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PAR-15
Political Football

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Dear Peter,

Had you been in Nicosia early on the afternoon of the 8th of December, 1985, you might well have opted to go for a dip. The sun was bright; it was extremely warm outside; and there was nothing much to do. I had been invited to join a German journalist in the pool at the Hilton, but decided instead to take a walk along the Venetian walls of old Nicosia and then along the green line dividing the city's Greeks from its Turks. The chief attraction was Hélène da Costa, who was covering this election for Radio France Internationale as she had covered the Turkish Cypriot elections last summer. This was her second trip to the South, and, apart from being splendid company, she was well informed regarding matters that I was then just beginning to sort out.

I had spent the morning journeying from one elementary school to another in hopes of getting photographs of the various Greek Cypriot political leaders casting their ballots in the parliamentary elections held that day. For the most part, the endeavor was a waste of time. The pictures taken by the Press Information Office and made freely available to visiting journalists were generally superior to the ones I took. I do not, however, regret the expenditure of a few hours. In visiting the various home precincts of Greek Cyprus' political grandees, I did get something of a feel for the small-time character of the whole operation. The elections in the Greek South were a more impressive event than those held in the Turkish North last summer--but only in the sense that city council elections held in Tulsa, Oklahoma are generally better financed and somewhat more awe-inspiring than those held in Muskogee, Ponca City, and Lawton. The Cyprus conflict is of legitimate concern to the two great powers: the squabbles between the island's Greeks and its Turks generate powerful emotions in Greece and Turkey; these quarrels have pretty much crippled NATO in its southern flank; and, more than once, they have come close to occasioning a war between fifty million Turks and ten million Greeks. And yet the actual number of human beings directly involved

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is remarkably small: there are not many more than half a million Greeks and 150,000 Turks on the island. As Hélène and I strolled along the thick, stone walls--built by Latin Christians centuries ago to repel the invading Turks--these were among the considerations that came to mind.

Everywhere we looked there were political posters and signs. Those of the Progressive Party of the Working People (AKEL), the powerful and well-organized Greek Cypriot communist party, were the most numerous--at least in the somewhat dilapidated areas through which we were wandering. They proudly boasted that AKEL was "the first party" (prōto komma); suggested that only AKEL could provide an exit from what was a dead-end street; or depicted women, peasants, and workers under a declaration that "the people (o laós) vote for AKEL."

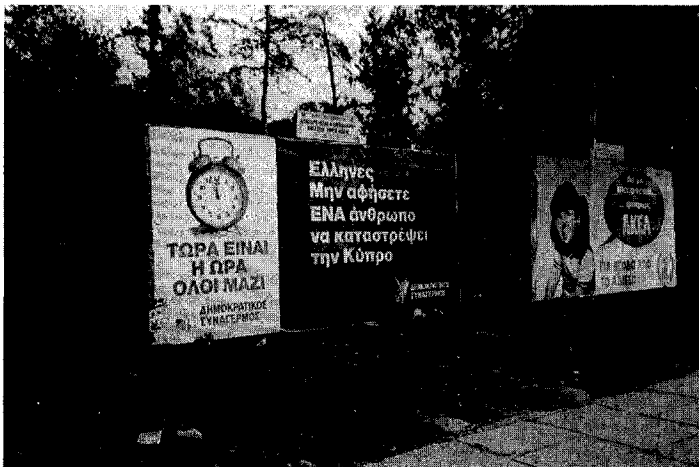


"AKEL: The Number-One Party" ¹

Those of Democratic Rally (DYSY)--Glafkos Klerides' pro-Western, conservative coalition--were undoubtedly the most dramatic of the posters out on the streets. In hinting at the necessity for Spyros Kyprianou's replacement as President of the Republic, they sounded two intimately related themes. Some posters depicted a clock: it was three minutes to midnight, and time was clearly running out. "Now," read the caption, "is the time for unity." Other posters merely carried an admonition: "Hellenes: Do not let one human being destroy Cyprus." Neither AKEL nor Rally mentioned that the chief left-wing and the chief right-wing parties were joined in a strange and uneasy alliance against Kyprianou, who spurned them both. With considerable justification, the leaders of the two parties feared that their collaboration with their ideological opposite numbers would alienate party loyalists and hand Kyprianou the victory he sought.

1. All photographs that appear in this letter are my own--except for the picture of Ezekias Papaioannou on p. 9, which was taken by the Press Information Office of the Republic of Cyprus.

The posters of Kyprianou's Democratic Party (DIKO) were remarkably tame. They spoke of "security" and "progress," depicted classrooms filled with smiling children, and linked the party with "justice for those to come." They lacked the fierce partisan tone evident in the DIKO leaflets scattered all over the streets. AKEL and DYSY had pledged that, if they garnered two-thirds of the seats in the Cypriot parliament, they would amend the constitution and thereby force Kyprianou to resign. The DIKO leaflets depicted the same clock to be found on the Democratic Rally posters. As before, the time was three minutes to midnight. But, this time, the clock was wired to four sticks of dynamite--two labeled "Democratic Rally" and two "AKEL"--and these were placed underneath a book entitled "The Constitution of Democratic Cyprus." Disaster threatened, but rescue was imminent: from a white sleeve sporting the DIKO logo, a hand reached out with scissors to defuse the time bomb and prevent Cyprus from going down "the road of catastrophe." If the election campaign was considerably more heated than similar contests held back in Tulsa, Oklahoma, it was largely for two reasons: though tiny and lacking in population, Cyprus is an independent state with an important role to play on the world stage; and its beleaguered President, Spyros Kyprianou, was fighting for political survival.



DYSY's Alarm Clock, and the Children of AKEL and DIKO

Except at its headquarters, which in due course we slowly bumbled past, the fourth and least important of the Greek Cypriot parties displayed relatively few posters. These either depicted children whose future would somehow best be protected by Cyprus' Baathist-model Socialist Party EDEK, or they presented the party's eloquent, shaggy-maned party leader Vassos Lyssarides speaking in the Cypriot parliament. Just two days before, Hélène and I had met the man, who is Greek Prime Minister Andreas Papandreou's greatest admirer and closest ideological ally on the island. We had both found him singularly unpleasant. When questioned, Lyssarides had been perfectly prepared to repeat his party's slogans--but, when gently pressed to explain just how his program was practicable, he had become surprisingly belligerent. This was apparently the manner in which he typically dealt with those skeptical regarding his wisdom. Nearly everyone (whatever their

political persuasion) takes it for granted that EDEK is largely funded by Colonel Gaddafi of Libya. Shortly before our arrival, when one journalist questioned Lyssarides on television concerning the connection between his party and the Cypro-Libyan corporation (which collects a fat fee on all Cypriot-Libyan trade), Lyssarides had reacted in the belligerent manner we were later to witness--in this case, by refusing to address the question and by threatening to sue the journalist for libel.



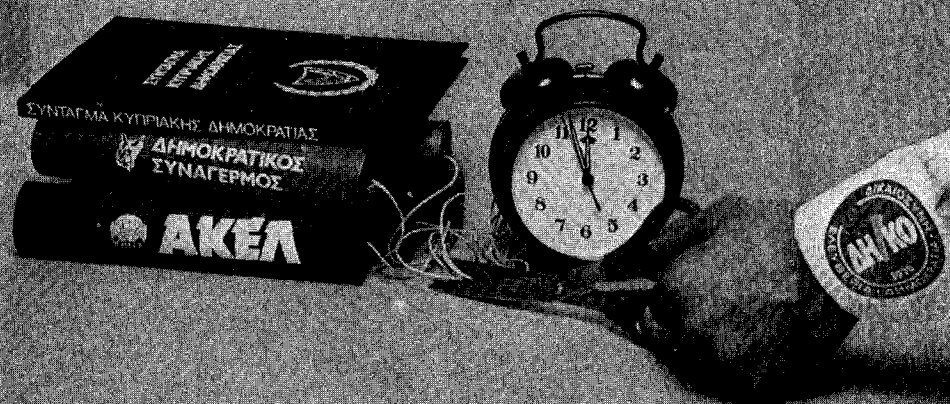
Lyssarides in Parliament, and
"The People Vote for AKEΛ"

Since we both found Lyssarides intellectually unimpressive and not a little offensive, we were quite surprised when we were accosted by an elderly gentleman of genial demeanor who turned out to be on his way home from voting for EDEK. This amiable ancient was none other than Kyriakos Dimitriou, whose confused views I touch on in my last letter.² He had overheard us discussing the election and had stopped us to offer himself as a guide. Having nothing better to do, we accepted his offer of hospitality--and for the next two hours we were his guests as we wandered along the Venetian fortifications to the green line and then across the Greek sector along that ugly border.

Here and there, we came across the words Ellada-Kypros: Enosē ("Cyprus=Greece: Unification") in spray paint on the walls of derelict houses. At one point in the course of our travels, we came across an unfamiliar slogan--Zēto Olympiakos--similarly adorning a wall. I recognized that it meant "Long Live Olympiakos," but was puzzled as to the identity of "Olympiakos." Kyriakos laughed and said, "For once, it is not political; Olympiakos is a football team."

2. See PAR-14.

ΕΜΠΡΟΣ ΟΛΟΙ ΜΑΖΙ ΝΑ ΦΡΑΞΟΥΜΕ ΤΟΝ ΔΡΟΜΟ ΤΗΣ ΚΑΤΑΣΤΡΟΦΗΣ



ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΚΟ ΚΟΜΜΑ

I

Kyriakos' claim, as he revealed three days later, was the truth--but not the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Olympiakos was indeed a soccer team, but support for that team was by no means without political import. Back in the late 1940s, in the midst of the Greek Civil War, the Greek Cypriot sports federation splintered along political lines. AKEL was at the time a crypto-communist party (something like the Turkish Republican Party in northern Cyprus today), and it had a considerable following among left-leaning, anticlerical intellectuals that included figures such as Vassos Lyssarides and George Ladas (a charter member of AKEL and now Spyros Kyprianou's chief deputy in DIKO) as well as many of the noncommunist Greek Cypriots working as journalists on the island today. Already in the 1940s, there were Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot soccer teams. AKEL was then intent on achieving enosis between Cyprus and what it thought would be a communist Greece. While pursuing cultural hegemony on the island, it attempted a Gleichschaltung of Greek Cypriot soccer. The majority of those prominent within the Nicosia soccer federation APOEL were opposed to mixing sports with politics; and, when the leftists found that they lacked the votes to seize control, they walked out and founded their own team--which they called Omonoia ("Solidarity"). Inevitably, this polarized the situation; and to this day APOEL is the team backed by Cypriot conservatives while Omonoia is the team supported by AKEL stalwarts and their fellow travelers. The former wave Greek flags at the matches--while the latter sport, as is only natural, red.

As soccer became more popular on the island, teams were organized in outlying towns such as Famagusta, Kyrenia, Larnaca, Limassol, Paphos, and Morphou, and in many of the larger villages as well. Wherever the numbers were sufficient, the Nicosia pattern reappeared: one or more teams represented the communists, and whatever other teams existed were allied with the right. In Greek Cyprus, politics infects nearly every sphere of life.

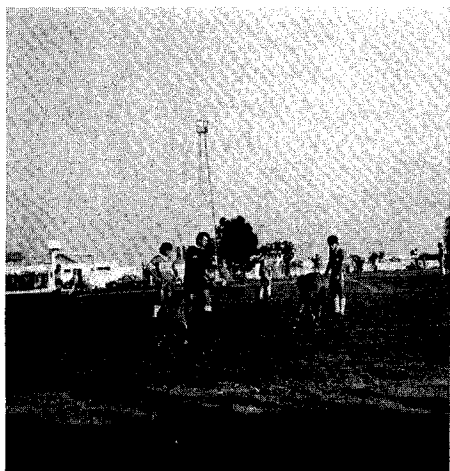
II

On the Saturday following our meeting with Kyriakos, I once again found myself with time on my hands. The election was over; Hélène was back in Paris; and nary a politician nor a civil servant was available for inquisition. To make matters worse, I had already seen the only non-porno film showing on the island,³ and there was no point in renting a car and driving out in the country: Katie Klerides, the intelligent, charming, and

3. In Cyprus as well as in Turkey, the introduction of the VCR has virtually driven decent films from the theaters; for reasons that I deplore, most people prefer to watch movies at home.

hospitable daughter of the DYSY leader had volunteered to take me to Paphos the very next day. That Saturday, I was footloose and fancy free.

While in Nicosia, I was staying at the Kennedy Hotel; over the course of my stay, I had become quite friendly with Barnabas Varnavides, the son of the local furniture magnate who owns the hotel. On my way in after lunch that particular Saturday, I stumbled into my friend. Earlier, he had aided me in arranging interviews with Archbishop Khrysostomos, the Greek Ethnarch, and with the communist trade-union leader Andreas Ziartides. When we met, he asked me how the interviews had gone and what was I up to just then. The interviews had gone very, very well, I replied. At the moment, I added, I was at loose ends and would probably spend the afternoon reading through one of the many tomes dealing with the Cyprus problem that I had purchased in the local bookstores. This, he replied, would not do on such a splendid day. And so he invited me to join him in a trip to the region near the UN buffer zone just to the South of Famagusta. His father hoped to buy a hotel in the area, and he wanted to go by and look the building over. More important, it was Saturday, and his team--which happened to be Olympiakos--was playing the Famagusta team Salamis at Derynia not far from the hotel they proposed to purchase.



Political Football: Capitalists vs. Proletarians

I jumped at the chance; and, before we knew it, we were on the road. I cannot say that the match was inspiring. Through most of the game, the two teams marched up and down the field in desultory fashion; as time began to run out, there were brief flurries of frantic activity--but to no avail: the match ended in a scoreless tie, and there was considerable grumbling from the stands.

The crowd was small, but the bleachers were packed. The town of Famagusta and its posh suburb Varosha are now in the hands of the Turks, and Salamis has no stadium of its own and, so, is forced to play home games on village soccer grounds in the one corner of the Famagusta region still in Greek hands. Derynia was just such a village, and the facilities were

adequate perhaps--but skimpy. We squeezed into the stands near the right end alongside the handful of capitalists who had driven down to watch Olympiakos; the workers and peasants belonging to what remained of the Famagusta proletariat sat to our left and cheered with modest enthusiasm for Salamis when they were not making rude remarks about the players. The dullness of the match had a similar effect on the Olympiakos stalwarts. One gentleman two rows up and a bit to my right became so loud and abusive that a policeman came over to tell him that, if he did not keep to himself his opinions about the parts of the male anatomy that certain of the Olympiakos players evidently lacked, he would be ejected from the grounds.

Olympiakos never plays terribly well when away from home. So Barnabas informed me. In any case, in recent years, the team has had a slump; its glory days are in the past. But there is hope for the future. Olympiakos now has a West German coach, and he has hired a British black to play forward. Each Cypriot team is allowed two ringers from abroad, and it is rumored that another foreigner of considerable talent will soon join the Olympiakos squad. Things may be looking up.

It was, I soon learned, no accident that the coach and the one foreign player associated with the rightwing team came from Western Europe. Salamis has a coach and a goalkeeper from Czechoslovakia. The same pattern persists all over the island. It would apparently be unthinkable for APDEL or any of the rightwing teams to look for talent in the eastern bloc, and it is equally inconceivable that one of the communist teams should hire a coach or player from the British isles, Scandinavia, the Benelux countries, France, Italy, Spain, Austria, or Germany. It would be an exaggeration to say that Greek Cyprus is divided into two separate communities--but not much of one.

III

All of this appears to be changing--and quite rapidly. AKEL is losing its grip. In previous elections, the Progressive Party of the Working People never secured under 32% of the ballots cast.⁴ In part because the British fostered AKEL as a force to be played off against the Greek Orthodox Church and the more militant supporters of enosis, in part because the party has always had skillful and dedicated leadership, and in part because there has never been a viable social democratic movement on the island, the Greek Cypriot communist party has had the solid support of somewhere between one-third and two-fifths of the Greek Cypriot population for the past forty years.

Now, that is no longer the case. On the 8th of December, AKEL took a nosedive: on the 24th of May, 1981, the party had garnered 32.768% of the total vote; four and a half years later, its support had fallen to 27.429%. In the interim, the number of registered voters had increased from 308,729 to

4. For the past history of the party, one should consult T. W. Adams, AKEL: The Communist Party of Cyprus (Stanford 1971).

346,450 while the number of ballots cast for AKEL had dropped from 95,364 to 87,628. The losses were the most dramatic where the party had always been strong. In the Nicosia region, AKEL's share of the vote dropped from 29.4% to 23.95; in its Limassol stronghold, support fell from 35.7% to 28.2%; and in Famagusta, where the party had secured 39% in 1981, it gained just 34%.



AKEL Leader Papaioannou Votes

The pre-election polls had, in fact, indicated a considerable shift of voters away from AKEL to Lyssarides' EDEK and Kyprianou's DIKO. Philelef-

theros, the leading Cyprus daily, is a newspaper so careful to maintain its political independence that it is virtually innocuous.⁵ But, in most matters, it is also relatively dependable and reasonably industrious. When the elections were announced, the paper had commissioned the Middle East Marketing Research Bureau (MEMRB) to sample the voters' preferences. During the week stretching from the 19th to the 24th of November, the pollsters of the MEMRB interviewed 1085 individuals from a carefully selected cross-section of the islands villages and towns. Of these, 19.2% cast blank ballots, and 23.7% voted for AKEL. The MEMRB staff were persuaded that, if the actual election had been held that week, the bulk of those casting blank ballots would have reluctantly opted to throw their support to the party they judged the least reprehensible; in the pollsters' estimation, AKEL would then have received anywhere from 26.4% to 32.5% of the total vote--with the likelihood that its support would not have much exceeded 29.4%, if it had reached that figure at all.

The MEMRB is a reputable and highly professional market research outfit, but it is also relatively new and it had played no role in previous elections. Everyone took note of its forecasts, but no one accorded them the attention they evidently deserved. The local political commentators predicted that the communist party would suffer a marginal decline--possibly large enough to prevent DYSY and AKEL from garnering two-thirds of the seats in the new parliament, the proportion that the two parties would need if they were to amend the constitution and open up the way for Kyprianou's ouster. No one expected the party to lose one-sixth of its support and to fall from first to third place. So dramatic a shift presupposed an electoral earthquake of the sort that had never happened in Cyprus before.

In the aftermath, Ezekias Papaioannou, the General Secretary of AKEL, explained the results by pointing to "unbridled demagoguery from all sides." He accused the party's opponents of bribery and promises and efforts to influence the electorate. "The whole state apparatus had been mobilized in an illegal and blackmailing way," he noted. In some districts, party officials later claimed, the ballots of AKEL supporters had been wrongly ruled invalid.

Not long after Papaioannou's diatribe, I spoke with Andreas Ziartides, an AKEL deputy who is the General-Secretary of the communist-dominated Pancyprrian Federation of Labor (PED) and who may be more powerful within the party than Papaioannou himself. When I asked him about his party's defeat, Ziartides declined to repeat Papaioannou's charges. He told me the obvious--that the Politburo and the Central Committee of the party would be examining the question in the near future--and he then added, "I cannot comment officially on the matter before the party has reached its decision." Had I been speaking with someone of dyspeptic temperament such as Ezekias Papaioannou or Vassos Lyssarides, that would undoubtedly have ended the discussion--but Ziartides is an accommodating fellow, and he evidently wanted to be helpful. "If you want

5. There is a reason for the caution of Phileleftheros' editors. Partisan journalism is so much the norm both in Greece and on Cyprus that virtually no one in either country would think it possible for a journal to provide fair coverage to all the parties and yet from time to time take a firm stand on its editorial page.

my personal view in a few words," he said, "some sectors of our friends did not understand correctly our policy, why we wanted to fight Kyprianou. Some were misled by the propaganda of Kyprianou about the need for the refugees to return to their homes in the North, about the absolute necessity for the Turkish troops to withdraw immediately. There were also subjective causes: our propaganda machine failed to present our case." Though he did not say so in so many words, Ziartides was acknowledging that his party lost on the very issues over which the campaign was fought.

This was the conclusion drawn by the Soviets as well. Within ten days after the election, an article hinting at criticism of AKEL's recent strategy had appeared in Sovietskaya Russia and had been transmitted by the Soviet news agency TASS. The article's author blamed the US and NATO for the intercommunal conflict on the island and then suggested that the gains registered by Kyprianou's DIKO and Lyssarides' EDEK reflected popular support for "a free and independent Cyprus." The leaders of AKEL were evidently stunned: for they responded with a front-page editorial in the party newspaper Haravghi in an attempt to soften the impression that Moscow holds the party's leadership responsible for its electoral defeat. A month later, the Soviets moved to align themselves decisively with Kyprianou and Papandreou against Denktas and the Turkish administration in Ankara and advanced proposals for a solution to the Cyprus problem that presuppose that the only serious obstacle to a settlement is the presence of Turkish troops on the island. AKEL will now have to abandon its cooperation with Rally and fall in line.

IV

AKEL's defeat evidently has something to do with its traditional supporters' attitudes regarding the proper stance to take towards Turkey and the Cypriot Turks, but it seems to have other roots as well. A number of Cypriot commentators certainly think so.

The rightwing press made much of the fact that AKEL has a superannuated leadership. Papaioannou, who served on the Cypriot Committee of the British Communist Party and later fought as a member of the International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War, is nearly 78; I was told that he is now the oldest communist party chief in the world. He has been General-Secretary of the Progressive Party of the Working People since August, 1949. Andreas Fantis, who was first elected Deputy General Secretary of AKEL in 1957, is a decade younger. He was a member of the original Communist Party of Cyprus (KKK), when it was proscribed in 1933, and he was present at the meeting at which AKEL was founded in April, 1941. He became a member of the Central Committee at the outset, and he joined the Politburo in 1946. Andreas Ziartides is a year younger than Fantis and came to prominence within the local communist movement while Papaioannou and Fantis were in exile. He joined the trade-union movement in the late 1930s and was elected General Secretary of the Pancyprian Movement of Workers (PSE) in 1943, three years after the PSE was formed. That same year, he was elected to the Central Committee of AKEL. The PSE was banned in 1945 and Ziartides was jailed by the British. When he was released in 1947, he returned to Cyprus and took over the leadership of the

PSE's successor PEO. Except when in exile in the late 1950s, he has held the post ever since.

Papaioannou, Fantis, and Ziartides are typical: their subordinates have been around for nearly as long. Sixteen years ago, an American scholar described AKEL as "a sleepy party ruled by an insecure and unimaginative group of old men, all of whom abhor change." "As long as the unity of the Greek Cypriot community is the paramount interest of the government of the Republic," he suggested, "AKEL can coast along as an accepted element of that community. But when national conditions allow peace to come again to Cyprus, a question will arise as to how long AKEL will be able to cling to its present pro-Soviet identity and survive."⁶ Not much has changed since these words were written: AKEL remains a sleepy party under the dominion of the same group of conservative old men who have run it for going on forty years. Peace has not come to Cyprus, but, in December, 1985, for the first time in its history, AKEL came to the polls with the government and the church ranged against it--and it suffered a dramatic loss. When I asked Ziartides whether the rightwing commentators were correct in arguing that the younger members are abandoning the party, he replied, "There are people who think that younger people should take the place of the older people in the leadership. I don't exclude that."



Andreas Ziartides at PEO

Ziartides had reason to acknowledge the fact: under the Cypriot election law, each party presents an electoral list of its candidates within each of the island's six regions; by listing its candidates in a particular order, the party indicates which individuals should be given priority. But the voters supporting a given party can reject its recommendations and give preference to any candidate they choose from the party list. Where no preference is stated, those counting the ballots assume that the voter accepts the party's judgment regarding the relative priority of its candidates. This the AKEL voters

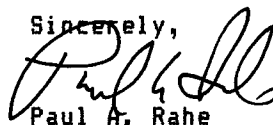
6. Adams, AKEL: The Communist Party of Cyprus 8-9.

declined to do in the recent election. A sizable proportion of those who remained loyal to the Progressive Party of the Working People nonetheless indicated a preference for the party's younger candidates. At the polls, in December, 1985, AKEL's leadership suffered an embarrassing rebellion from within the ranks as well as a humiliating defeat.

There was at least one other reason for the debacle. Of the journalists on the island, Alekos Constantinides, the outspoken editor of the rightwing, pro-DYSY newspaper Alētheia ("Truth"), is probably the best informed concerning AKEL. Until 1957, he was himself a member of the party, and he knows AKEL and its leaders intimately. When I spoke with him, Constantinides insisted that the decline in support for AKEL was "permanent." He spoke of it as "the beginning of a larger drop." "In Cyprus," he explained, "we have a European standard of living; it is almost absurd for us to have an orthodox communist party here gaining a vote of 33%. The party's collapse was bound to come sooner or later; it was inevitable that their support would eventually fall to their natural strength in a country with our standard of living. Eventually, they will drop below 20%; their real strength is about 15%." This may be wishful thinking, but I have a sneaking suspicion that he is right. A Greek Cypriot journalist who covers both Greece and Cyprus for The Financial Times described the results as "an historic defeat for AKEL."

A week after the elections, the Greek Cypriot right added insult to AKEL's injury. While I was in Paphos, touring archaeological sites and remarking on the island's beauties, APOEL scored twice in the second half to shut out the league champion Omonoia 2-0. That, too, was an historic defeat of sorts. Prior to the 15th of December, the soccer team of Cyprus' working class had had a winning streak of 47 matches.

Sincerely,



Paul A. Rahe

Received in Hanover 2/10/86