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Cyprus: the National Issue and the Anarchists
1985

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© struggle against the racism-chauvinism that permeates after decades of nationalist brainwashing. (d) insistence on protecting the rights of minorities.

These are, as mentioned, minimalist positions. They do not constitute a unity for a solution to the Cyprus problem etc.; they could perhaps constitute the "principles" or guidelines of a radical critique and action, but without discussion and praxis, they will remain, like so many others, empty figures of speech.

Radical critique is a critique that tries to connect the utopia of a liberated society with the problems of society and everyday life in the here and now. It is an attempt to find alternative perspectives in the general misery and deadlocks of today's society. And this is not an easy task — it nevertheless constitues the rebirth of social conflict. And in the case of nationalism in Cyprus, it is the re-emergence of resistance against leveling, homogeneity, the mitigation of class conflict and the patriarchal fantasies that underpin the idea of the nation.

c. the opposition to power, both as a structural phenomenon and as a diffuse form of constitution of interpersonal relations. The diffusion of anti-authority and its constitution as an alternative political-cultural pole is a necessary condition for an anarchist revolutionary society.

Of course, all this is not that simple to accomplish. We need action and antiauthoritarian discourse. And it is a necessary honesty to ourselves and those who listen to us to admit that we are still at the beginning of this process. We are still trying to push the national issue aside from the center of the debate. It is precisely our understanding of the stage we are at that makes us refuse to provide 'solutions'. A few directions for investigation can, however, be sketched out:

a. The need to oppose nationalism at every level and in every form. And this implies a critique of the ideology of nationalism, an opposition to further involvement of Greece and Turkey (and the possibility of war) in Cyprus and the need for communication and solidarity between Greeks, Turks and Cypriots.

b. The need to form an alternative space that will cease to be a tail of hegemonic ideology (like the Trotskyists and the unionists) and that will collectively seek through its disocurse and praxis a way out of the current impasse.

c. The removal of the national issue from the center of the debate, but also the simultaneous expansion of its limits. Some of the first minimalist "positions" of an alternative space for the Cyprus problem could be: (a) insistence on the right of free settlement-movement (b) struggle for the expulsion of all armies (Greek, Turkish, British) and the abolition of the Cyprus problem. The anti-militarist movement in Greece is self-evidently one of the natural allies of the Cypriot region.

This text was written by comrade A.P. around the end of 1985. Although it is his personal effort, it also expresses the general view of the Cypriot Anarchists who contributed (theoretically and practically) to the shaping of its final form.

The national issue in Cyprus is part of everyday life. You are born with it, you hear people talking about it everywhere and you almost can't imagine the world without it. No matter if in its specific form the national issue means different things every dozen or so years (e.g. Enosis, independence, occupation of Northern Cyprus). People (nannyed by their politicians) talk as if the problem has always been the same — and for hours they give you the impression that they can't imagine a world without it.

The far left that emerged after '74 did not, of course, escape these concerns. On the contrary, it made them the centre of its problematic. It tried to introduce a certain social critique through the classic thesis of left nationalism, that the ruling classes are selling out the national struggle.

Over time, two completely opposite interpretations of this position became clear — on the one hand, the Trotskyists[1] adopted the Cypriot national identity, the hat of the Cypriot state and defined the national issue as the struggle for independence (i.e. the independence and undisputed authority of the Cypriot state in Cyprus). On the other hand, the Maoists (this fashion has quickly faded away) made a long dive into the past and rediscovered Enosis.[2] Here hellenism acquired all the romanticism that had been dreamed of for years by the nationalist movement. The Greek state became for the

[1] There were and are various Trotskyist tendencies (most with 4–5 people). The reference to Trotskyists here is aimed at the group around "Sosialistiki Ekfrasi" or self-described as the "Left wing of EDEK".

[2] The existence of various tendencies was also present here. The reference is usually to the group around the "Aftodiathesi [Self-Determination]" magazine, but not only to them.

Unionists something similar to Moscow for the Communist Youth of Greece, and the national struggle acquired almost metaphysical dimensions — the preservation of our hellenism, "Enosis with the mother" and other similar things.

The anarchists were the first to deny the centrality of the national issue, the label of national identity, centring their critique against social contradictions and conflicts. Although this change of emphasis may seem simple now (especially abroad), its shaping was not so easy. Even today leftists try to put us in their labels (New Cypriots-Greeks, or "Cypriot, then what are you?" Unthinkable for them to be a person without a national identity). "How will we deal with the 'occupation'?" "How will we solve the Cyprus problem?" etc. These are not exaggerations — they are results of the ideological climate (and narrow-mindedness) created by nationalism, even in a milieu that wants to call itself revolutionary.

AN ANARCHIST CRITIQUE OF THE NATION

The anarchist critique of the ideology of the national is not simply based on internationalism — and this is one of the reasons why leftists find it difficult to understand it. The anarchist critique consists of two parts — the critique of the idea of the nation as an ideology and in the critical reassessment of the historical experience or nationalism. Anarchists do not deny the objective existence of problems that could be called "national" — they are problems concerning a dependency, cultural imperialism, etc. The difference with left and right nationalists lies in the definition of the social whole and in the way of dealing with the problem. Nationalists readily identify the social whole with an objective collective entity — the nation. However, the only objective substance of the nation is its state (that which exists or that which is about to be built). The nation, from an anarchist perspective, is an ideological unity cul-

These are not fantasies. They come out of the anarchist critique of nationalism and the historical experience of anarchist movements (see Spain). And they are not completely unrealistic suggestions for Cyprus. On the contrary, they are the continuation of the resistance against the power and the ideology of the flattening-homogenization of nationalism on the island. However, it is utopian to talk today about such a "solution" to the Cyprus problem as a serious possibility. Power structures and nationalism have created deadlocks and historical wounds that are not easily solved. And there is no reason to live with illusions. The importance of anarchist "utopia" lies both in its dreamlike dimension, as an escape to a hope, and, more importantly, in its function as a directive. And "utopia-as-directive" is one thing, and the magical formulas of the leftists are another (the Trotskyists still seem to be waiting for the great revolution to come around the corner — the Godsend angel of history). In anarchist "utopia-as-directive", you make the road and shape the utopia in the process through your action. The magical formulas of the leftists seem like a defining path — and, although they seem to have missed the train, they are not willing to look for it on their own. An anarchist society is not made by itself or by historical necessity (you see, history does not love us like it loves the Marxists). It is made by people and their actions. And if anarchy as a utopia-directive presupposes anything, it is the sharpening of social conflicts and the creation within this society of an alternative-antiauthoritarian culture, where the ends are reflected in the means used. In Cyprus, such a culture presupposes at least three dimensions:

a. the struggle against and the overcoming of nationalism and its historical wounds

b. the revival and redefinition of the tendencies for decentralisation, autonomy, pluralism, which nationalism-statism has suppressed for so many decades

has ready-made answers for all problems. We simply have to admit that at the moment we cannot propose a solution. And Orwell was right: "In a time of deceit telling the truth is a revolutionary act"!!!

The Cyprus problem is a problem of many dimensions and we are only now beginning to criticise the ideology (nationalism) that created it. The logic of 'if you have no solution to propose, keep silent' is the logic of the petty bourgeois, who wants his soap when he gives his money. We have the right to criticise and to look for alternatives through praxis, however long it takes — and the petty bourgeois must also learn in order to find his soap. The time for big and beautiful answers is over. The only way we can begin to propose something really alternative and viable is through radical praxis.

THE ANARCHIST "UTOPIA" AND RADICAL CRITIQUE

On a utopian level, of course, we know what we want: an anarchist organisation of Cypriot society, based on the principles of non-power, pluralism and autonomy-decentralisation. The state (centralised or bi-zonal), the other power structures (patriarchy, capitalism, etc.) and the mechanisms of violence (army, paramilitary groups), of course, have no place in this society. If the state is the objective expression of the ideological unity of the nation, the autonomous, self-managed community is the anarchists' response at the institutional level. Anarchist society is based on such communities cooperating and coordinating within a federation. These communities are political assemblies of direct democracy (anarchy) without institutionalised powers and can take various forms: economic-productive units, collectives or workers' assemblies, district-local units, general assemblies of residents or even cultural units. Pluralism is self-evident, just as the rights of free settlement and movement are self-evident.

tivated through various mechanisms and based on the subjective identification of individuals.

The nation is not something objectively-historically given. Nations appeared in the Modern Age, but the process of their formation is neither inevitable nor ideologically innocent. Nations are formed around a state through long processes of conflict — not only external but also internal. Cultural and social minorities are suppressed and disappear,[3] the state becomes the central axis of every nation, and nationalism, after the romantic phase of national constitution, becomes openly reactionary, suppressing social conflict in the name of the nation's supra-social unity. One could, of course, say that even if the rise of the nation is not a process of the "historical destinies of the race", nevertheless nations are eventually constituted and do exist. The world is full of them and it's like closing your eyes to reality by denying the objectivity of their existence now. That's what anyone could have said 20 years ago. Today, however, things are not so simple. Even in the now 'historic' nations of Europe one encounters strong escaping tendencies, social and regionalist minorities asserting their autonomy from the stifling unity of the nation and its political administrator — the state. The emergence of these movements is not a new phenomenon. On the contrary, it is the continuation of a conflict that has been going on since the idea of the nation was formed and promoted. Nations were formed after internal conflicts — ideological and social.[4] And this conflict continues and takes on new dimensions today.

Historically, anarchists have been among the leading figures in the resistance against the centralisation-homogenisation of the

[3] For examples from the Greek experience, one only has to look at the course of ethnic minorities in Greece. Some interesting facts are also found in the article by Th. Kalomylos "The Modern Greek Nation", in "TETRADIA".

[4] These conflicts appear from the very beginning — even in the French Revolution. See, for example, the contradiction between the direct democracy of the "Sans-culottes" and the nationalist mobilization (see Soboul Sans Cullote) or the conflicts in the French countryside (see Tilly La Vender).

nation-state. For anarchists understood (even if they did not write it in academic dissertations) that the imperialism of the metropolis on the periphery is not only at the global level but also within a "nation-state" (capital against the province, hegemonic culture against the marginal, etc.). This is the basis of anarchist internationalism — an internationalism based on non-power, diversity and pluralism. Starting from the autonomy and interaction of different communities within a society, it proceeds to the international level. The reference point in these contexts is the community, not the nation. And it is for this reason that anarchists can be both anti-imperialists and critics of nationalist movements and their practices.

Because nationalism and the nation are ideological constructs and movements that undermine the practice of liberation. And a comparison could be made between Bolshevik socialism and nationalism. Both ideologies promise "great riches" before coming to power — but once in power they become just as (if not more) oppressive. And perhaps the convergence of Leninism and nationalism in the Third World is not so coincidental.

THE HISTORICAL EXPERIENCE OF NATIONALISM IN CYPRUS

If the nation is an idea that offers collective identification, nationalism is the ideology that promotes, cultivates and imposes it. The historical trajectory of nationalism in Cyprus (to return to reality after the journey to abstraction) is typical. Nationalism was not born spontaneously as a result of historical processes or as an awakening to the "destinies of the race."[5] Nationalism was imposed on Cypriots in the 19th century. Not only is the ethnic division

[5] The following analysis is brief and descriptive. For an extensive analysis of the historical experience of nationalism in Cyprus, see "Cyprus, the national issue and nationalism".

projecting a "threatening Other") to suppress social conflict and exacerbate nationalist hysteria.

But, of course, the Cyprus problem exists without war. And this is an existent problem. However, we need to make some things clear from the outset. The Cyprus problem will be solved away from us — and the rest of the Cypriots. Politicians will tie and stitch and impose the solution through the votes of their supporters. This is for those who think that tomorrow they will be asked how the problem will be solved. Of course, this approach solves nothing. After all, one might say, this is tradition. I would say it is "cynical realism" and we need a bit of cynicism in bourgeois democracy.

The issue, however, goes further. It is a refusal to rekindle nationalism. Because at the moment the only other solution, apart from refusing to put the national issue at the centre of the debate, is to start talking about the "cyclamen on Pentadaktylos" in relation to the betrayal of politicians (as the leftists did). The images and ideologies you use and appeal to are necessarily those that have been cultivated for years in us and all Cypriots. But there are other dimensions of the issue that the one-dimensional discussion around the occupation obscures. For it is not only the occupation of Northern Cyprus, it is also the Greek army, the British bases and, most importantly, the historical wounds opened by nationalism. Because Cypriots may not have had the hatreds that the extreme right-wingers of the two communities and their bosses in Athens and Ankara cultivated, but 20 years of conflict, massacres and propaganda have changed many things. Especially since '74, after which human contact has completely stopped. Even if the politicians find a solution, the tensions arising from this historical tradition will not be easily forgotten. And this is an issue that needs to be addressed soon. There will, of course, be criticisms of the "so you have nothing to propose" variety. Not really. We simply refuse to provide "solutions" in the styule of a magic formula. We have to get over the logic and insecurities of leftism at some point — and especially the insecurity that we are the enlightened vanguard that

gue that Turkey would have a real interest in occupying southern Cyprus. Already, it has huge economic and political problems with what it conquered in '74. And back then there was an excuse — the protection of the Turkish Cypriots. Despite the whining of leftists and other nationalists, the international boycott of North Cyprus is still in place and is not at all convenient for Turkey. If Turkey wanted to occupy all of Cyprus, it would have done so in '74 when there was no resistance. Further, a new Turkish offensive would potentially create a general Greek-Turkish conflict — something totally unlikely to continue for a few days, given US interests in the region. This does not mean, of course, that the Turkish state would not want to annex all of Cyprus. Expansion is the dream of states and nationalism. It is just that the circumstances in the region and internationally make it very difficult and unprofitable. There is, of course, always the possibility of a change in the balance of power. But, the most likely cause of further Turkish expansion is internal tensions. A war could be a means of ideological discharge of the internal tensions in Turkish society. It is, of course, unprofitable and of dubious duration, but nationalist hysteria lives in its own world sometimes.

So, yes, there is a certain vague possibility of war somewhere in the future. But what we have said above can be said with equal accuracy about the Greek state. A war, whoever starts it, will be the height of nationalist hysteria. So what do we do? Unionists are concerned, of course, about the morale of the army. But, from a radical point of view, the point is to avoid a war.

The struggle against nationalism is also a struggle against a war of states — a meaningless massacre in front of monuments to heroes.

Today's boogeyman of the "Turkish danger" is no different from the boogeyman of the "Bulgarian danger" chanted by nationalists, or from Reagan's boogeyman of the "Russian danger".

There is always the possibility of war, as long as there are states — the bogeyman, however, is the ideological use of this issue (by

non-existent but we have several common uprisings of Orthodox Christians and Muslims (the Greek-Turkish terms were also non-existent) against the elites of the two communities. Nationalism was imported from Greece and Turkey and imposed on the population through the educational system, vulgar politics and spectacular polarization. English colonialism was by no means unconnected to these developments (however much they ultimately damaged it). It introduced the Greek-Turkish separation (and imposed the conditions) at the level of political power. It would, however, be a mistake to think that nationalism was a ploy by the elites and colonialists to suppress social conflict. The rise of nationalism was promoted by various strata, but it was largely a phenomenon that was born by power structures and in turn promoted the reconstruction of power structures in Cyprus. Over the last 100 years, nationalism has been the ideological response of power (and its structures) to social conflict.

And anyone who looks at the history of the rise of nationalism will see this constant conflict between the ideology of power and elements of social resistance. A prime example of this conflict that has continued for decades is the refusal of the majority of Cypriots to accept an active form of chauvinism. Until before 74, when there were still relations between the two communities on a daily level, nationalism had only succeeded in making people passive in the face of its racist hysteria — the majority of Cypriots said and believed the now classic statement: "But we have nothing against the Turks (or Greeks)". However, the prevalence of nationalism after the 1950s was total — and did not only lead to tension between the 2 communities. It created the ideological atmosphere that legitimized the state, suppressed class struggle for decades in the name of "national unity" and made the patriarchal family the undisputed basis of society.

As we have tried to show elsewhere, nationalism was essentially the unifying element of the hegemonic ideology. In '74, nationalism went through its most intense crisis in decades. In the

space of a few months it was forced to change its face and went from being Greek with tsarouhia and davuls to Cypriot with vraka pants and lute. For a while it seemed that this change would be as successful as what was happening before ’74. Around the end of the 70s, however — and especially from the 80s onwards — a general indifference among Cypriots and a shift to a petit bourgeois individualism began to emerge. The national isssue is of course everywhere — but there is also a cynicism at the same time.

The rallies are thinning out and the parties are forced to resort to spectacular political crises in order to keep the interest of the viewers-voters. At first glance, this shift may seem uninteresting or perhaps even worse than before. Leftists, who feel their loneliness more acutely, have a literature around “the situation getting worse”. They’ve settled everything in their theories and decided that the ruling classes don’t want “the people” to care about the national issue — because as everyone knows this is Aeolus’ bag for the “revolutionary prospects”. Now, of course, why Lycaugis cries out and wails about our store every day in “Philelefθeros” is not explained to us — maybe he has “revolutionary tendencies” too. From an anarchist point of view, however, today is [but] a reaction to the flattening and oppressive society constituted by the nationalist imaginary. A reaction with no positive prospects for the moment, but nevertheless a reaction as a continuation of the historical tradition — the conflict between the ideology of power (nationalism) and social resistance (however distorted the latter may be). Thus, if it followed the crisis of nationalism, this reaction was not a mere feedback loop. Slowly, new elements of politics and consciousness are also emerging. The emergence of anarchism (towards the end of the 1970s) was the first element of resistance and critique. For Cypriot anarchism is not just imported ideas — it is a reaction born out of the contradictions of Cypriot society. And its clearly antinationalist position is directly related to the historical experience of the individuals who make it up. Recently, new signs have begun to emerge. There are some basic mobilisations around community

demands, even some spontaneous strikes, some discussion around women’s equality is opening up, a youth subculture is beginning to be formed, etc. These phenomena do not, of course, constitute any revolutionary etc. movement. They are reformist, trade unionist or even marginal phenomena. Their emergence, however, is a promising new development. Something is finally in motion, albeit spasmodically. Beyond that, their appearance brings the results of tensions in social structures. In one sense, they are premonitions of a more general crisis in society. And the emergence of this crisis is not unrelated to the crisis of nationalism. The crisis of this incriminating element of the hegemonic ideology has loosened somewhat the tight ideological unity of society, opening the way for the expression of static contradictions in various social spheres and structures. The crisis of nationalism has not only not been promoted by the ruling classes, but is the result of structural contradictions and social resistances. And it is a positive thing. A radical critique must deepen this crisis and establish an alternative pole of reference if it wants to intervene in social developments. The unionists and the Trotskyists of Ekfrasi have become the tails of parties, ideologies and imaginaries from the past. Marx used to also say good things: “The revolution must draw its poetry from the future and not from the past”. In this context, there is a need to set aside the national issue from the centre of the debate — especially among individuals and groups who do not live with a romantic image of the past, but who are interested in constructing an alternative space and discourse.

But, again, someone will say, what about the Cyprus problem, AND YET THE PROBLEM EXISTS. After all, there are so many thousands of refugees, there is the problem of free settlement, the Turkish danger, etc. Anyway, we said at the beginning that nationalism may be an ideology, but there are real-objective problems that one has to face even after criticizing it.

Let’s start with the bogeyman of the “Turkish danger”. Only in the context of our ideological narrow-mindedness could one ar-