audacity, the self-sacrifice of these young people, was something we had only known in revolutions.

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<sup>1</sup> "Funnel", an improvised megaphone which enabled night time speeches to be made from the roof tops.

<sup>2</sup> Panhellenic Organisation of Youth, the youth organisation of EAM.

The internal life of the group was absolutely democratic, with regular weekly assemblies where we gave an account of our activity and criticised it, and where we decided future activity. Decisions were the result of real collective debate. And everybody applied them without distinction or exception. When the number of members grew, rendering the assemblies practically impossible in the absolute clandestinity in which we lived, representative conferences were held regularly, preceded by free debates. There was a publication committee for the journal, but every member could write in it.

Today we know that no other group in the world defended the principles of revolutionary defeatism with such clarity, courage and intransigence during the nightmare of the second imperialist carnage. Without doubt no other group had displayed an activity similar to, or on the same scale as, ours in conditions where death dogged our every step. We had been the only political group in the whole world who, in conditions infinitely more difficult and more dangerous than in 1914-1918, had continued the heroic tradition of Luxemburg and Liebknecht.

The intellectual, moral and psychological situation of the popular masses was at the time very different from what we had known under the Metaxas dictatorship and in spring 1942, in the transfer section of Piraeus.

Under the dictatorship, from one end of the country to the other, up until the Italian invasion, the masses had fallen into passivity and indifference. Fear ruled the land. Fear had literally paralysed those who, linked in one way or another to the movement in the past, hadn't been put under surveillance or arrested by the Security Police, as it paralysed the *dilosias*\*. Whenever they happened to come across us they always had some exceptionally important work to do and did not have time to discuss. Twice I asked old comrades and friends to give me a place to stay for two or three days, at the time when we were checking if our house was under surveillance, but they refused both times. It is very easy to find excuses to justify their fear in front of their conscience. That state which the "ex-revolutionaries" had fallen into provoked more pity and disgust among us than indignation.

During the winter of 1941-1942 Athens and Piraeus were only populated by human wrecks, in the moral as well as physical sense. Human skeletons who begged, who cried and who died.

We knew the situation in those two towns. Those images were engraved in our brains. When, in the transfer section of Halkis, we discussed probable occasions when we could escape, some people, quite a few, said: "To go where? To do what? Beg? But who from?" Some of those comrades didn't escape because of this, when they could have done so. They stayed, to quickly find themselves in Larissa and Haïdari. And from there to Kournovo and to the firing squads of Kaisariani.

But what we, the escapees, found in Athens was very different from what we thought we'd find there.

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\* Literally, "the declarers" – those political prisoners who had signed a document renouncing communism in return for their freedom during the Metaxas dictatorship (1936-41) – *Translators Note*

The economic situation had improved slightly. Nobody was dying of hunger anymore. The International Red Cross had organised soup kitchens for everyone. Each person, without exception or distinction, had a plate of beans or gruel every day at noon. The bakeries gave out a few grams of bread every day with a ration card. On Athens' streets, in Monastiraki and elsewhere, you could find raisins, tinned food and other foodstuffs on stalls in the open air. The smokers could supply themselves with the tobacco of their choice, loose or in cigarettes, in open air "shops". Some restaurants and tavernas were open and you could find something there. The black market also provided some not bad delicacies for those who could pay in gold pounds.

Prices rose day by day. The Bank issued currency daily, and almost every day it added more zeroes to the notes. A one drachma note became a ten, a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand, a hundred thousand, a million etc. The first word of a "merchant" coming to sell something was "I don't have any small change". That is to say thousand drachma notes. Two days later, or even the next day, it meant ten thousand drachmas. And so it went.

The economic situation had changed, but also, first of all, the people themselves. People had got back on their feet. They found themselves again, and with that their dignity, their courage and their determination to fight. And everyone knew that this time it wasn't the *phalanga* or castor oil which awaited them, but the firing squad. Nobody was afraid though. Young people and women in particular displayed an unbelievable contempt for danger. In fact danger and death was normal. Even the "former", the "ex", and the *dilosias* became fighters again. How people change! Who can give a logical explanation for this phenomenon of the metamorphosis of cowards into heroes, so common in history and which is so decisive in peoples' struggles for their emancipation?

Organisations were created. Duplicated or printed journals were circulated clandestinely. Slogans covered the walls and the asphalt of the street. Groups of partisans had already appeared in the mountains. Strikes broke out. Demonstrations were organised.

We found ourselves there at the beginning, and what characterised that period was the selfless solidarity of everyone towards everyone else, independent of political differences, and the free debates on the content, forms and methods of struggle. Alas, that period didn't last long.

### ***Marxism and the Nation***

The nation is a product of history, like the tribe, the family, the city. It has a necessary historic role and must disappear when that is fulfilled.

The class bearing that social organisation is the bourgeoisie. The national state coincides with the state of the bourgeoisie, and historically, the progressive work of the nation and of capitalism joined together to create, with the development of the productive forces, the material conditions for socialism.

That progressive work came to an end with the epoch of imperialism, of the great imperialist powers, with their antagonisms and their wars.



The nation has fulfilled its historic mission. Henceforth wars of national liberation and bourgeois-democratic revolutions make no sense.

Proletarian revolution is now the order of the day. It doesn't create or maintain nations and borders but abolishes them and unites all the peoples of the earth in a global community.

The defence of the nation and the fatherland are in our era nothing other than the defence of imperialism, of the social system which provokes wars, which cannot live without war and which leads humanity to chaos and barbarism. This is as true for the big imperialist powers as it is for the little nations, whose ruling classes can only be accomplices and associates of the great powers.

“At this time socialism is the only hope for humanity. Above the ramparts of the capitalist world which is finally crumbling, shining in letters of fire are the words of the *Communist Manifesto* : socialism or the fall into barbarism.” (R Luxemburg, 1918)

Socialism is a matter for the workers of the whole world, and the terrain of its creation extends across the globe. The struggle for the overthrow of capitalism and for the setting up of socialism unites all the workers of the world. Geography fixes a division of labour: the immediate enemy of the workers in each country is their own ruling class. It is their sector of the international front of struggle of the workers to overthrow world capitalism.

If the toiling masses of each country are not conscious that they form just one section of a global class, they will never be able to set out on the road of their social emancipation.

It is not sentimentalism which makes the struggle for socialism in a given country an integral part of the struggle for a world socialist society, but the impossibility of socialism in one country. The only “socialism” in national colours and national ideology that history has given us is that of Hitler, and the only national “communism” that of Stalin.

The struggle inside the country against the ruling class and solidarity with the toiling masses of the whole world, such are the two fundamental principles of the movement of the popular masses for their economic, political and social liberation in our time. It's the same for “peace” as for war.

War between peoples is fratricide. The only just war is that waged by peoples who fraternise across nations and borders against their exploiters.

The task of revolutionaries, in times of “peace” as in times of war, is to help the masses to become conscious of the ends and means of their movement, to rid themselves of the domination of the political and union bureaucracies, to take their own affairs into their own hands, to have no confidence in any other “leadership” than that of the executive organs which they have elected themselves and which they can revoke at any moment, to acquire consciousness of their own political responsibility and first and foremost to emancipate themselves intellectually from the national and patriotic mythology.

These are the principles of revolutionary marxism as Rosa Luxemburg formulated them and applied them practically and which guided her politics and her action during the First World War.

Those principles guided our politics and our action in the Second World War.

We are going to measure and appreciate the politics and action of the EAM under the Occupation with the help of some definitions and landmarks.

***Extracts from the reports of the group at the unification congress of the Trotskyists in July 1946***

2. The “Resistance Movement”, that is to say the struggle against the Germans in all its forms, from sabotage to guerrilla warfare, in the occupied countries, cannot be considered outside the context of imperialist war, of which it is an integral part. Its progressive or reactionary character cannot be determined by the participation of the masses, nor by its anti-fascist objectives nor by the oppression by German imperialism, but in terms of the reactionary or progressive character of the war.

ELAS like EDES<sup>3</sup> were armies who continued the war against the Germans and Italians inside the country. That alone strictly determines our position in regard to them. To participate in the resistance movement, under whatever slogans and justifications, means to participate in the war.

Independently of the attitudes of the masses and the intentions of its leadership, this movement, because of the war which it conducts in the conditions of the second imperialist massacre, is an organ and appendage of the Allied imperialist camp. (...)

4. All the actions of the EAM in Greece were profoundly reactionary. By its whole policy, with all its forces, it ruined the spirit and the class consciousness of the workers. It excited the masses against the Germans and also excited the German soldiers against them, rendering their fraternisation with the Greek workers impossible. The majority of killings of Germans had no other result than to provoke ferocious reprisals from the occupation authorities which in turn provoked the population even more. In no way did it dare to interfere with individual property or to defend the elementary interests of the poor peasants against their exploiters. On the contrary, it was on the best terms with the rich peasants and the Church, and in the regions where it dominated, with its legislation and its armed forces, it zealously upheld the protection of property, the family, religion and “morality”.

Political reforms, democratic freedoms, self-administration, popular tribunals, the elections of the PEEA<sup>4</sup>, etc., were so much deception and farce.

The organisational structure of the EAM like that of the ELAS was purely military, and the most severe discipline reigned. Any initiative coming from the base was impossible, and those who were murdered because they had the courage to express some sort of objection can be counted in the hundreds. Their hatred was aimed from the start at any critique, any manifestation of the left.

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<sup>3</sup> The National Democratic (or Republican) League of Zervas.

<sup>4</sup> Greek initials of the Political Committee of National Liberation, the government formed in 1944 by EAM. The PEEA organised clandestine legislative elections across the whole territory in April 1944. But they only had one candidate per district, that of EAM.

Thousands of non-commissioned officers, officers and commanding officers, active or reservist, from the army, from the navy, from the air force and the police entered ELAS. The cadres of EAM in the towns were in the great majority of cases petty bourgeois nationalists. The composition of the National Council (the Parliament of EAM which met in May 1944 in Koryschades<sup>5</sup>), according to information given by Siantos, was the following: 4 university professors, 1 teacher in a higher business school, 8 generals, 23 workers (of the Siantos, Kalomiris, Stratis or Mariolis type<sup>6</sup>), 5 private employees, 20 officials and employees of banks and public services, 5 industrialists, 23 peasants (of the Gavriilidis and Terzopoulos type<sup>7</sup>), 9 journalists, 15 doctors, 25 lawyers, 6 soldiers, 4 clerics, 1 engineer, 1 entrepreneur, 2 agronomists, 1 archaeologist, 10 lecturers, 4 *kapetanios*, 3 artisans, 1 chemist, 1 notary. Two dozen of them were former deputies and senators of the "revisionist" Chamber of 1936.

The politics of EAM precisely reflected its structure and its social composition. A nationalist movement in the service of imperialist war.

5. The patriotism of the masses and their attitude in regard to the war, so contrary to their historic interests, are well known phenomena since the previous war, and Trotsky, in a large number of texts, had tirelessly foreseen the danger that revolutionaries would be surprised and that they would let themselves be carried away by the current. The duty of internationalist revolutionaries is to hold themselves above the current, and to defend against the current the historic interests of the proletariat. This phenomenon cannot be explained purely by the technical means used, propaganda, the radio, the press, the marches, the atmosphere of exaltation created at the beginning of the war, but also by the state of the spirit of the masses, which results from the previous political evolution, from the defeats of the working class, from its discouragement, from the destruction of its confidence in its own strength and in the means of action of class struggle, from the dispersion of the international movement and from the sapping opportunist politics carried on by its parties.

There is no historic law which fixes the delay before which the masses, initially carried away by the war, finally come to their senses. It is the concrete political conditions which awaken class consciousness. The horrible consequences of the war for the masses make patriotic enthusiasm disappear. With discontent mounting, their opposition to the imperialists and their own leaders, who are their agents, ceaselessly deepens and wakes up their class consciousness. The difficulties of the ruling class grow, the situation evolves towards the breaking of internal unity, the crumbling of the internal front and towards revolution. Internationalist revolutionaries contribute to the acceleration of the pace of this objective process by intransigent struggle against all the patriotic and social-patriotic organisations, open or hidden, by the consistent application of the policy of revolutionary defeatism.

6. The consequences of the war, in the conditions of the Occupation, have had a completely different influence on the psychology of the masses and their relations with their bourgeoisie. Their class consciousness has sunk into nationalist hatred, constantly reinforced by the barbaric behaviour of the Germans. Confusion gets worse, the idea of the nation and its destiny have been

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<sup>5</sup> A mountain village in the centre of the country.

<sup>6</sup> Bureaucrats of the Stalinist, reformist, trade union and agrarian apparatuses.

<sup>7</sup> Same as 6.

placed above social differences, national unity is reinforced, and the masses are even more submitted to their bourgeoisie, represented by the organisations of national resistance. The industrial proletariat, broken by the previous defeats, its specific influence exceptionally diminished, has been a prisoner of this terrible situation for the whole of the war.

If the anger and the rising up of the masses against German imperialism in the occupied countries was “justified”, that of the German masses against Allied imperialism, against the barbaric bombardments of workers’ neighbourhoods was, just as much justified. But this justified anger, which is reinforced by all means by the bourgeois parties of every stripe, can only be exploited and used by the imperialists for their own interests. The task of the revolutionaries still remaining above the current is to lead this anger against “their own” bourgeoisie. It is only that discontent against our “own” bourgeoisie which can become a historic force, the means of ridding all humanity of wars and destruction once and for all.

From the moment that the revolutionary in war time simply makes an allusion to oppression by the “enemy” imperialism in his own country, he becomes the victim of the narrow nationalist mentality and social-patriotic logic, and cuts the links which unite the small number of revolutionary workers who remain faithful to their banner in different countries, in the hell into which capitalism in decomposition has plunged humanity.

7. The struggle against fascism “is only realisable in the framework of internal conflicts, when the struggle poses in practice the problem of the political regime. But if we mechanically apply the laws and methods of struggle of different classes in one and the same nation to the imperialist war, that is to say the struggle of one and the same class of different nations, we will be purely and simply illusionists and charlatans” (Trotsky). The struggle against the Nazis in the countries occupied by Germany was a trick and a means which Allied imperialism used to chain the masses to its war chariot. The struggle against the Nazis was the task of the German proletariat. But it was only possible if the workers of all countries fought against their own bourgeoisie. The worker in the occupied countries who fought the Nazis was fighting on behalf of his exploiters and not for himself, and those who carried him and pushed him into that war were, whatever their intentions and justifications might be, agents of the imperialists. The call to German soldiers to fraternise with the workers of the occupied countries in the common struggle against the Nazis was, for the German soldier, a misleading trick of Allied imperialism. Only the example of the struggle of the Greek proletariat against its “own” bourgeoisie which, in the conditions of the Occupation, means to struggle against the nationalist organisations, would have been able to arouse the class consciousness of the conscripted German workers and make possible fraternisation, and the struggle of the German proletariat against Hitler.

Hypocrisy and trickery are as indispensable to the conduct of war as tanks, planes or heavy guns. War is not possible without the conquest of the masses. But for them to be conquered they have to believe that they are fighting for their own good. All the slogans, all the promises of “freedom, prosperity, the crushing of fascism, socialist reforms, a popular republic, defence of the USSR”, etc., aim at this goal. This work is above all reserved for the “workers” parties, who use their authority, their influence, their links with the toiling masses, the traditions of the workers’ movement... so that the masses can be more easily tricked and slaughtered.

The illusions of the masses in the war, without which it is not possible, do not make it any way

progressive, and only the most hypocritical social-patriots can use this to justify it. All the promises, all the proclamations, all the slogans of the SPs and the CPs in this war were only illusions.

8. The social-patriotic character of support for the resistance movement is brought into particularly sharp relief in the regions that EAM completely controls. It has both the space and the geographic borders of a "country", with parliament, government, courts, concentration camps, prisons, police and tax collectors, in a word, a state, which conducts an official war against the Germans. In what way, in its class nature, can this state differ from any other bourgeois state? What do the workers and poor peasants have to defend in this war, and in what way does it differ from that conducted by the government of Metaxas?

And even if the political reforms, self-government, popular courts etc., had not been illusions, even if the political regime had been similar to that of Russia after the February Revolution, even then, the workers would not have been able to participate in the war. They would only have fought once they had political power in their hands. Such was the position of Lenin and Trotsky against the powerful wave of "revolutionary patriotism" which had then submerged Russia for the defence of the "revolutionary democracy" after the February Revolution.

9. The transformation of a movement into political combat against the capitalist regime does not depend on us and the force of conviction of our ideas but the nature of the movement itself.

"To accelerate and facilitate the transformation of the movement of resistance into a movement of struggle against capitalism" would be possible if that movement, in its development, had been able to itself permanently create, in class relations, consciousness, and in the psychology of the masses, conditions more favourable to its transformation into a general political struggle against the bourgeoisie, and therefore into a proletarian revolution.

The struggle of the working class for immediate economic and political demands can transform itself in the course of its growth into a whole political struggle to overthrow the bourgeoisie. But it is rendered possible by the very form of this struggle: the masses, by their opposition to their bourgeoisie and its state and by the class nature of their demands, rid themselves of their nationalist, reformist and democratic illusions, liberate themselves from the influence of class enemies, develop their consciousness, their initiative, their critical spirit, their confidence in themselves. With the extension of the field of struggle, ever greater numbers of the masses participate, and, the more deeply the social soil is dug, the more the class lines are strictly distinguished and the more the revolutionary proletariat becomes the principle axis of the masses in struggle. The importance of the revolutionary party is enormous, to accelerate the pace, for awareness, for the assimilation of experience, for the comprehension of the necessity of the revolutionary taking of power by the masses, for organising the insurrection and ensuring its victory. But it is the movement itself, from its nature and its internal logic, which gives strength to the party. It is an objective process of which the politics of the revolutionary movement is the conscious expression. The growth of the "resistance movement" has, also by its very nature, the exactly opposite result: it destroys class consciousness, reinforces nationalist illusions and hatred, disperses and atomises the proletariat even more into the anonymous mass of the nation, submits it even more to its national bourgeoisie, bringing to the surface and to the leadership the most ferociously nationalist elements.

Today what remains from the resistance movement (nationalist hatred and prejudices, the memories and traditions of that movement which were so habitually used by the Stalinists and Socialists) is the most serious obstacle to a class orientation of the masses.

If there had been objective possibilities for its transformation into a political struggle against capitalism, these would have manifested themselves without our participation. But we saw no trace of a proletarian tendency, even the most confused, coming from its ranks.

10. "The transformation of the war into a civil war is the general strategic task to which all the work of the revolutionary movement must be subordinated during the war" (*The Fourth International and the War*). The shifting of the fronts and the military occupation of the country, as in almost the whole of Europe, by the armies of the Axis do not change the character of the war, do not create a national question and do not modify either our strategic objectives or our fundamental tasks. The task of the proletarian party in these conditions is to sharpen its struggle against the nationalist organisations and to protect the working class from anti-German hatred and the poison of nationalism.

Internationalist revolutionaries participate in the struggles of the masses for their immediate political and economic demands, trying to give them a clear class orientation and opposing themselves with all their strength to the nationalist exploitation of these struggles. Instead of taking it out on the Germans and the Italians, they explain why the war broke out, a war of which the barbarism we live in is the inevitable consequence, courageously denouncing the crimes of their "own" imperialist camp and bourgeoisie, represented by the various nationalist organisations, calling the masses to fraternisation with the Italian and German soldiers in the common struggle for socialism. The proletarian party condemns all patriotic struggles, however massive they may be and whatever their form, and openly calls on workers to abstain from them.

Revolutionary defeatism in the conditions of the Occupation encounters horrifying and never previously seen obstacles. But the difficulties can not change our tasks. On the contrary, the stronger the current, the more rigorous must be the attachment of the revolutionary movement to its principles, the more it must intransigently oppose the current. Only that policy will render it capable of expressing the sentiments of the revolutionary masses of tomorrow and being at their head. The policy of submission to the current, that is to say the policy of reinforcement of the resistance movement, would have added yet another obstacle to the attempts at class orientation of the workers and would have destroyed the party.

Revolutionary defeatism, the correct internationalist policy against the war and against the resistance movement, expresses today and will always express in the revolutionary events to come all its strength and value.

***The first spontaneous initiatives under the most horrific politico-military regime that the country had ever known***

When the people stood up and found themselves again, after the tragic days of winter 1941, in more than just the struggle for survival, discussions began on the situation that created the

occupation of the country and the tasks which it made necessary. How are we going to fight? What political content will the struggle have? What forms will it take and what means will it use? How to organise?

The people asked themselves these questions in a completely new political context. Political parties had not existed since the time of the dictatorship. Nobody accorded them any importance and very few still remembered them. This was also true for the Greek CP, which had been even more discredited, with the passage of a whole series of its leading cadres into the service of the dictatorship, and with the Provisional Leadership\*.

The resistance of the people to the dictatorship, spontaneous and unorganised, limited itself to hiding and helping the New Zealand soldiers who had not been able to escape with their units, rendering unusable and destroying German and Italian vehicles, and above all the action of the *saltadors*<sup>8</sup>. One day history must recall these intrepid kids. They jumped on the German vehicles while they were moving, ripping open sacks of supplies with their pen knives and throwing the contents onto the road: bread, tinned food, flour etc. And people picked it up. It is for them that they did it. For themselves they kept nothing. Many lost their lives or were tortured. Who wrote down their names? At least of those who died? No historian of the resistance preoccupied himself with them, none dedicated even a few lines to them. They didn't have fine-sounding names, didn't belong to any party or organisation, were not bearded<sup>9</sup>, didn't wear hats<sup>10</sup>, their chests were not decorated with cartridge belts, nor with chains and daggers and there is no photograph of them taken in various "heroic" poses. In spring 1942, I knew two of them in the transfer section of Piraeus. One of them was called "Demon". Apart from their audacity and their contempt for the death which awaited them, their modesty, their dignity, their indifference in regard to themselves was the most impressive thing, along with their concern for others, their solidarity towards the weakest, the most frightened, the most hungry of their fellow detainees. They had a word or a gesture for everyone. I would particularly like to stress, in that virgin political period of the resistance, the solidarity without political or partisan distinction, the reciprocal trust, the free discussions, without animosity or hatred or attempts to impose themselves, the sincerity, the modesty, the simplicity, everything which characterises a popular movement when the tutors, the bosses and the professional saviours are absent.

This period couldn't last long. Its duration was closely linked to the conditions of the war and the Occupation. Commandos began to arrive from the Middle East, to set up radios, organise espionage and carry out generalised sabotage.

Former members of the CPG, mostly *dilosias*, were put in position to take the initiative and were capable of it, but they lacked authority. EAM, which had already been formally created, started to develop itself gigantically, so as to eventually cover the whole political terrain of the country, when some former leading cadres enjoying the trust of the members took over the leadership of

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\* A reference to the notorious incident, described in Chapter 5, in which the police effectively took over the Greek CP for a while, creating their own central committee, the Provisional Leadership. - *Translator's Note*

<sup>8</sup> Literally, the "jumpers".

<sup>9</sup> The beard, an almost obligatory attribute of the partisans, daggers and cartridge belts were designed to show the continuity with the *kleftes* of the war of independence.

<sup>10</sup> The guards of the boss of ELAS, the *mavroskoufides* ("black hats"), wore astrakhan hats taken from an enemy unit which they had massacred.

the CPG. That is to say when Siantos and Ioannidis escaped<sup>11</sup>. They were not missed. After the leadership of the party had got over a few hesitations and involved itself in the partisan war (maybe some faded remains of their former revolutionary ideas), they gave themselves the task of organising the national resistance in the mountains as well as in the villages. The leading cadres of the CPG undoubtedly knew how to organise and to lead, all the more so because scruples were as unknown to them as they were foreign. The organisational capacities and severe military discipline of Bolshevism entered into the service of imperialist war.

All those who wanted to fight recognised the organisational and leadership capacities of the CPG and joined EAM without hesitation. The capacities of the CP in these areas had already been well known for a long time. ELAS was staffed by hundreds of active or reserve officers of all grades and all specialities.

The objective conditions were scandalously favourable to the CPG. It acted as a guarantee to the masses as to the supposedly anti-fascist character of the imperialist war, such as the realisation of the solemn and categorical promises of the “Big Three” about democracy, peace, the suppression of famine and fear, the right of peoples to decide for themselves etc. The influence of the USSR was still very strong then, and, for the masses, the USSR in Greece was the CPG. Without doubt it would be difficult to find in history a misunderstanding as tragic as the one which existed then and which continues to exist today to a certain extent, between what the masses believed about the CPG and what that party consciously set out to do.

EAM was already the only military and political force in the country which mattered. Thus it felt strong enough to demand the monopoly of the resistance and to present itself as the only patriotic organisation in the country. This pretension translated itself into a short term ultimatum: all the partisan groups which continue to exist outside the ELAS must choose between immediate integration or extermination. Whoever does not belong to the EAM organisations in the towns and villages is an agent of the Gestapo, or the *carabinieri*, or the Quisling government, which amounts to the same thing. In calumny, in provocation, lying, machination, hypocrisy, trickery, the Stalinists have beaten all historical records. Who doesn't remember the case of Sarafis<sup>12</sup>? One day *Rizospastis* wrote that “sections of ELAS have seized known agents of the Italian carabinieri Sarafis et Kostopoulos”, and two days later, the same Sarafis was solemnly promoted to military chief of ELAS.

The *Khites*<sup>\*</sup> then made their appearance. These groups were organised and armed by the Germans and carried out the armed struggle against the Communists with their authorisation. Whoever was not a *Khite* was a Communist for them. In Athens, the inhabitants of Pangrati, Thission, Kypseli and Metaxouryon lived in permanent danger of being beaten, arrested or executed by them. Everyone knew that their boss was Grivas<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Zachariadis, handed over to the Germans, had been deported to Dachau.

<sup>12</sup> General Sarafis, one of the principal protagonists of the Venizelist coup d'état of 1935, had tried to create a resistance organisation in competition with ELAS, before being captured by it and passing into its service.

<sup>\*</sup> Named after their organisation, which was known by the Greek letter “X” (pronounced “Khi”), the first letter of the word “Christ”. These fascist killers were good Christians... - *Translator's Note*

<sup>13</sup> A colonel who made a second career in the '50s leading the nationalist anti-British guerrillas fighting for the unification of Cyprus with Greece.



At the same time, with the agreement of the occupation authorities, the Rallis<sup>14</sup> government organised security battalions (*tsoliades*). The majority of their men were recruited from the criminal underworld. They were free to steal, to rob and to kill when they felt like it. And they didn't stint on these things. It was unthinkable that they would be called to account. It was then that the OPLA also went into action. This was a sort of GPU or *Okhrana* in the service of EAM.

What happened in Greece at that time didn't happen in any other occupied country, at least not on such a scale, with such a long duration and above all with such savagery and fanaticism.

In the mountains ELAS engaged in furious fighting with other groups of partisans in defence of its monopoly of the partisan movement. The occupation authorities replied to the partisan's attacks against the occupation army's men, government agents or military installations, as they did to various forms of sabotage, by massive executions of hostages, burning and razing whole villages and massacring their inhabitants.

In the towns, particularly in Athens, the *Khites* killed, the *tsoliades* killed, OPLA killed, they tortured on Merlin Street<sup>15</sup>, every day courts martial pronounced condemnations to death, with execution being immediate. Every day the army took over neighbourhoods, with the rounding up of men in the squares and arrest, or even execution on the spot, for those picked out by men wearing masks<sup>16</sup>, and searches in houses, in shops and in the streets. Such was everyday life, at least in Athens.

The solidarity, the trust, the free discussion of the first days had disappeared, without leaving the slightest trace in the spirit or in the vocabulary. What you heard now was: "Where are you? In what organisation? Where do you take your line from?"

If you came across the *tsoliades* at night, there was the search, the theft of your wallet, your watch, your wedding ring if you had one, your pen and anything that had value in their eyes. Afterwards you could go. It got to the stage where you didn't ask for an apology anymore. If you had gold teeth it was better if you didn't show them when speaking.

In the case of a meeting with the *Khites*, if you could prove you didn't belong to the EAM, in the best scenario it would be a beating, in the worst you would be killed or maimed. If at night you passed by the sectors where they were stationed and you didn't stop at the "Halt!" to have your papers checked, they would open fire immediately. An. Man. and I came within a whisker of being killed. We went out late at night from Kareas, where we had had a meeting, and, without being aware of it because of the darkness and the driving rain, in Pangrati we came across the fortified house of Papageorgiou, in Prophitis Ilias. In response to the "Halt!" we immediately threw ourselves on the ground, while machine gun bullets flew over our heads. We crawled away, without anything happening to us, except that the five or six eggs in my pocket had been broken so we went hungry.

If you passed through a rural zone controlled by EAM, most probably looking for supplies, it

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<sup>14</sup> The third and last "Collaborator" government.

<sup>15</sup> Merlin Street, the headquarters of the Gestapo in Athens.

<sup>16</sup> The local grasses, their faces hidden with masks, pointed out members of EAM.

would mean immediately being intercepted and brought in front of an “official”. He would ask for your “papers” which had to be provided by EAM on its territory. If you didn’t have them, there was a report, arrest and being taken under escort to the immediately senior “official”. There, there would be a new report to his superior and a new escort to take you in front of him. There again, always in order, reports, receipts of delivery and acknowledgement of receipt etc. From official to official and from village to village up to the most competent authority, each time there had to be a journey on foot across the rocks of at least five or six hours. There you stayed in detention until the arrival of instructions on your correct political position in relation to EAM in your region. In case of doubt or suspicion you were lost.

In the latter years of the war, a territory where EAM was the state, in every sense of the word used by Engels, existed in occupied Greece: government, ministries, secretaries, bureaucratic hierarchy, tax collectors, police, courts, prisons, concentration camps and even special investigation police under the command of Zoulas and Makriyannis. But above all, there was an army: battalions, regiments, divisions, corps, command posts, headquarters, general staff, *kapetanios* and political commissars. A regular army with a very strictly military structure, of fifty thousand men. This is without counting the ELAS reserve, with at least fifty thousand other men under arms. It also had cavalry and a navy.

But the popular force organised from EAM in the towns and villages was far superior in number, and its influence extended even further. All that military and political force was under the absolute control of the CPG.

Never had any political party in the country possessed such formidable military and political power, never had any party had so much influence on the masses.

### ***The military action of EAM-ELAS***

Outside a very limited region in Epirus where Zervas was established and which he controlled, there was no aspect of the struggle against the occupation authorities in the whole of the rest of the country, in the towns or in the countryside, which EAM was not responsible for and which it did not decide on. All the military operations of ELAS came to be led within the framework of the plan fixed by head quarters.

Here are a few facts which illustrate the nature of its military activity.

On 27 April 1944, at Molaï, they killed a German general and three members of his escort. The Germans executed two hundred hostages in reprisals, and a military detachment received the order to kill everyone that they met on the road from Molaï to Sparta. Most of the two hundred hostages who were executed on the First of May 1944 were old militants of Akhronafpia. Of these, Maniadakis, Ioannidis and Bartzotas had been handed over to the Germans in April 1941.

The next day, they killed two German soldiers in Kyriaki. The Germans executed a hundred and ten hostages and burned the village.

Those who ordered the killing of the general and the two soldiers knew perfectly well that

executions of hostages and massacres of innocent people would follow. They knew it because it had already happened hundreds of times.

In response to the killing of men from the army of occupation or agents of the government, the occupiers executed ten, twenty, fifty, a hundred, a hundred and fifty, two hundred hostages. In response to the destruction of sections of the German or Italian army by the partisans, they massacred the villagers of the region, burning and razing the villages.

In no history of the resistance, in no Memoir of its leaders, can you find an explanation or any kind of justification from a military point of view of this tactic. For sure sacrifices are inevitable in a struggle. And in some cases, they shouldn't even be prevented, however heavy they are, but only when they are indispensable to the final success. How and in what way did the murder of a few men from the army of occupation contribute to the "liberation of the country and democracy", when it was certain that thousands of innocents would pay for them, that thousands of villagers would be homeless?

There must surely have been a reason, but it had nothing to do either with the liberation of the country or with democracy. Thousands of innocent poor people lost their lives without anybody knowing why, neither they nor those who killed them.

They killed women because, pushed by hunger or the need to save their children, they gave themselves to the German or Italian soldiers for a tin of food or a crust of bread. One of the highest authorities of "progressive thought" suggested the type of punishment to inflict in such cases. "Mark, he wrote, on their forehead with a hot iron a 'P' for perjurer and prostitute". For the "lover" their crime was a capital one. They had carried out an attack on national dignity, not to mention the danger of bastardising the race. The Glinos book, *What EAM is and What it Wants*, must remain for the education of future generations, while for sure they are recommended to equip themselves with a gas mask to protect themselves from the poisonous vapours rising from every word and every page.

They killed women because they had washed the clothes of German and Italian soldiers, they killed workers because they worked in German companies.

This "national liberation movement", as it characterised itself, also liquidated the national minority question, which neither the dictatorships nor the most reactionary governments had dared to do: EAM exterminated the Slavo-Macedonians, and Zervas the Albanians of Thesprotia.

When Badoglio capitulated, an entire Italian division, the Pinerolo division, passed over to the Greek resistance<sup>17</sup>. A popular movement inspired even in a rudimentary way by the most confused and outdated democratic principles would be able to influence the soldiers and make them come over to its side without difficulty. What did the EAM-ELAS, in the name perhaps of "proletarian internationalism", do? Solon Grigoriadis teaches us in his *History* (Volume 2, pp. 69-70):

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<sup>17</sup> When Italy surrendered on 8 September 1943, the Pinerolo division, made up of ten thousand men and equipped with modern weapons, stationed in central Thessalia, passed into the zone controlled by the resistance, and its commander, general Infante, negotiated his rallying to the Allied camp with the British and the partisans.

“On the evening of 4 October 1943, in the common head quarters of the partisans<sup>18</sup> at Pertouli, the Italian general Infante was suddenly surrounded by a group of *elasites*<sup>19</sup> who ordered him to hand over his personal revolver. From that moment that Pinerolo division changed its role: from ally to prisoner. Thus began the final act of the Italian Second Army on the slopes of Pinde.

At the same time, all the sections who had retained their equipment were disarmed by the forces of the First Division of ELAS, without any resistance (...)

The disarmed Italians then suffered a terrible fate. They were abandoned in miserable camps, in hovels or mud huts. The harsh winter of Pinde fell on them like a calamity. Chased from everywhere in a panic by the incessant cleansing offensives of the Germans, abandoned by everyone – by the British, who took their time in giving out the sum of 10 shillings per month allocated for each of them, because of the difficulties of communication, and by ELAS, because of the continual battles. They were cut down en masse. Dozens of dead were collected every day from their bivouacs which all humanity had abandoned, and thrown into mass graves.”

It is a historian who wrote this, a cadre of ELAS and a supporter of EAM. And that is sufficient to illustrate the real content of this movement and the real objective of its leadership.

The same historian informs us that ELAS had the objective of seizing the Italians' arms, not to use them against the Germans, but so as to have superiority in armaments after the retreat of the German troops, which everyone thought was close. And they didn't just take arms but also boots, raincoats and blankets. So as to clothe “their own”.

This ELAS operation counts amongst the most bestial and inhuman crimes of the war. It was above all the surest means of preventing the fraternisation of the partisans with the German and Italian soldiers -the prevention of the thing which, in all reactionary wars, provokes panic and terror in all those responsible for the massacre of peoples: their exploiters and rulers. What Italian or German soldier would dare to pass into the ranks of the partisans, knowing that they would be disarmed and robbed, and left to die of hunger and cold ?

### ***Autumn 1943***

In Autumn 1943, we believed that the decisive hour of the war had arrived. In Italy, Mussolini had been overthrown by his own party and the general Badoglio put himself in charge of the government. He first surrendered, and then openly passed over to the Allied side against the Germans. The Italian army was disbanded. Part of it was taken prisoner by the Germans and the majority of them were executed. The others tried to find asylum and refuge where they could. Many houses, in the towns as well as the countryside, opened to them and welcomed them, and

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<sup>18</sup> In July 1943, under pressure from the British military mission in Greece, ELAS and EDES (the partisans of Zervas) accepted the creation of a common head quarters of the resistance placed under the orders of the British HQ for the Middle East. This was set up in Pertouli, a village on the mountain of Pinde, to the north east of Thessalia.

<sup>19</sup> ELAS fighters.

so many were saved. EAM didn't so much as lift a finger: such acts of humanity were unknown and foreign to it.

Insistently, the word went round that the working class had undertaken an autonomous action in northern Italy, that it had seized some factories and that workers' councils had appeared. We believed then that the October Revolution would finally be followed up, that it was the beginning of the transformation of the fratricidal war between peoples into a war of peoples against their exploiters. The editorial of our journal, *Workers' Front*, was entitled: "The Lvov Government". We saw in the Badoglio government the equivalent of the first Russian government after the February Revolution and the overthrow of the Tsar.

At the same time the food and clothing shops closed and the market disappeared from Athens, for purely speculative reasons. The spectre of famine, of the terrible winter of 1941, menaced the capital once again. But this time the people did not let themselves die of hunger. The exasperated masses filled the streets of Athens in immense crowds, with women at the head and mothers in the front line. The doors of shops and warehouses were smashed to pieces and the masses looted the goods and clothing which they found there. In the warehouses of the big shops around Omonia they found an incredible quantity of women's clothes. The women of Kaisariani, of Polygonos and other poor neighbourhoods helped themselves to plenty.

At the same time a series of strikes broke out with a clear class content. The German soldiers not only didn't intervene but they looked at the looting of shops and strikers' demonstrations with the greatest sympathy.

So as to satisfy both the soldiers and the masses and perhaps to prevent dangerous developments, that is to say their fraternisation, the German administration arrested two olive oil merchants, bringing them very quickly in front of a military tribunal, condemning them to death and hanging them in Amerikis Square with a sign round their neck: "Profiteer. Enemy of the people".

Our group set about an impetuous activity. Thousands of tracts and flyers were circulated. We entered into a greater and greater contact with the masses. We talked to them about the workers' councils in Italy and about the revolution which had begun and they listened with emotion and enthusiasm.

We actively participated in the pillage of the warehouses. Some comrades forced open one on Mavromichalis Street, full of pastries of the highest quality. People formed a queue and the pastries were distributed in an orderly fashion, without those who distributed them keeping anything for themselves. We broke open another one, in Vathis, full of bars of soap, which were then distributed in order, to each person in turn.

EAM was completely disoriented. What was happening in front of their eyes was not what they expected, was incomprehensible to them. They saw with stupefaction that the situation was slipping from their fingers. They tried to intervene in the looting without succeeding and asked for a part of it for the Partisan Administration (ETA), without obtaining it.

An official from EAM came to the warehouse that we had forced open and where we were distributing the pastries and asked us very severely who we "took the line" from. We addressed

ourselves to the crowd and told them that they had to answer this gentleman who wanted to know where we “took the line” from. Laughter, disapproval and booing answered him. The gentleman left and was quite rightly astonished at the indiscipline of people with regard to EAM and the lack of respect for its representative.

Yet all these events were only a fleeting light in the darkness.

We don't know and we never knew if there were really revolutionary demonstrations in northern Italy. The German troops very quickly seized the whole of northern Italy and that region was proclaimed the “Socialist-Fascist Republic” under the presidency of Mussolini, who German parachutists had already freed. Anglo-American troops progressed from the south of Italy, where the Badoglio government was considered an ally.

The masses had disappeared from the streets of Athens, EAM was perhaps even stronger than before and we, who had for a moment felt the popular wave carry us to the heights, saw ourselves once more isolated and even more against the current.

But this fleeting light was able to show which policy, which slogans and above all which actions could arouse the consciousness of the masses bleeding for the interests of their exploiters. In the masses who had looted the shops of the Greek merchant-exploiters, and in the strikes with a clear class content, the conscripted German workers had seen their brothers, recognised themselves, themselves and their class. But that didn't last long and it could not have been otherwise in those conditions which were so incredibly contrary to the revolution.

Let's note then, that in this context, the Unified Organisation of Communist Internationalists of Greece (EOKDE) made its existence known by a lamentable tract talking about associations and cooperatives.

### ***The war ended, but there was neither revolution nor peace***

From the beginning of 1944, it was even more obvious that the military collapse of Germany was a simple question of time, and of a time which was very near. On the Russian front, the German troops were being hit severely. The Allied troops progressed in Italy from the south towards the north. The whole of Africa was in the hands of the Allies. In the air the Anglo-Americans had crushing superiority. German cities were bombed relentlessly: Berlin, Hamburg, Munich were turned into ruins. There were more than a hundred thousand dead in Dresden, all of them women, children and old people. The Allies bombed as bestially as the Germans in their time, with even more fury. The American airmen were particularly resolute. Their objective was the working class neighbourhoods. We knew them here too, with the bombardment of Piraeus, when the mortuaries filled up with dead and the hospitals with wounded. Here also it was almost all women, children and old people.

In June 1944, it was the Normandy landings, while the Russian troops swept all before them. From one end to the other, Germany burned. The world of the Twentieth Century became the apocalypse. Hitler committed suicide after killing his wife, who he had only just married. Goebbels committed suicide after having slaughtered his children and his wife. The other Nazi

chiefs disguised themselves and tried to run away and hide. An end without glory for those who wanted to conquer the world.

Trotsky wrote that, a second birth being always easier than the first, the proletarian revolution in this war would be easier than in the first. But the war ended and the revolution did not appear in any part of the world.

The principal reason for the absence of the revolution can be found perhaps in the years which preceded the second imperialist war. And even before the 1930s, apart from a few exceptions, on the political scene we only knew of robots deprived of their judgement and critical spirit, who could only march in line and under command, under Hitler, Stalin or some ridiculous dictator or party boss in the other countries. The workers' movement had been emptied of its substance as an autonomous revolutionary movement and, *via* the Stalinists, was used for the needs and interests of the Soviet bureaucracy. The way was open to war when, with the help of the Stalinists, the last fires of revolution were extinguished in Spain, France and Greece.

The form, so unfavourable to revolution, taken by the Second World War is a second reason, also very important. The military occupation of almost the whole of Europe by German troops created objective and subjective difficulties for the reconstruction of the movement and the awakening of the class consciousness of the masses never seen before. In the midst of Occupation, they could not see anyone else responsible for their terrible situation apart from the Germans. The bestial measures of the occupation authorities, provoked by the Stalinists in many cases, fed nationalist hatred and reinforced nationalist propaganda.

The Stalinist leader Zevgos wrote in his *Journal* that history would designate them, him and his own, as traitors equal to Scheidemann and Noske. "Traitor" is not a suitable word. They fought frantically and in the most disgusting fashion against socialism, the revolution and its militants because the interest of the social stratum which they represented, a stratum which is the most enraged enemy of the movement of the toiling masses for their emancipation, imposed itself. They were not mistaken, they knew very well what they were doing.

During this war the Stalinists feared revolution even more than Churchill and Roosevelt did. Their principal objective as German imperialism crumbled was to mercilessly nip in the bud any attempt, any tendency, any suspicion of independent revolutionary action. Stalin, who had spoken five years before publicly and shamelessly about "the rights of poor nations", meaning Germany and Italy, shouted with all his strength: "Germany isn't going to fool us anymore with its mantle of socialism, break it". And the armies which had been unleashed on Europe broke it. In Europe the Russian troops did not act like those of Robespierre or Bonaparte, but like the hordes of the Holy Alliance, of Cavaignac and of Thiers. Their government let them carry on without restraint, reinforcing the sentiment of vengeance for everything which the Germans had done to their country. They advanced irresistibly, sweeping everything before them, destroying, looting, killing, raping, everywhere spreading panic, terror and horror.

Poland, Eastern Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria passed under the military occupation of Russia and, at the same time as it was inventing "people's democracies" and naming puppets as governors, it was plundering them through heavy reparations, dismantling and transporting whole factories to Russia, imposing unfair "treaties" and obliging the population to

look after the occupation troops.

From Poland alone – by means of the agreement of 16 August 1935 which obliged Poland to supply coal to Russia at the price of two dollars a tonne, when the price on the international market was sixteen dollars – it sucked one hundred million dollars per year, that is to say a sum which the British imperialists never extracted from all their investments in India. It took a hundred million dollars from Manchuria, which was a Japanese colony, by way of reparations and the “people’s democratic” sister East Germany paid three billion six hundred and fifty million dollars in compensation.

Besides the Stalinist puppets, the most reactionary and corrupt cadres of the old regimes participated in the “people’s democratic” governments set up by it.

Where the installation of Stalinist regimes wasn’t possible, the Communist parties, whether from fear of independent action by the working class, or because they had contracted obligations toward their allies from the cynical division of the world into zones of influence, threw all their strength into the defence of the old regime. In France and Italy they participated in governments of “national unity” and disarmed on behalf of the resistance organisations and all the armed people, re-establishing “order”. They classified strikes as reactionary and in every response to workers’ demonstrations they spoke about the need to first of all reconstruct the “national economy”. That is to say that the workers must tighten their belts and work to build up the regime of their exploiters.

### ***The myth of the liberation of the country by EAM***

EAM aimed, as was specified at its foundation, at the expulsion of the conqueror and the setting up of a republic. But, despite its imposing military force, unimaginable for a political party, and despite its enormous influence on the masses, it did not achieve either of its two objectives. It did not chase out the conquerors and it didn’t set up the republic.

ELAS “liberated” the country when Germany was militarily crushed and when the German troops were retreating from all the occupied countries. And if there had not existed a single partisan, if none of the events which plunged the country into mourning and despair had happened, the German troops would still have left, as they left Norway, Denmark, Belgium, Holland, Yugoslavia, Northern Italy.

Despite everything which has been written and said about the liberation of various towns by the “heroic ELAS”, despite the parades, the “presentation of arms” to “heroic personalities”, we and not a few others know that the Germans had already left the towns that ELAS “liberated”.

What is true for EAM is also true for Tito, who never missed a chance to proclaim that it was not the Red Army which had liberated Yugoslavia, as it had liberated Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia, but rather him and his partisans. But Tito as well, and his thousands of partisans, had liberated Yugoslavia when Germany collapsed and when its troops retreated.

The horrific battles on the plains of Normandy, on the steppes of Russia and in its own sky had



brought about the fall of Germany. More precisely, the fate of Germany had already been decided on the Russian front, before the Allied landing in Normandy. The armoured columns which had swept Europe had already received severe blows and been subjected to decisive defeats in Russia. The more the Russian people remain passive and submit, the more formidable is their uprising, whether to break their chains, as in 1905 and 1917, or to tighten them as in the Napoleonic era and during the “Great Patriotic War” of 1941-1945. And it was not socialism, which they had tasted for a short while in 1917-18, nor the appeals of Stalin which made them rise up with the ferocious determination of victory or death, but the bestial behaviour of the Nazis and the undisguised plans of Hitler for their genocide and physical extermination. From the moment that the people had risen up with that ferocious determination, nobody could hold them back. Germany would have fallen even without the Normandy landings.

The “liberation” of the country by ELAS is a myth maintained and cultivated by the most “progressive” part of the bourgeoisie so that the patriotic tradition and spirit of the resistance, the greatest obstacles to a revolutionary class orientation of the masses, are maintained.

The survival of the people assured by EAM makes up part of the same myth<sup>20</sup>. EAM only provided the soup kitchens of the International Red Cross with its committees, cooks and distributors.

### ***EAM hands power to the “national” government and participates in it***

The question is not one of why EAM did not take power<sup>21</sup>, but rather why it gave it up. Well before the German troops left the country EAM was already the only organised political and military force. It exercised real power in the countryside as it did in the towns. That monopoly of power was its constant objective throughout the Occupation. Its army, its armed corps, its divisions, its regiments, its squadrons of cavalry, its command posts, its head quarters were destined for that.

Its well-known military activity against the occupation authorities, everything which thousands and thousands of innocent people had paid for in blood and tears, was something which could be led by small groups of partisans. A decisive confrontation with the German troops was beyond its capabilities and its leadership and its high command never made such a thing the order of the day, nor envisaged it.

The army of EAM, very well organised with a severe discipline, with a majority of brave fighters and capable and seasoned officers at its head, was destined to take over power immediately after the retreat of the occupiers.

And yet, at the last moment, it renounced its principal strategic objective, which it had already realised. Under persistent pressure from the British, after protests, resistance, haggling, it finally ended up with totally unacceptable concessions.

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<sup>20</sup> EAM, according to some historians, claimed the paternity of the soup kitchens organised by the Red Cross.

<sup>21</sup> Historians and commentators generally pose the problem in these terms.

It first of all recognised the Papandreou government<sup>22</sup> as the legal power in the country and participated in it. Who was it made up of? Politicians barely in the consciousness of the people, unknown youths and forgotten old men. It's Churchill who nominated the ministers. The criterion for the sharing out of ministries by party was their electoral strength in 1936. As if nothing had happened since which could influence the thought, the consciousness and the ideas of the masses. EAM participated with five ministers. But only two were Communists. The three others were uncertain personalities, from those used by the CPG to camouflage itself and present EAM as a front of supposed organisations.

But Caserta<sup>23</sup> made the most monstrous concession. ELAS recognised Scobie<sup>24</sup> as its military leader, certainly with all the responsibilities and powers of military chiefs in time of war. Scobie's first order after the retreat of the Germans was that ELAS should not enter Athens. And it did not enter even though the majority of the popular masses called for it, expected it and had prepared a triumphal welcome.

They nominated a certain Spiliotopoulos, entirely unknown until then<sup>25</sup>, as the military governor of Athens.

The Papandreou government acted according to a very well premeditated plan. It first sent Zevgos, one of the bosses of EAM, into Greece<sup>26</sup> to prevent any "aventurist" action. The government was afraid of the massacre of the *tsoliades* and the *Khites*, because its plan envisaged using them against ELAS. And Zevgos carried out his mission. Perhaps it was then that he felt remorse and wrote in his *Journal* that history would describe them as traitors.

The German troops left Athens on 12 October, after having laid a wreath to the Unknown Soldier. The Occupation had lasted four years<sup>27</sup>, six months and five days.

The "national" government of Papandreou triumphantly entered Athens on the 17 October. There were huge demonstrations and rallies. All of Athens was on the streets. Enthusiasm, joy, tears. Papandreou hoisted the flag on the Acropolis. The Prime Minister of the "liberation of the country" could not be surpassed in his speeches: everything that the people wanted, he promised them. But, at the same time that he repeated in each of his speeches that the *laocracy*<sup>28</sup> would be set up in the country, he prepared in secret with the British the crushing of EAM-ELAS.

How can we explain these climb-downs and concessions which the EAM made towards the

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<sup>22</sup> Georges Papandreou, second-rate liberal politician, former minister, father of Andreas. When the CP founded EAM, it offered the presidency to Papandreou, who stupidly declined the offer. Papandreou was the Greek screen for Churchill. The latter closely followed the evolution of the situation in Greece and personally led British policy in the country.

<sup>23</sup> In the suburbs of Naples. The British head quarters had left Cairo and from then on was in southern Italy. The Caserta agreements were signed on 26 September 1944.

<sup>24</sup> A British general, delegated from the Allied high command.

<sup>25</sup> Spiliotopoulos had been the commander of the gendarmerie in 1941.

<sup>26</sup> From now on the Greek government in exile was installed in southern Italy, where it had followed the British headquarters. Zevgos was one of the two Communist ministers of EAM in this government.

<sup>27</sup> Three, in fact.

<sup>28</sup> Synonym for democracy, with more of a "left" nuance, more plebeian; often translated as "people's democracy" (in the Stalinist sense of that term). *Laocracy*, a very vague slogan, was the key note of EAM propaganda.

British and this government without either strength or influence? Today everyone knows, but even at that time those who knew were already quite a few.

The “Big Three” who, while appealing to the peoples to serve as cannon fodder, promised that after the crushing of German fascism the peoples would be free and could decide their fate themselves, that peace and freedom would reign over the world and that fear and famine would disappear forever, were at present the conquerors and masters of the world, sat down at Yalta, and between morsels of caviar and streams of vodka, divided up the world as they had the vineyards of their ancestors. In the course of this division Greece fell to the British. And Britain firmly decided not to let her go<sup>29</sup>.

There is no doubt that the leadership of EAM knew this.

What did the “national” government do?

Inflation rose rapidly, the gold pound went from a few million to a billion and a half drachma. And Svolos<sup>30</sup> will go down in history as the minister who liquidated the domestic public debt with half a drachma. Porphyrogenis was a minister of Labour similar to Gonis, Dimitratos, Bakatselos and Laskaris in every way. He responded to workers' demands like his French and Italian colleagues, who had first of all to reconstruct the “national economy”. And that Communist minister, to facilitate the reconstruction of the capitalist economy, abolished the law put in place by the Germans which prohibited bosses from laying off workers. From then on the bosses could lay off anybody without justifying it to anyone.

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<sup>29</sup> It was in October 1944, four months after Yalta, that Churchill and Stalin in Moscow divided up the zones of influence in the Balkans between them. Churchill got Greece. The Yalta Conference only took place after the events mentioned here.

<sup>30</sup> University lecturer. Figurehead of the non-Communists of EAM. The “Svolos stabilisation” introduced a new drachma which was equivalent to fifty thousand of the old ones. This devaluation was accompanied by a freeze on wages.

***Our withdrawal from the DKKE and our break from Trotskyism***

Our stay in the Internationalist Communist Party of Greece\* didn't last long, and it could not have been otherwise. Our political differences with this "party" were on the same basis as those that we had with the CPG. Its internal regime was a caricature of Bolshevism. Its political activity nonexistent. Moreover an unbearable atmosphere of hostility towards the members of our group reigned within it. The two other tendencies lined up together in their attitude towards us. The "internal bulletin", in which we had the right to criticise, and where we had effectively criticised the ICP and the Fourth International, had ceased to appear for a long time. In our internal meetings, we continually asked ourselves these questions: What are we doing here? Why remain? We ran the risk of becoming mouldy in our turn. Then we left in the spring of 1947.

Starting in April 1937, facing the imminence of war, our group had rejected the slogan of "defence of the USSR" and from then openly defended the view that the task of the Russian proletariat in the war was to overthrow the Stalinist regime and to take power. Nevertheless we had never undertaken a critique of Trotsky's positions on the social nature of the USSR. However, this never had an influence on our practical political action. More exactly, our positions and our action were opposed to what they had to be for a partisan of the Trotskyist theory of the degenerated workers' state.

Comrade Castoriadis, at the beginning of 1945, and comrade Stam., in 1946, had stated that the political action of the group was incompatible with the theory of the degenerated workers' state, and that the group had to reject it. But the group as a whole only lined up with that thesis in September 1947. That is to say that this theory for the first time became an object of debate and critique. And the sentiment that we had all felt then turned into irritation and anger against ourselves for our blind faith in Trotsky.

Social democracy had contested the means and the methods of the passage to socialism. In reality it was certainly a question of a social stratum who, thanks to the struggles of the working class, were assured of a privileged place in capitalist society, and who, with their theory of the peaceful and gradual march towards socialism, defended at the same time their privileged position and the society which had assured them of it.

Trotsky, with the theory of the degenerated workers' state, opposed the very content of socialism.

The historic object of the modern social revolution was not the economic, social and political emancipation of the working class, but the statisation of the means of production and planning. It was a question of a "gigantic social conquest". Such was the fundamental criterion for assessing the class nature of society; and whether the labouring masses were in power or whether they were subjected to wage slavery, bound and gagged, and the country just a vast concentration camp, did not enter into this estimation.

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\* Stinas' organisation had taken part in a "Unification Congress" with the real Trotskyists (Pouliopoulos' Unified Organisation of Internationalist Communists) in July 1946. Stinas saw no point in this but went along with what the majority of members wanted. They ended up uniting with the Trots in the short-lived "Internationalist Communist Party, Greek section of the Fourth International".

Socialism would follow afterwards, when the development of the productive forces and the augmentation of the mass of social wealth will have prepared the indispensable material conditions. This is precisely what was already said about capitalism when it was vigorous: that it was preparing the material conditions for socialism. And here we are talking about the historic justification for exploitation. For Marx, between capitalism and classless communist society was inserted the period of class domination by the proletariat. He called this stage socialism. For Trotsky, between capitalism and socialism was inserted the degenerated workers' state, that is to say the dictatorship of the bureaucracy over the working class.

When Russian troops occupied most of Poland in September 1939, Trotsky wrote that the regime installed by the Russians was progressive, but there existed the danger that it would create the illusion amongst the workers that bureaucracy could play their role in their place. In his proclamation on the war, in May 1940, he wrote that what the Stalinists had done in Poland showed that the strangled and betrayed October Revolution was still alive. The October Revolution for Trotsky was naturally the statification of the means of production.

But is it really an illusion of the workers that the bureaucracy can replace them in the creation of "workers'" states? The illusion is to believe that such an impossible thing can in reality even happen. Those states which, for Trotsky and the Trotskyists, are "workers'", rather than "degenerated", are born without the working class and against it. In this case it is not a question of illusions: all the "workers' states" born since then and that the Fourth International has saluted in joy and enthusiasm and inscribed in its annals are the deeds of Stalinists. And since the Stalinist bureaucracy is not emancipated humanity but a system of exploitation with statification of the means of production, the working class became simultaneously a dominant and dominated class. Dominant in the "dialectico-historic" sense of the term, since the means of production are statified, and dominated since it is something else which occupies power in the state, in the means of production, and everywhere else.

Trotsky was the most incompetent and the most incapable theoretician of socialist revolution. He was one of the principal leaders who, by their words and deeds, by "dialectic" and machine guns, barred the way to revolution and placed the workers under the yoke once again.

Our organisation broke all political and organisational links with the Fourth International in the autumn of 1947.

The Second Congress of the Fourth International had an enlarged character and some organisations which were not members of it took part. Comrade Castoriadis represented ours. He set out his views, which were also those of our organisation, on the Fourth International, the USSR and Trotskyism.



## **Appendix**

# **The USSR and the Struggle for World Revolution**

(the cuts are those made in the French edition)

The history of the theoretical struggles within the workers' movement has shown that only debates on concrete problems can reveal the deepest differences (...). Many a time an agreement has been achieved on theoretical questions which does not have any concrete importance and where the deepest differences appear later when they become the object of mass activity (....) This indeed happened with our debate on the nature of the Soviet Union. Our agreement with the general political principles of the Fourth International was repeatedly announced by all. That did not prevent the appearance of serious differences on a whole series of vital problems of the day, for example "the struggle on two fronts" and "revolutionary defeatism". These two questions were vital for the immediate political activity of our party. The struggle to transform the war into a civil war in our country was impossible without a total and thorough understanding of revolutionary defeatism and the future victory of the Greek workers' struggle would not be possible without a deep understanding by the whole party of the opportunist nature of the "struggle on two fronts" as is very precisely formulated in the articles by the majority of comrades in the unified EOKDE cell. It is a matter then of very great importance (...).

### ***1. Revolutionary Policy in the USSR***

(The differences with the EOKDE about this did not concern the character of the revolution but the means to achieve it. We all supported the conception that the revolution in the USSR would have a political rather than a social character. But we said that the revolution, a real revolution, would have to be a ferocious armed struggle between the worker masses and the bureaucracy and its state. The comrades of the unified EOKDE gave no clear answer to this. Here are some relevant extracts.)

(....) Comrade N wrote that "the Russian section of the Fourth International must safeguard and consolidate the social base of the regime, not reverse it". But these were hollow phrases, the sort of Stalinist boasting to which we were accustomed, and which their authors used when they would not or could not give a more serious analysis. The Russian proletariat may not have to overthrow a social regime, that is to say change the legal property relationships, but it has to overthrow the most monstrous and totalitarian state of the modern world. Its overthrow would only be possible as a result of a civil war which would very probably be amongst the most ferocious and murderous in history. (....) The more the supporters of the Fourth International approach this task with audacity and intransigence, the more success will be guaranteed. Conciliation and retreats will have no other result than to reinforce counter-revolution. (....)

### ***2. Bureaucracy and Counter-Revolution***

To this the defenders of defeatism ingenuously reply "Read the articles by CH and N. that 'The bureaucracy is counter-revolutionary'". But by its nature and social origin the bureaucracy is not the counter-revolution in person but a privileged and conservative caste within which, just as within the labour aristocracy and collective farms, counter-revolutionary elements take root and flourish in a hothouse atmosphere (...). Our comrades infer that the Soviet bureaucracy has become anti-revolutionary, and even if it has not yet established individual private property, this is because of fear of the proletariat (...).



As Trotsky wrote “It is wrong to identify the bureaucracy as only the dominant and privileged social layer in the full sense of that term. The bureaucracy is a complete pyramid which carries this social layer on its shoulders (...).”

We have the naivety to ask the comrades if they will explain to us why the bureaucracy is not counter-revolutionary by its nature and social origin. What is this “dominant and privileged social layer” which it is false to identify with the bureaucracy? And what social layer is built, like a complete pyramid, on the bureaucracy? This formula confuses very deep reasons which either show the ignorance of its authors or their inability to express their thoughts clearly. That contains the opposition between the real points of view and appreciations of the comrades and the tasks and slogans of the Fourth International in relationship to the USSR.

In spite of its confused formulation the logical deduction of the above passage is very clear and very revealing. If the bureaucracy is not by its nature and social origin the counter-revolution, that in Marxist language means that the bureaucracy is not counter-revolutionary because of its material interests. There are in the USSR then, as the comrades write, only counter-revolutionary elements within the bureaucracy and within the aristocracy of labour and collective farmers, but a social layer, whose counter-revolutionary tendencies are determined by deeper material reasons, does not exist. The counter-revolution is therefore, from the point of view of the comrades, intangible, ghostly and impersonal: it fact it does not exist. The social regime cannot be threatened by counter-revolutionary elements which originate here and there (...). It is no use sending the comrades back to immerse themselves in the Marxist texts so that they can find out the causes and conditions which give birth to revolutions. It is not that they are unaware of Marx's theory; they reject a revolutionary policy in the USSR (...).

Furthermore, the comrades, who are sarcastic about the “naivety of the workers frontists” and of comrade D, tell us that the bureaucracy is not homogenous. This is the ABC of Marxism, and if they believe this adds anything to the debate this only goes to show their own naivety. There does not exist and there has never existed in class society a social category or class which is, or can be, strictly homogenous. That is even truer for the proletariat (...) but classes in spite of their lack of homogeneity have fundamental characteristics in common which distinguish them from other social classes (...). The bureaucracy, in spite of its lack of homogeneity is very precisely distinguished from the working class and the peasantry (...) the Lords of the Kremlin and their Praetorian Guards in the GPU have a very different life from that of the chairman of a village collective farm, but the life of the latter differs much from that of the mouzhik. However, these two from the highest to the lowest are bound together by their common interests against the workers and by their wish to keep and to reinforce their privileges (...).

The greater or lesser degree of cohesion of the bureaucracy will be revealed when, for the fourth time, the heroic proletariat of the USSR once more raises up its head (...).

The comrades then write “We see three main tendencies within the bureaucracy: 1. The Butenko grouping; 2. the Reiss tendency which represents the lower levels of the privileged; and 3. the centre faction of Stalin. The majority of the bureaucracy is influenced by the first two centrifugal tendencies.” The Stalinist faction is not a centrist grouping that wavers between Marxism and reformism., but a blood-stained Bonapartist clique which, in the interest of the counter revolution, exterminates working class militants from every tendency with fire and sword (...). What is

more it is by no means certain the Reiss tendency represents the lower levels of the privileged. This is no tendency in the sociological sense of the term and it does not represent the interests of part of the bureaucracy because no section of the bureaucracy provides an economic basis for such a clearly proletarian tendency. Rather the matter concerns revolutionaries who have not been corrupted and who, though very few and scattered, can still exist in the state machine which came out of the revolution (...).

### **3. *The USSR in the War***

Always and in all circumstances Marxists have said that the destiny of the USSR is entirely determined by the destiny of the world revolution. "The October Revolution has created the dictatorship of the proletariat in Russia ... This opens the epoch of World revolution." Such are the opening words of the Bolshevik party programme. In sum, without a victorious outcome for the proletariat's world revolutionary struggle, at least in the most advanced capitalist countries and the support for this by the USSR through economic and political state methods, the dictatorship of the proletariat would be condemned to founder (...). This fundamental position is found in all the serious works by the leaders and masters of Communism starting with Trotsky and Luxemburg. Those comrades who, replying with a childish naivety to those who see the destiny of the USSR played out by the proletariat in the industrial centres of Europe write, "In spite of everything ... the USSR is still standing" show that they have understood nothing of the USSR, the world revolution or the bonds that exist between these two things. Trotsky knew something more than the anti-defeatist comrades when he wrote "more than ever the fate of the October revolution is bound up now with the fate of Europe and the whole world. The problems of the Soviet Union are now being decided on the Spanish peninsular, in France, in Belgium. At the moment when this book appears the situation will be incomparably more clear than today, when civil war is in progress under the walls of Madrid. If the Soviet bureaucracy succeeds with its treacherous policy of people's fronts in ensuring the victory of reaction in Spain and France - and the Communist International is doing all that it can in that direction - the USSR will find itself on the edge of ruin. A bourgeois counter-revolution rather than an insurrection of the workers against the bureaucracy will be on the order of the day", *The Revolution Betrayed*, New York edition, 1973, p.290.

(...) If the working class does not finish the war by revolution, society and civilisation are threatened by a retreat and catastrophe that the most pessimistic imagination cannot conceive. The USSR will not survive this unprecedented catastrophe (...).

The welfare of the USSR today depends absolutely not only on the struggle of the European working class, but upon the transformation of the existing war into a civil war. The achievement of this objective will need all our forces and all our efforts. Our political initiatives, our least important tasks and our slogans must all be subordinated to this fundamental and immediate task, and are only correct to the degree that they help it. For the party of the revolutionary working class in the capitalist countries it is very clear: we must use the suffering caused by the war to develop the political activity of the masses and to transform the imperialist war into a civil war to overthrow capitalism. It is absolutely the same for all capitalist countries irrespective of their political regime, or whether they are allies of the USSR. In no case would a "modification" or a "different interpretation" be justified, and the following paragraph from the report on the war by

the majority of the Akronafplia cell of the EOKDE is very odd in this regard: "Some particular problems of a tactical nature which could occur in the Greek section of the Fourth International during a war in case of a Soviet-Anglo-French bloc supported by Greece." What can these be? In a struggle for its demands, whatever these may be, the proletariat in the war has no other weapon than the class struggle and its application which leads to revolution and the defeat of the government. Can these "particular" questions make us use different means from those which determine our principles, and, more concretely, our immediate basic task? If not, what is the meaning of this very strange paragraph? This paragraph leaves an opening whereby social-fascism and the concept of an "anti-fascist" war can be swallowed, and through which the Party can sink to treason. The removal of this passage is for us, and we would hope for the majority of the Party, a matter of principle. There is no "particular problem of a tactical nature" for the working class of a country which may be allied to the USSR, and the call for "Defence of the USSR" loses all its practical value in a world war, and can only create confusion. Those comrades who maintain the contrary must quote us some concrete "particular problems". If they cannot, they give us the right to say that they are deliberately trying to smuggle the idea of an "anti-fascist" war into the party. The duty of a "Workers' state", whose destiny will be determined in a decisive fashion by the ability of the world working class to put an end to this frightful war by a revolution, is to help the world working class accomplish this task, to denounce the aims of the brigands of war from both sides, and to call upon the workers of the belligerent peoples to join hands against their executors and to proclaim that their army serves to toughen, encourage, and to give hope to the revolutionary working class (...).

This job cannot be done, or even thought about, without the overthrow of Stalin. And that is the job of the Russian working class (...).

The call for the transformation of the war into a civil war within the capitalist countries, as the duty of the proletariat alone, in whatever conditions or circumstances, and the call for a revolutionary struggle to overthrow the bureaucracy by the Russian proletariat, whatever the temporary consequences at the front, will concentrate activity and attention upon a distinct and clear objective and will ideologically prepare the masses for the carrying out of this task when conditions allow (...).

#### ***4. The Tactic of War on Two Fronts***

We again insist on this problem, and we would particularly want to draw the attention of all comrades to the above. The very grave errors committed by our "anti-defeatists" not only result from an erroneous appreciation of the situation in the USSR and the character of the bureaucracy, but from a more general point of view from the tactic of "struggle on two fronts", which is totally opposed to the programmatic principles of revolutionary Marxism. The broad lines of the positions, so openly right-wing but also so naive, identical to those defended by our anti-defeatists, appeared inside a party of the Fourth International during the Spanish Civil War with Nin's position and its critique by Trotsky and the secretariat of the Fourth International (...). In Greece illegality prevented the Trotskyists taking any active part in the debate and the organisations were happy simply to solidarise with Trotsky and the secretariat and, as is apparent today, at least as far as the majority of the EOKDE cell is concerned, to condemn the participation of Nin in the

Catalan government without however really understanding the errors of the POUM and Trotsky's criticism.

As we are going to show, the existence in our ranks of such profoundly opportunist positions which revolutionary Marxism had resolved years ago, is neither surprising, nor does it justify any disillusion in the future of our party: it is enough that the Marxist critique will not be withdrawn and that we will not try to cover up errors and conciliate the opposition for a broad and shallow "agreement". It is shown for the  $n^{\text{th}}$  time that the broad acceptance of our programme by any group does not *ipso facto* make that group revolutionary.

(...) The comrades refer constantly to the "difficult", "complex" or "composite" character of the problem, and of the "surprises kept in reserve by the dialectic" as if they wished to suggest that if they had not succeeded in giving a concrete analysis the responsibility fell on ... the problem itself. But one can tell a Marxist by his ability to clarify and analyse all the most difficult and complex problems, and, as part of his analysis, to trace out his perspectives and tasks. The confusion does not reside in the problem but within the comrades' skulls.

In all their writings the majority comrades in the EOKDE cell systematically avoid concretely posing the problem of the struggle on two fronts, and try to persuade us that it means nothing more than the simultaneous struggle of the working class on several fronts against different enemies, as let us say, in the first years of the Russian Civil War when the revolutionary proletariat fought the counter-revolutionary bands and the imperialist armies both in the interior and on the frontiers at the same time.

Our debate would not make sense if it was about that. The working class revolution then fought the same enemy on every front: counter-revolution and international imperialism, which were allies and which together tried to strangle the revolution. Though spread over the interior and the frontiers, there was only a single front. On the contrary the tactic of the struggle on two fronts which the anti-defeatist comrade advocated for the defence of the USSR results from an arrangement of fronts and relationship of enemies which are entirely different. At least that is what these comrades think.

The proletariat is faced by two enemies who are themselves enemies. When these face one another, the proletariat helps one against the other which it reckons is the most dangerous, while simultaneously it carries on another struggle against its ally. Such is the theory of the struggle on two fronts that is also known as opportunism (...).

Both before and after 1905 the same theory was formulated by the Russian Mensheviks in the course of debates on the character and motor forces of the Russian revolution, as against the theory of permanent revolution. They said that the task of the Russian proletariat was, in alliance with the liberal bourgeoisie, to overthrow Tsarism and feudalism, and push through the most democratic measures while at the same time it had to struggle for its own interests as a class against the bourgeoisie. But inevitably by the same logic of this "war on two fronts" the Mensheviks found themselves during the revolution on the same side as the Tsarist generals and foreign imperialists. In Spain the POUM also adopted this tactic, and it was precisely this that led the revolution to disaster (...).

The centrist theory of the struggle on two fronts by its nature and its own logic does not differ from the traditional reformist theory of an alliance with the democratic bourgeois parties against the reactionary “tendencies” in bourgeois society (...).

This theory arises in periods of calm and retreat and does not take into account the changes which occur in consciousness and spirit of the masses in revolutionary periods which this recipe is for (...).

There is no section of the bourgeoisie whose economic interests push it to ally itself with the working class against another section of the bourgeoisie. The petty-bourgeois layers can be conquered by the proletariat, not when the latter makes deals with and allies with “their parties”, but only when it has won its independence and when it shows, by its policy and its behaviour, that it is ready to become the master of society (...).

In a revolutionary situation real power and force are to be found in the street. The bourgeois and petty bourgeois “workers” parties are stripped of all their real influence. But they still keep an influence which is explained by links with the past. The revolutionary masses will only free themselves from this “influence” by the revolutionary party's unrelenting struggle against these parties, and with calls for the “destruction of the state machine” and “all power to the organs of the revolutionary masses”. Then the old parties will be forced to throw away their “democratic” and “socialist” mask and to reveal their real face. The slightest retreat in favour of “the unity of all against fascism” leads inevitably to the victory of the “allies” first and fascist reaction afterwards (...).

The real opinion of the comrades of the EOKDE is the following: the bureaucracy, which is not itself the counter-revolution, and whose interests coincide with those of the Worker's State, will defend the USSR against foreign imperialism. The working class has the duty to it to repel the imperialists and to prevent the enslaving of its own country. Thus in time of war it will find itself on the same side as the bureaucracy. Until then, their idea is logical, it will doubtless give satisfaction to all “friends of the USSR” (...). If the comrades stop at that point their attitude would be very clear, and the fronts sharply marked. But at the same time they tell us they will fight not just for the defence of the borders but for the revolutionary overthrow of Stalin.

Nevertheless, the war does not only happen on the frontiers but also in the rear, and it demands a total unity and discipline both at the front and in the interior. All governments know this very well, and that is why they give such enormous importance to the home front. It is not only keeping morale high; with modern techniques today war takes on a truly totalitarian character, and the entire population participates in it. The revolution, if we do not in a criminal fashion play with the words and if it is a real task for us and not just a hollow phrase, needs the development of the class struggle inside a country, and the breaking of national unity and its discipline, that is to say a war in the interior of the country against the government. Every show of strength inside the country, every strike, every demonstration will have an immediate and disintegrating effect on the front. The army is not built in some separate area apart from society, but is an integral part of society, of its flesh and blood. The revolution will influence it also and pass through it. The enlisted workers and peasants will go over to the side of the revolutionary masses, the officers and the offspring of the bureaucracy, to that of the government and to counter-revolution. The

defence of the frontiers and the simultaneous struggle for the revolutionary overthrow of the government are irreconcilable (....).

The masses will make their appearance on the scene when there is a decisive defeat at the front, a foreign revolution or a serious crisis of the regime. At the moment when, breaking national unity, the masses range themselves against the government and the war, civil war will break out in the country. At that precise moment everything will depend on the preparation of the vanguard. The bureaucracy will turn against the masses in revolution under the cover of the "defence of the borders" and the "saving of the country threatened by the foreign invaders", accusing the revolutionaries of being agents of the enemy. The slogan of the "struggle on two fronts" will then acquire force and significance. Its job will be to hold back the revolutionary enthusiasm of the masses and to terrify them with the danger of a foreign invasion. It will then become a weapon in the hands of the bureaucracy against the working class.

During the whole period leading up to the rising, the role of those who defend this slogan will be to contain and hold back any anti-governmental demonstration, above all when the fronts run the risk of being broken and when defeat threatens. To the extent that it depends on them, they will contribute to the unity and the discipline of the home front, that is to say, submission to the bureaucracy.

As a result the slogan of the revolutionary overthrow of Stalin and the bureaucracy, independently of its consequences at the front, concentrates the struggle of the proletarian vanguard on a concrete objective and prepares for an unrelenting struggle against the bonapartist clique and the counter-revolution (...).

And what of the frontiers of the Workers' state? In April 1938 our cell gave the following answer, "It is very likely that revolutionary struggles inside the country will let the enemy over the frontier.... But internationalist revolutionaries are absolutely convinced that Stalin is leading the country to a catastrophe, to defeat and dissolution, and only that can save the USSR from the totalitarian catastrophe. The victorious proletariat will at the same time be able to be enthusiastic and to mobilise the country of October, to give a revolutionary character to the war on its own side, to dissolve the opposing armies, to fraternise with the workers and peasants in uniform, as much in the fascist countries as in the 'democratic' ones, and to hurl them against their own executioners".

### ***5. Revolutionary Defeatism***

In view of their arguments that the anti-defeatist comrades use in their polemic against revolutionary defeatism in the USSR, we can make two hypotheses: maybe they are intentionally giving a wholly inadmissible interpretation to this slogan which is amongst the most fundamental of Bolshevism, or maybe they have an idea of revolutionary defeatism which is both naive and dreadful, and evidently reject it and throw it away for every country in the world, and not just the USSR.

If the omission of this slogan in their attitude to the war is not chance - and how can the omission of a slogan which is precisely the one that distinguishes us from all sorts of social patriotism and

pacifism be chance? - then we must suppose that it is the second theory which is correct, at least for some of the anti-defeatists. For these comrades revolutionary defeatism means - open the borders and deliver the country to foreign imperialism. We know that reaction has always tried to give such an 'interpretation' to this slogan making the revolutionaries out to be the agents of the enemy to justify vicious measures against them.

Other comrades assert that revolutionary defeatism imposes itself on the working class in the advanced capitalist countries because they have nothing to defend, while in the USSR on the other hand the workers have seized the shop and are ready to defend it. (...). The working class would be truly unworthy of its great mission if, faced with the great historical events which determined the outcome for the world, its attitude was determined by such a miserably miserly point of view. The present day proletariat has nothing in common with the slaves of the Roman Empire, it is concerned with the productive forces of society of which it will be the historical inheritor, and on this base it will build the future happiness of mankind. Revolutionary defeatism conditions the success of the proletarian revolution and proletarian revolution is the only way to save human society from the chaos and catastrophe to which rotting capitalism is taking it. A revolutionary defeatist policy flows from the reactionary character of the capitalist system and modern imperialist wars and from the historical necessity for a proletarian revolution and not from the point of view that "we have nothing to defend"(...).

We do not fold our arms during a war and say that we might just as well be chopped into little bits because "we have nothing to defend", but we fight for the transformation into a civil war precisely because we have to defend human civilisation (...).

We carry out our fight against the government only by means of class struggle (...). What we want, and what we do, all advanced workers want and do. Thus, our struggle is part of a world struggle. Until the revolution starts we cannot know which is the weakest link in the capitalist chain. But we are convinced of the historical necessity of our struggle. We are convinced that the weakest link will break, that the revolution will raise its flag and that it alone will put an end to the war and free humanity from its horror and destruction for ever.

The working class does not seize political power to defend its own little "household" and to create its own national state. The working class is a class which bears the civilisation of a world which will abolish frontiers, and unite all peoples of the world in a world society. It defends the borders of a country when it holds political power there solely in the sense that it defends the cause of international socialism in a region of the world where it happens to be. It does not think that its task ends by overthrowing its own government and the taking of power, but it puts all the strength which state power gives it to the service of the world revolution.

Revolutionary defeatism very sharply distinguishes us from all other tendencies in the workers' movement, and because of that it must be brought out very clearly in our resolution on the war. But far more than mentioning it in our resolution, we must understand its essence and its significance. If the drafter of a report on the war understood that, he could not slip any passage on "particular tactical questions" into his text. Thus revolutionary defeatism excludes the appearance of any other questions than those of class posed by our struggle for the overthrow of the government. At the same time it can never be a matter of "parallel" struggles to overthrow the dictatorship and to transform the war into a civil war, as appears in another article by the same comrade.

In the war we struggle against the government of the bourgeoisie which is carrying out the war, whatever it is, and not just because it is the dictatorship of Metaxas. If in war conditions, Metaxas is replaced by someone else (which is very unlikely) that will be because of the need to carry on the war more effectively and to deceive the masses. Our open and courageous revolutionary defeatist position puts us into absolute opposition to all the “democratic” and “workers” parties and forewarns against any deviation. Furthermore, a struggle against the government parallel to that which we wage to transform the war into a civil war does not exist. The resulting struggle for the transformation of the war into a civil war merges with the struggle to overthrow the capitalist government, whatever it may be.

Our tasks in relation to the war must be clear. It is a question of life and death for our party and for the working class and the comrades who understand that must insist on the drafting of an absolutely clear resolution without ambiguities or double meanings (...).

The Russian proletariat will only defend borders when this means defending the cause of international socialism. And that will only be possible when it has overthrown the bloody bonapartist clique and swept the country clean of the leprous bureaucracy (...).

Akronafplia, October 1940

A. Stinas