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ΠΟΛΙΤΙΚΕΣ ΣΥΝΕΠΕΙΕΣ ΤΗΣ ΚΑΤΑΣΤΡΟΦΗΣ

PHILIP CARABOTT

THE GREEK «COMMUNISTS» AND THE ASIA MINOR CAMPAIGN

When in early November 1918 some thirty-four individuals met at Piraeus with the aim of uniting the approximately eighteen socialist and labour organizations which they represented into a single socialist party¹, very few of the delegates — or indeed those whom they represented — knew what lay ahead. In the preceding months protracted negotiations, some of which were sponsored by Venizelos' government², had taken place among Greece's nascent socialists. But, despite the creation of a General Confederation of Workers (GSEE) in late October, the heterogeneity of the participants who assembled a fortnight later did not leave much room for optimism. Undoubtedly the momentum of the «Great Bolshevik Revolution», which had begun to «inspire the peoples and frighten their tyrants»³, managed to give some semblance of unity to the proceedings of the congress which resulted in the foundation of the Socialist Labour Party of Greece (SEKE). But it did not prevent basic ideological differences, as well as contradicting policies, from manifesting themselves both in subsequent congresses and in the every-day activities of the *par excellence* party of the working class. It would take the Greek communists more than six years to overcome organizational deficiencies and another seven to master ideological doctrines and to wipe out sectarian attitudes and practices and become, under the watchful guidance and heavy handed intervention

1. For an exhaustive discussion on the actual number of participants and their respective organizations see O. Smith, «The First Congress of the Socialist Workers Party of Greece: Old and New Problems», *Scandinavian Studies in Modern Greek*, vol. 7-8 (1983-84), pp. 107-121.

2. G. Leon, *The Greek Socialist Movement and the First World War: The Road to Unity*, New York 1976, pp. 101ff.

3. See the introductory comments of A. Arvanitis (one of the five members of the organizational committee of the congress) on the first day of the proceedings in *Τό πρώτο συνέδριο τού ΣΕΚΕ — Πρακτικά*, Athens 1982, p. 22.

of the Comintern, the pure and incontestable section of the Third International in Greece.

These ideological differences are perhaps best illustrated in the party's stance on issues of foreign affairs. The adoption of a slogan for an independent Macedonia and Thrace in late 1924 severely damaged the KKE's public image, hindered its influence in inter-war politics and was largely responsible for the introduction of emergency legislative measures (*Ίδιώνυμο*) — apart from claiming heavy casualties among its members. But even prior to 1924, the party's attitude during the Asia Minor campaign of 1919-1922 provided its opponents with valuable ammunition for labeling it an «anti-Greek» party, a stooge of international Bolshevism. In a country where the collective mentality of the inhabitants had been for almost a century heavily imbued with the *Μεγάλη Ίδέα*, public opinion was sensitive to any hindrance of irredentist aspirations, and notions of xenophobia, especially communist-phobia, could and indeed did find expression among large numbers of Greeks. In this article I will trace SEKE's stance in regard to the Asia Minor campaign. In doing so I will draw a distinction between the policies of the leadership and the activities of individual communists, and attempt to examine the effect, if any, that these had on the outcome of Greece's last — albeit fatal — irredentist venture.

Until recently the proceedings of the First Congress of SEKE had not been published and all relevant information was derived principally from the censored reports of *Βαλκανικός Ταχυδρόμος* and *Ριζοσπάστης*; from the ambiguous accounts of participants, such as Benaroyias, or those who seemed to have access to the minutes of the congress, such as Kordatos; and from SEKE's publication of April 1919, entitled «The Principles and Programme of SEKE». Unfortunately, the published *praktika* do not shed any new light on the discussion of foreign affairs for they do not include the deliberations of the last two days of the congress when the issue was raised. Notwithstanding want of specific details, it is certainly indicative of the participants' — and consequently the party's — diverse stance that two separate resolutions on foreign affairs were submitted. The fact that the proponents of the «minority» resolution forthwith withdrew from the congress should not lead us to assume that differences of opinion ceased to exist. For the creation of the Third International and its subsequent twenty-one integral points was bound to strike a sensitive chord with the highly individualistic patriotism of the Greeks, communist or otherwise. Indeed, it could be argued that the diversity between an «international» and a «national» approach, in theory and even more in practice, characterized SEKE's turbulent history until the party's overt bolshevization in 1924.

More specifically, the «majority» resolution dealt with a wide range of issues, offering a variety of solutions. Among other things it demanded the denunciation of all secret treaties and alliances and the abolition of secret diplomacy; it strongly advocated the concept of national self-determination; it called for the commencement of public negotiations that would lead to the

conclusion of a general peace; it supported the establishment of the League of Nations, only in so far as it would contribute to the independence of all nations, large and small; and it advocated the creation of a Balkan Democratic Federation. Although there was no direct reference to Greece's territorial claims, the resolution insisted that the concept of self-determination should be applied regarding traditional Greek irredentist areas such as northern Epirus, Cyprus, the Dodecanese and the northern Aegean islands, and requested the immediate repatriation and compensation of refugee populations forcefully expelled from their homes in the Balkans and Asia Minor⁴. The resolution was voted for by the so-called «left» and «centre» factions⁵, and was supplemented by a decision to abstain («in principle») from every war (although the necessity of «national defence» was recognized)⁶. At the same time, SEKE declared its adamant opposition to the proposed Entente military intervention in the Soviet Union⁷.

The internationalist orientation of the «majority» resolution should not be over-estimated. Its basic axiom was that the termination of hostilities should create neither victors, nor vanquished; and as has been pointed out the resolution was «more Wilsonian than Wilson», while the advocacy of a Balkan Federation showed «an acute understanding of the Balkan problem in grasping the intense interplay between domestic and external factors»⁸. Nevertheless, the issue here is not so much whether in late 1918 the majority of SEKE had exhibited political astuteness and far-sightedness, but rather whether its resolution corresponded to an objective evaluation of the current situation in Greece —especially in the light of the national hysteria that prevailed at the time⁹. The resolution failed to acknowledge that the right of self-determination applied to the Greeks of Asia Minor, an area which topped the list of irredentist claims¹⁰, and those of eastern Thrace, presumably because they both constituted ethnic minorities¹¹. Instead, it advocated the creation of autonomous

4. Text of «majority» resolution in *Τὸ ΚΚΕ — Ἐπίσημα κείμενα*, vol. 1, Athens 1974, pp. 11-13.

5. For a brief description see A. Benaroyias, *Ἡ πρώτη σταδιοδρομία τοῦ ἐλληνικοῦ προλεταριάτου*, 2nd ed., Athens 1986, pp. 120-122.

6. *Τὸ πρῶτο...*, pp. 82-85; *Τὸ ΚΚΕ...*, p. 8.

7. G. Katsulis, *Ἱστορία τοῦ κομμουνιστικοῦ κόμματος Ἑλλάδας*, vol. 1, Athens 1976, p. 121.

8. Leon, pp. 116, 115.

9. See inter alia D. Vakas, *Ὁ Ἑλ. Κ. Βενιζέλος — πολεμικός ἡγέτης*, Athens 1965, pp. 270-272; Ph. Carabott, *The Dodecanese Question, 1912-1924*, unpublished Ph. D. thesis, University of London 1991, pp. 116ff; and A. Karagiannis, *Greece's Quest for Empire at the Paris Peace Conference, 1919-1920: The Diplomacy of Illusions*, unpublished Ph. D. thesis, Indiana University 1981, *passim*. For an overall critique of the resolution see Katsulis, p. 133.

10. Carabott, pp. 117-118; Karagiannis, *passim*.

11. Leon, p. 116.

provinces «in present day Turkey» which in due course would be absorbed into the Balkan Federation. Such concepts automatically stigmatized the party in the eyes of the highly nationally minded Greeks and made it the government's target.

In contrast to the «majority» resolution, that of the «minority» revealed strong nationalist tendencies. This is not in the least surprising when one considers its main exponents. They represented, and in some cases actually were, the very individuals who, at the proceedings leading to the creation of the GSEE in late October 1918, had proposed a resolution regarding the settlement of outstanding issues in the Balkans and the Near East which has been described as a «juxtaposition of contradictions symptomatic of the inherent incompatibility of nationalist aims and certain traditional socialist principles»¹². In a similar fashion, the «minority» resolution advocated the dismemberment of Turkey as the only viable solution to the Eastern Question and, in contrast to the «majority» resolution, dealt almost exclusively with the territorial settlement in the Balkans and the Near East. It proposed the creation of a number of autonomous provinces, none of which were directly related to Greek territorial claims, under the supervision of the League of Nations; it advocated the cession of northern Epirus, the Dodecanese, Smyrna and the vilayet of Aidin to Greece; and argued that as an independent state Turkey should be confined to central Asia Minor with an exit to the sea at the ports of Alexandretta and Attalia¹³. The similarity of the «minority» resolution with Greece's territorial claims as presented by Venizelos at the Paris Peace Conference in early 1919 is striking and goes a long way in explaining the grounds on which it was opposed.

The internationalist orientation of the new party was first tested during the participation of Greek troops in the Entente intervention in southern Russia. *Ριζοσπάστης*, although not yet the party's official organ, carried a fierce campaign against the intervention, and this despite the existence of strict censorship¹⁴. Although it seems that the extent of SEKE's anti-war and pro-Soviet propaganda among the soldiers of the three divisions of the Greek expeditionary force was minimal, not least because of the party's organizational deficiencies, its policy of non-intervention was consistent with the feelings that prevailed among most soldiers. Without going into great detail, suffice to note here that for the ordinary Greek privates who had been in colours since 1912, their country's participation lacked a clear *raison d'être*, while the mercenary nature of the campaign was not lost on them. Already in a state of constant

12. *Ibid.*, p. 112.

13. Text of «minority» resolution in Katsulis, pp. 119-120.

14. S. Zorbalas, *Σημαία του λαού (σελίδες από την ιστορία του Ριζοσπάστη) 1917-1936*, Athens 1978, p. 56. Also see *Ριζοσπάστης*, no. 650 (13 May 1919).

irritation at the continuation of hostilities and sensitive to demands for demobilization, most soldiers paid little heed to their officers' admonitions to fight for the «liberation of an unfortunate people» from the clutches of blood-thirsty «gangsters and plunderers», despite the couplet that promised: «'Από τή Ρωσία σύρνει / δρόμος ἴσα γιά τή Σμύρνη»¹⁵. Ripe to the anti-war propaganda of the «Committee for the Enlightenment of Foreign Soldiers» and the «Greek Communist *Omada* of Odessa»¹⁶, the Greek soldiers, despite «their patriotic sentiments»¹⁷ and the attestations of their commanders and the Greek General Staff¹⁸, seem to have exhibited little enthusiasm for the «fulfilment of their noble mission»¹⁹. More important, however, was the fact that after the miserable failure of the Entente intervention, the three Greek divisions, following a brief spell in Rumania, were transported to Smyrna²⁰. Although we lack direct evidence, it is tempting to argue that their participation in the Ukrainian campaign had acted, at least for some of them, as a «communist university» — to use Lenin's terminology. That Venizelos himself had expressed the fear lest the Greek troops were contaminated with revolutionary ideas²¹ is perhaps supportive of this argument, albeit a high propensity for exaggerating the communist threat. Nevertheless, even if few soldiers were imbued with communist doctrines²², there is little doubt that large numbers were experiencing a «revulsion against all wars», exemplified in the words of a Greek volunteer from Asia Minor who had refused to participate in the Ukrainian campaign:

15. O. Orfanidis, *Ἄσπράδες Ὀχτώβρης καί ἡ Ἑλλάδα*, Athens 1979, p. 146. Actually, the soldiers had composed their own song on the following lines: «Ποῦ μωρέ, ποῦ / ποῦ σᾶς πάει ὁ ἀρχηγός σας / στό μακρὸ τὸ δρόμο μπρός σας». For a slightly different version of the original couplet (Ἄπό τήν Ρωσία σύρνει / πλατὺς δρόμος γιά τή Σμύρνη) see G. Spiridonos, *Πόλεμος καί ἐλευθερία. Ἡ μικρασιατικὴ ἐκστρατεία ὅπως τήν εἶδα*, Athens 1951, p. 35.

16. See *ibid.* pp. 149-156 and V. Agtzidis, *Ποντιακὸς ἐλληνισμός. Ἄπό τή γενοκτονία καί τὸ σταλινισμό στήν περσεστρὸικα*, Thessaloniki 1991, p. 82.

17. A. Zapantis, *Greek-Soviet Relations, 1917-1941*, New York 1982, p. 50, quoting the Soviet historian A. Gukovsky (*Frantsuskaya Interventsia na Yuge Rossii 1918-1919*, Moscow 1928, p. 178).

18. For a useful summary see *ibid.* pp. 46-53.

19. See the memoirs of various soldiers in *Ριζοσπάστης* (19 June, 16 July 1929 and 17 July 1930), cited in Y. Pikros, *Καλπάκι - Φυλακὲς - Ξερωνήσια*, vol. 1, Athens 1978, pp. 61-78, 84-90. Also see Orfanidis, pp. 166-167.

20. N. Petsalis-Diomidis, «Hellenism in Southern Russia and the Ukrainian Campaign», *Balkan Studies*, vol. 13, no. 2 (1972), p. 249.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 235.

22. Orfanidis (p. 177) narrates the following incident: When in 1978 a correspondent of *Pravda* visited a village in Mytilini its president told him that his village «ἐἶναι κόκκινο», for its male inhabitants had participated in the Ukrainian campaign and came back home imbued with «communist ideas».

Εγώ δεν πήγα στην Ουκρανία. Όχι γιατί είχα ακόμα ιδέα του τι ακριβώς γινόταν στη Ρωσία. Αρνήθηκα να πάω από καθαρά αντιπολεμική δράση. Είχα συχαθεί τον πόλεμο²³.

It was precisely this widespread feeling that SEKE expounded and the communist soldiers in the Asia Minor front, imbuing it with revolutionary slogans, propagated in the months to come.

At first sight the immediate reaction of SEKE to the landing of Greek troops in Smyrna appears to have been rather lukewarm. It is characteristic that the resolution on the party's foreign policy, passed at the First National Council of SEKE which met in late May—early June 1919, failed to deal directly with the Asia Minor campaign. Instead, it once more protested against the intervention in Russia; denounced the League of Nations as a mere «bluff... directed against the international revolution»; and, in a peculiarly worded sentence, forcefully castigated «the brutal and imperialist nature of the present war»²⁴. Of course, the strict censorship that prevailed at the time and the government's coercive measures against the communists²⁵ meant that it would be rather foolish on SEKE's part to openly declare its opposition to the Asia Minor campaign. By vaguely referring to the imperialist nature of the present war, SEKE indirectly alluded to the war in Asia Minor as well, all the more since the resolution on the internal policy of the party called for «general demobilization»²⁶. Yet, the National Council continued to recognize the «necessity of national defence», accepting, if somewhat hesitantly, the principle of «defensive war», which under certain circumstances could easily be translated into a «war of liberation».

What these contradictory declarations and resolutions illustrate is that from the very moment that Greek troops landed in Asia Minor, SEKE was finding it difficult to decide on the particular nature of the campaign. Was it simply a war to liberate fellow Greeks? Was it an offensive war undertaken by the Greek lackeys of imperialist and colonial powers to safeguard their patrons' economic interests? Or, perhaps both? If it was a war of liberation, should not the Greek communists support their brethren in Asia Minor in their struggle against alien oppressors and thus pave the way for their incorporation into a Balkan Democratic Federation? These and similar questions confronted SEKE in the early summer of 1919. Within the next year or so SEKE would manage to get out of its predicament, partly because of the effect that the creation of the Third International had on the party, partly on account of the

23. P. Danielidis, *Ό Πολύδρορος θυμῶναι*, Athens 1990, p. 24.

24. See *Ριζοσπάστης*, no. 667 (30 May 1919) and *Τὸ ΚΚΕ...*, p. 30.

25. *Τὸ ΚΚΕ...*, pp. 14-15, 18-19.

26. *Ριζοσπάστης*, no. 667 (30 May 1919).

fluidity of the situation in Asia Minor, the advancement of the Greek army, its clashes with Italian troops and the emergence of Kemal, and largely because of the independent activities of individual communists.

The change of SEKE's stance in regard to the Asia Minor campaign from passive acceptance to equally passive opposition, is perhaps best illustrated in the columns of *Πιζοσπάστης*. During the spring and summer of 1919, the paper, which in September of the same year became the party's official organ, attempted to address critically the nature of the Asia Minor campaign under the constraints of censorship. On 2 May the paper's editorial argued that the occupation of Smyrna by Greek troops

indicates the acceptance of Greece's claims on the coast of Asia Minor. As such it is the beginning of awarding justice to small people, to oppressed populations. The inhabitants of Asia Minor have already suffered a lot so as to have the right to gain at long last their freedom. It would have been much better if this [acceptance] did not immediately bind Greece to recognize other facts, which constitute clearly imperialistic coups d'état on behalf of other states, such as the occupation of Adalia.

The following day, *Πιζοσπάστης* drew its readers' attention to the fact that «territorial issues are not solved and will not be solved» by the application of certain moral principles. The powers were bound to arrive at a solution which would accommodate their «rivalries and conflicting interests». Therefore, the landing of Greek troops in Asia Minor was only of «strategic significance», similar to other such campaigns in the eastern Mediterranean. In the following weeks *Πιζοσπάστης*, while stressing that «from a socialist point of view» the province of Aidin should be ceded to Greece and that «nobody accuses a government which is working for the liberation of enslaved Greek populations», questioned the hasty nature of the campaign, its inextricable links with imperialist designs and the fatal effect it had on Greece as a whole. On 20 June, the newspaper delivered its warning to the government:

It must be understood that the Greek people are not prepared to see Hellenic populations exiled and slaughtered for the sake of the contradictory interests of their powerful protectors.

From then onwards *Πιζοσπάστης* adopted a theoretical anti-war stance, stressing the imperialist nature of the campaign, warning with much bravery and far-sightedness about the consequences of the imminent «tragedy», and accusing the government of exploiting the Greeks' nationalism to further imperialistic interests. However, it stopped short of demanding the immediate evacuation of Greek troops from Asia Minor. Three weeks after it was declared SEKE's official organ, changing its subtitle from «Newspaper of Democratic Principles» to «Socialist Newspaper»²⁷, the paper's editor Y. Petsopoulos, who

27. *Ibid.*, no. 771 (13 September 1919).

had already become a member of the party, spelled out with brevity his comrades' stance on the Asia Minor campaign:

The state of war has terminated for Greece... Greece can not and will not solve the Turkish question by force of arms²⁸.

Notwithstanding the anti-war pronouncements of *Ριζοσπάστης*, which were continuously and rather monotonously repeated throughout the war years, the party had yet to officially and publicly declare its opposition to the Asia Minor campaign. When SEKE's Second Congress was convened in Athens in April 1920, the main issue that dominated the proceedings was whether the party should join the Third International²⁹. After heated debates regarding the advantages and disadvantages of affiliation, a resolution was passed to the effect that SEKE «organically adheres to the Third International of Moscow, accepting its principles and decrees»³⁰. The resolution also accepted and endorsed the decisions taken at the First Congress of the Balkan Communist Federation, held in January 1919, and declared the party's intention to co-operate closely with the other Balkan Communist parties for the establishment of a Balkan Democratic Federation. Furthermore, the delegates voted almost unanimously in favour of changing the party's stance in regard to the «necessity of national defence», arguing that «every war that is carried out today, under whatever pretext, can not but serve to defend the interests of the bourgeoisie»³¹. Finally, to sugar the pill of «proletarian internationalism», the qualification «communist» was only added in brackets and at the end of the party title³².

Yet, despite SEKE's overt support and adherence to the Third International, the Second Congress failed to pass or even discuss a resolution in regard to the Asia Minor campaign. Of course, demands for general demobilization and the explicit reference to the nature of «each and every war», at least indicated SEKE's position. But as long as such demands and references were construed on the basis of an imminent class struggle and did not take into consideration the issue of the unredeemed Greeks, they could be simply disregarded as utopian and unrealistic by the Greeks who despite their war-weariness still remained exceptionally nationally minded³³. Furthermore, in as much

28. *Ibid*, no. 792 (6 October 1919).

29. A. Georgiadi-Katsulaki, *Η πρώτη συνδιάσκεψη του ΣΕΚΕ(Κ), Φεβρουάριος 1922*, Athens 1984, pp. 13-21.

30. *Τò ΚΚΕ...*, pp. 61-62.

31. *Ibid*, pp. 64-65.

32. *Ibid*, p. 68. Also see G. Mavrogordatos, *Stillborn Republic. Social Coalitions and Party Strategies in Greece, 1922-1936*, Berkeley 1983, p. 92.

33. See the various declarations that SEKE(K) specifically addressed to the workers and peasants of Greece, rather than to the Greek people as a whole, in the summer of 1920, in *ibid*, pp. 91-112, which illustrate the party's inability to reach out to the masses.

as SEKE's opposition remained primarily theoretical and was not carried into action³⁴, it indicated the leadership's misgivings or perhaps inability to direct the impoverished masses which included very few «proletarians». Although in late June 1920 SEKE issued a declaration in regard to the war which was effaced by censorship, probably on account of its anti-war stance³⁵, it does not necessarily follow that the leadership had officially decided to actively lead the anti-war campaign. The fears entertained by the party's leading members lest an outward and active anti-war policy exasperate the government to the extent that the «bourgeois» authorities would severely persecute them, contributed significantly to SEKE's cautious approach. But more importantly, the inherent conflict of trying to balance an internationalist and revolutionary approach with a nationally-oriented one, at a time when the «Greece of two continents and five seas» appeared feasible, explains the leadership's overall non-commitment. For it must be stressed that irrespective of how many Greeks opposed the Asia Minor campaign, such opposition that did exist was not based on any theoretical or ideological principles. Metaxas, to cite only one of the many non-communist examples, both in 1915 and again in the early '20s was against Greece's entanglement in Asia Minor not because he did not consider such a venture just and ethical, but because he thought it was neither feasible nor realistic. Since the majority of SEKE's leading members were bourgeois intellectuals with certain socialist leanings, matured and nurtured in an environment heavily dominated by the age-old dream of the *Μεγάλη Ίδέα*, it was understandably very hard for them to overtly renounce from the start their avowed nationalism and patriotism and on purely ideological grounds actively support an anti-war position which, irrespective of its merits, would be equated with high treason.

The predicament of SEKE's leadership is well illustrated by the example of G. Georgiadis. Before joining the party probably in late 1919³⁶, Georgiadis, a respected and well-educated lawyer, was public prosecutor for the crown³⁷. In

34. British sources maintain that although «there have been numerous strikes throughout Greece [in 1920 - early 1921]... all these troubles passed off with very little violence or disorder. In nearly every case no strike was definitely declared before a delegation of the workers had approached the local authorities or the government in Athens and endeavoured to obtain the avoidance of a strike through negotiations»; see PRO (Public Record Office), FO (Foreign Office), 371/6096 C15954: Granville (Athens) to Curzon (London), 21 August 1921.

35. *Τὸ ΚΚΕ...*, p. 90.

36. Y. Kordatos, *Ίστορία τῆς νεώτερης Ἑλλάδας*, vol. 5. Athens 1958, p. 536; P. Nutsos (ed.), *Ἡ σοσιαλιστικὴ σκέψη στὴν Ἑλλάδα ἀπὸ τὸ 1875 ὠς τὸ 1974*, vol. 2, part two, Athens 1992, pp. 177-181.

37. Georgiadou-Katsulaki, pp. 12-13. Also see E. Stavridis, *Τὰ παρασκήνια τοῦ ΚΚΕ*, 2nd ed., Athens 1988, p. 24, who maintains that Georgiadis was dismissed from his post because during the trial of an officer who had slandered the king, instead of acting as public prosecutor, he undertook the defence of the accused.

1918 he published a 50-page pamphlet entitled «The Influence of War on Socialist Theories». After praising Venizelos who «with luminous precision defines the responsibilities of the Greek towards the motherland and those of the motherland towards the citizen», Georgiadis outlined the workers' duties:

Greece is waging a war. And it is the responsibility of the working class to actively participate in this war. Not only because it is a war that liberates enslaved workers... but primarily because by participating in this war (the people) will defeat their external enemies and remove the obstacles to their internal development.

The worker's motto should be: «Struggles and sacrifices», for only thus «are great things achieved»³⁸. In 1918 Georgiadis strongly believed in the messianic role of Venizelos and his arguments were based on a mixture of hazy socialist principles heavily imbued with notions of national grandeur and reminiscent of the rhetoric that the Second International employed before and during the Great War. By 1920 comrade Georgiadis, the chief proponent of SEKE's adherence to the Third International³⁹, had lost his faith in Venizelos and had undoubtedly expanded his Marxist vocabulary. But he had not yet resolved the inherent contradiction of advocating internationalism and denouncing any and every war without actively opposing the Asia Minor campaign.

But if SEKE's Central Committee and leading members in Athens were slow in developing their feeble anti-war declarations, a number of communist soldiers at the front and communist agitators in mainland Greece were certainly eager to take the lead. Unfortunately, information regarding these individuals and their activities is largely scarce, biased and distorted, to say the least⁴⁰. Notwithstanding lack of direct evidence however, it seems that their anti-war propaganda and activities commenced before SEKE, on the occasion of the November 1920 elections, campaigned on an anti-war ticket, urging the workers, peasants and soldiers to vote against the «bourgeois parties that send you to war»⁴¹. Communist activists in mainland Greece, especially in urban

38. G. Georgiadis, *Ἡ ἐπίδρασις τοῦ πολέμου ἐπὶ τῶν σοσιαλιστικῶν θεωριῶν*, n.p. 1918, pp. 35, 49 (a series of articles originally published in *Νεοελληνικὴ Ἐπιθεώρησις*).

39. Kordatos, p. 537. For Georgiadis' speech see Georgiadiu-Katsulaki, pp. 14-16.

40. Main sources for this paper were the accounts of A. Stinas and E. Stavridis, although given Stavridis' subsequent *volte-face*, his assertions should be accepted with caution. I was unable to consult the pamphlet *Γιατὶ πολεμήσαμε* published somewhere at the front in 1921 by communist conscripts.

41. *Τὸ ΚΚΕ...*, pp. 142-157. According to British sources, SEKE (K) had originally concluded an alliance with the Anti-Venizelists, attempting to capitalize on the Greeks' war-weariness; see FO 371/4682 C11285: Director of Military Intelligence (War Office) to Foreign Office, 9 November 1920. This short-lived «alliance» was well illustrated by the couplets «Σφυρὶ - δρεπάνι / κί' ἐλιά στεφάνι», and «Σφυρὶ - δρεπάνι / ὁ Κωνσταντῖνος φθάνει»; see Stavridis, pp. 37-38 and Danielidis, p. 31.

centres, were instrumental in organizing politically the impoverished masses. Capitalizing on the general discontent «at the very high and still rising cost of living and the extreme dissatisfaction prevailing on account of the continuance of the war»⁴², gradually they managed to transform demonstrations and strikes of an economic nature into overt anti-war manifestations⁴³. «Spontaneous» meetings to declare the Greeks' readiness «to incur any sacrifice in order to carry out the Treaty of Sevres» were poorly attended and backfired when with communist instigation the alleged «patriots» expressed «the sentiment that the frontier may be at Larissa provided Constantine is King»⁴⁴. Young communists carried on intensive anti-war propaganda in army divisions, «enlightening» their fellow soldiers and incurring the wrath of their superiors⁴⁵. Communist activists in Salonica, headed by Spiros Priftis (Ayis Stinas), toppled the conservative leadership of the Labour Centre, and with the aid of the remaining vociferous Jewish members of the old *Fédération*, began publishing a newspaper (*Φωνή του Έργάτη*) which, in the words of its editor, «became a true revolutionary organ» and waged an unrelenting struggle against the war⁴⁶. At the same time, acting as a sect (*φράξια*) rather than a party organization, they sent copies of their newspaper and other anti-war material to a communist committee that had been established in Smyrna for distribution among the troops. They also replied to the advertisements that soldiers used to put in the personal columns of the «bourgeois» press asking to correspond with young women - thus succeeding in «enlightening» them and occasionally bringing them in contact with the communist committee at the front.⁴⁷

Of greater importance were the activities of communist soldiers at the front. It is evident from three proclamations published in *Έργατικός Αγώνας* (20 September, 29 November 1920 and 3 January 1921) that a Central Executive Committee (alternatively named «Executive Council of the Soviets of Greek Soldiers» and «Central Council of Communist Soldiers of the Front»)

42. FO 371/6082 C12920: Knight (Volos) to Granville, 5 June 1921. For a useful summary regarding the rise in the cost of living and its short-term effects see FO 371/8832 C 15167: Lindley (Athens) to Curzon, 2 July 1923.

43. FO 371/6079 C5702: Granville to Curzon, 7 March 1921. A typical example of this were the so-called *Fevruariana* of Volos in 1921; see N. Koliu, *Τυπο-φωτο-γραφικό πανόραμα του Βόλου*, vol. 1, n.p. 1991, pp. 329-336 and Benaroyias, pp. 142-144. For similar demonstrations in Macedonia and Thrace see Stavridis, pp. 42-50.

44. *Ibid.*

45. Danielidis, pp. 31-36.

46. A. Stinas, *Άναμνήσεις, 60 χρόνια κάτω από τη σημαία της σοσιαλιστικής επανάστασης*, vol. 1, Athens 1977, pp. 50-51.

47. *Ibid.*, pp. 51-52.

had been formed sometime in early 1920⁴⁸. This committee co-ordinated the activities of the communist nuclei which existed in almost every division of the army and was recognized as the supreme authority. The avowed objective of the committee was to enlighten the soldiers as to the true nature of the war and to distribute anti-war material to the front, supplied by a close-knit system operated by communists in Salonica, Alexandroupoli, Andrianople and Constantinople⁴⁹. The committee's proclamations, at least those that were published, contain vitriolic attacks against the bourgeoisie, whether represented by Venizelos or by King Constantine, elucidate on the hardships of war, castigate the «pseudo-patriots» and the imperialist nature of the campaign and prepare the people for the imminent «revolution». The brain and soul of this communist military organization was Pantelis Puliopulos⁵⁰, who after the Asia Minor disaster played an instrumental role in the bolshevization of SEKE, becoming for a short period its secretary⁵¹. The committee's members and its sympathizers had been heavily influenced by their participation in the Ukrainian campaign and «the preaching of that great truth which with a thundering voice comes from up there (i.e. Soviet Russia)»⁵². Their patriotism was of an international, revolutionary character — at least in theory:

We are the true patriots... We are the true heroic soldiers of mankind, not of your *patrida*... [And] we listen to one cry, strong and stentorian that comes from the fighters' brave chests, their consumptive lungs, their buried bones: Long Live the Revolution⁵³.

As the war dragged on and new classes were enlisted (March-April 1921)⁵⁴,

48. Text of proclamations in *Tò KKE...*, pp. 114-116, 170-173, 176-178. It is probable that this committee corresponds to the «Greek Communist party of Smyrna» that British Intelligence sources mention; see FO 371/6342 E2601: India Office to Foreign Office, 24 February 1921. Also see Stavridis, pp. 90-92, 104-105.

49. Stinas, p. 49 and Th. Nikolopoulos, *Ἡ ἄλλη ὄψη τοῦ ἐλληνικοῦ ἐργατικοῦ κινήματος (1918-1930)*, Athens 1983, pp. 54-55. A Kutsukalis (*Ἡ πρώτη δεκαετία τοῦ ΚΚΕ, 1918-1928*, Athens 1979, p. 78) mentions that the communist organization of Constantinople included among others N. Zahariadis, S. Maximos and K. Sklavos.

50. P. Puliopulos, *Τὰ λαϊκὰ μέτωπα — Ὁ 2^{ος} παγκόσμιος πόλεμος — Ἡ δικτατορία τῆς 4^{ης} Αὐγούστου*, Athens 1958, introduction; Stavridis, p. 66; Nikolopoulos, p. 55; D. Livieratos, *Παντελής Πουλιόπουλος: Ἐνας διανοούμενος ἐπαναστάτης*, Athens 1992, pp. 17-18.

51. Upon his return to Greece, Puliopulos also took part in the formation of the «Association of Old Soldiers»; see the pamphlet *Πόλεμος κατὰ τοῦ πολέμου. Ἀποφάσεις τοῦ πρώτου πανελληνίου συνέδριου Παλαιῶν Πολεμιστῶν καὶ Θυμάτων Στρατοῦ*, 2nd ed., Athens 1975, and Livieratos, pp. 19-25. On the activities of the AOS see FO 371/9891 C18981: Cheetham (Athens) to Chamberlain (London), 11 December 1924; «it may be said that 'Old Soldier' means Communist».

52. *Tò KKE...*, p. 115.

53. *Ibid.*, pp. 115, 178.

54. For the mobilization of three new classes in March 1921 see FO 371/6080 C7235: Granville

membership grew and sympathizers increased. The proliferation of communist ideas and activities was greatly aided by the government's unwise, to say the least, emergency measures⁵⁵. In an effort to curb anti-war manifestations in Greece, the government forcibly conscripted militant communist agitators and sent them to the front as a form of punishment. To cite only one example, in the spring of 1921 approximately 300 railway workers were arrested and transferred as conscripts to Asia Minor where they replaced nationally-minded fellow workers who returned to Greece. Not all of these 300 «victims» were communists, but the unjust nature of their transfer left a negative impact on them and radically influenced at least a number of them⁵⁶. As a result of these measures, from the summer of 1921 onwards, communists gained control of major communication centres —railway lines and telegraph stations— throughout the southern group of the Greek army⁵⁷. Their activities centred around the dissemination of anti-war propaganda, in the form of leaflets, brochures and hand-written newspapers. Even copies of *Ριζοσπάστης*, the distribution of which had been prohibited since the summer of 1919⁵⁸, and SEKE's ideological journal, *Κομμουνιστική Έπιθεώρησης*, found their way to the front, meticulously concealed in the berth cabins of communist doctors and nurses aboard the hospital cruiser *Elsi*⁵⁹.

Apart from spreading anti-war propaganda among the rank and file, the communists, from their well-placed positions, assisted the human traffic of deserters. According to British intelligence sources these exceeded 4,000, «many of whom had formed themselves into bands and lived by raiding their own convoys»⁶⁰. Non-communist soldiers who wished to desert were encouraged to do so and aided in their attempt to reach the coast in search of boats to get them over to the Aegean islands and mainland Greece. But, as a former communist official has stressed, «we never said to the soldiers: Do not fight. In the battles the communists fought, perhaps not heroically, but as the others did

to Curzon, 31 March 1921; «the general impression would appear to be that it has only been moderately successful».

55. See Leon, pp. 118-121, for similar measures in late 1918—early 1919 and their effect.

56. Stavridis, pp. 65-66.

57. *Ibid.*, 64-67; p. Spiridonos, p. 255; and M. Llewellyn Smith, *Ionian Vision: Greece in Asia Minor 1919-1922*, London 1973, p. 276.

58. *Ριζοσπάστης*, no. 747 (22 August 1919). Also see Vakas, p. 260, for a telegram of Venizelos to Repoulis on the issue of censorship and *Ριζοσπάστης*.

59. Stavridis, p. 66.

60. FO 371/6536 E13183: Rumbold (Constantinople) to Curzon, 29 November 1921. In 1921-1922 the issue of deserters roaming all over Greece had reached such proportions that even pro-government papers referred to the «tragic picture which, if not speedily and efficaciously suppressed, will shortly bring Greece back to the old times of brigand rule portrayed in About's *Roi des montagnes*»; see FO 371/6082 C15956: Granville to Curzon, 26 July 1921.

and they never propagated either desertion or defeat»⁶¹. This is well illustrated by the following passage from a two-page newspaper, *Ειρήνη* (Peace), which communist soldiers published in Smyrna in 1921-22:

We are not asking you not to wage a war; do as you please. We are asking, however, that you send us home and if you wish, ask who wants to fight and who wishes to leave. Those who want war, so be it; let them stay another ten years. The rest however must remain free⁶².

However, the line that separated anti-war propaganda from overt acts of desertion and defeatism was indeed rather thin and it would be hard to argue that it was never crossed. A high ranking staff officer of the Greek Army in Asia Minor in charge of censorship writes, with what degree of accuracy or objectivity it is impossible to ascertain, that the communists excelled themselves in drawing the soldiers' attention to the nature of the war, inciting them to mutiny.

What do you expect in this inhospitable land where there is not a single trace of Hellenism? Think of your widowed family. Use your rifles not against the Turk who is fighting for his motherland, but against those who have been compelling you to fight for the last ten years⁶³.

Despite the probable existence of such and similar proclamations, there was a total lack of overt acts of sabotage or wide-spread mutinies⁶⁴. Given the communists' control over sensitive communication centres one would expect that they would at least attempt to engage in sabotage activities and bring about mutinies. The argument that they «could not [by] themselves engineer a collapse of the front»⁶⁵, refers only to their eventual failure to do so. But it overlooks their motives and their avowed objectives. Having clearly and overtly described the Asia Minor campaign as an imperialist, colonial and adventurous enterprise, if the communist soldiers were to adopt particular revolutionary tactics, as exemplified in the principles and guide-lines of the Third International⁶⁶, their main objective should have been to transform the war into a civil war, uniting with their Turkish comrades and turning their arms against their officers and the bourgeoisie. However, the communist soldiers did not-

61. Stavridis, p. 67. For a different assessment see Spiridonos, p. 224.

62. *Πιζοπάστσης*, (27 July 1930), cited in Pikros, p. 96. Other communist newspapers published at the front included such names as *Κόκκινος Φαντάρος*, *Φούντα*, *Έρυθρός Φρουρός*, *Άραμπάς*, see Nikolopoulos, p. 55, Livieratos, p. 18 and Nutsos, vol. 2, part one, pp. 428, 430.

63. Spiridonos, p. 224.

64. With the exception of a mutiny at Raidestos in September 1922; see Danielidis, p. 43, and Pikros, pp. 99-101, 103-107.

65. Llewellyn Smith, p. 276.

66. See J. Brauntal, *History of the International 1914-1943*, translated by J. Clark, vol. 2, London 1967, especially pp. 162-181, 533-542; *International Press Correspondence*, vol. 2, no. 29 (25 April 1922), p. 221.

ing of the kind, short of carrying on systematic agitation among the troops. They took «every opportunity to encourage the men to ask the question ‘Why are we here and who are we fighting for?’»⁶⁷, but they never adopted internationalist revolutionary tactics. They were not preoccupied with bringing about Greece’s defeat, not least because they considered such an outcome inevitable. Instead, they were primarily interested in bringing the war to an end, before a shattering Greek defeat took place. They were «pacifists» rather than revolutionaries; «evolutionary theoreticians» rather than international activists. They aimed at enlightening the soldiers, imbuing their minds with communists ideas, preparing them for the imminent class struggle, moulding them for the revolution which was going to take place not at the inhospitable terrain of Anatolia but back in Greece. As one of their declarations claimed:

Our struggle, propagandistic for as long as we remain soldiers, direct and active in tomorrow’s political life, must continue unremitting and dauntless with unyielding conviction to our communist triumph⁶⁸.

The activities of the communist soldiers at the front and their comrades in mainland Greece were not directed by the leadership of SEKE in Athens. A number of active participants have rather indignantly asserted that the party did not actively direct or support their anti-war propaganda, either at the front or in mainland Greece; that it considered their activities «dangerous for us and the party», maintaining that such «anarchic manifestations» should be discontinued. Indeed, Stinas has claimed that «all this anti-war campaign was undertaken without SEKE’s knowledge and against its will»⁶⁹. However, this is a rather exaggerated claim, especially in regard to the party’s lack of willingness. Furthermore, it fails to take into account the organizational difficulties that SEKE was facing due to the government’s campaign of terror and intimidation. Leading members were imprisoned or exiled and militant trade-unionists ruthlessly crushed, while party offices, including those of *Ριζοσπάστης*, were frequently ransacked⁷⁰. As a direct consequence of these emergency measures SEKE was deprived of virtually all its active elements. Despite the fact that some of the latter —especially those that were forcibly conscripted— found their way to the front, the party as a whole was left in the hands of «bourgeois intellectuals» and «sectarian busy-bodies». In late May 1921 the party hierarchy, guided by the principle of democratic centralization, made a feeble attempt to control events by sending two of its members to the front to organize and, one should add, check the activities of the communist soldiers

67. Llewellyn Smith, p. 276.

68. *Tò KKE...*, p. 173.

69. Stinas, pp. 41, 56. Also see Danielidis, p. 38, Stavridis, pp. 54-56, Benaroyias, pp. 148-149, and Georgiadu-Katsulaki, p. 136.

70. *Tò KKE...*, pp. 197-198, 204-210, and Benaroyias, pp. 145-149.

there⁷¹. Although this decision was most probably prompted by the promulgation of the 21 terms of the Third International (September 1920)⁷², it refutes Stinas' claim regarding SEKE's unwillingness to lead the anti-war campaign. Having disregarded such and similar personally motivated and biased accusations⁷³, the issue at stake is the extent to which the leadership was in a position to either actively direct or indeed control the anti-war campaign. Under the prevailing circumstances and given the party's organizational deficiencies, the smouldering internal dissensions, and the leadership's shaky ideological basis, it is not surprising that individuals and not the party as a whole should take the lead.

The First Panhellenic Conference which was convened in February 1922, is a case in point. Contrary to all revolutionary principles, but in line with SEKE's previous official declarations and policies which were characterized by a series of half-measures and a lack of consistency and decisiveness in terms of strategy and tactics, it was asserted that the «party, going through a period of organization and propaganda, *needs a long period of lawful existence*»; while accepting all the resolutions of the Third International «*as documents of historical significance* which should enlighten the party in its course in accordance with the historical period that the movement is going through in Greece»⁷⁴. This opportunist resolution was supplemented by exceedingly revolutionary rhetoric and the customary denunciation of the «imperialist and adventurous war»⁷⁵. As has been pointed out,

such contradictions cultivated to the utmost disintegrating trends, channelled the activities of party members into internal struggles and alienated them from the revolutionary struggle⁷⁶.

If prior to February 1922 the party leadership had been apparently unable to

71. Stavridis, pp. 56-57.

72. Perhaps it is not coincidental that two months after this decision was taken, one of SEKE(K)'s leaders, N. Dimitratos, present at the Third Congress of the Third International, «congratulated» himself on the party's anti-war policies; see Kutsukalis, pp. 94-96.

73. Stavridis (p. 56), who was one of the two members sent to the front, maintains that he was chosen «not so much because the party's activities at the front would be strengthened — for in this [leaders] were not in the least interested — but primarily because they would be relieved of the presence of a troublesome individual who opposed them».

74. *Τὸ ΚΚΕ...*, pp. 213, 220. For the proceedings see Kordatos, pp. 614-617. Also see *Κομμουνιστική Ἐπιθεώρησης*, vol. 2, no. 4 (April 1922), pp. 172ff, and Georgiadu-Katsulaki, pp. 125-136.

75. *Ibid.*, pp. 211-225. Also see the declarations of 22 February and 21 May (*ibid.*, pp. 228-231, 242-244) in which SEKE(K) «praised itself» on being the only party which «had the courage to say that the war in Asia Minor is doomed and that its continuation will result in the total destruction of the country».

76. Katsulis, p. 255.

actively lead the anti-war campaign, after the First Panhellenic Conference it became virtually incapable of doing so, engaged as it was in one of its first, albeit not last, fratricide struggles. Benaroyias summarizes the position well:

From its first steps, [the leadership] was characterized by a lack of ideological and organizational coherence... The co-ordination of the leadership's activities became impossible on account of the apparent and hidden personal differences and trends⁷⁷.

The *coup de grâce* came in early July when the whole leadership was arrested and thrown in jail on charges of high treason for a number of anti-war articles carried in *Ριζοσπάστης*⁷⁸. It was while they were interned in the medieval Syngrou prison that the leaders of SEKE heard the news of the tragedy which they had for so long predicted.

In retrospect, it is certain that SEKE's position in regard to the Asia Minor campaign was largely determined by the party's tumultuous history from 1918 to 1922. Internal dissensions, especially over issues of foreign policy; centrifugal and sectarian tendencies; personal motivations and differences; structural and organizational deficiencies; attempts to balance off immediate demands with basic principles; and last but not least inextricably linked external factors such as the «demands» of the Third International; the fluidity of the situation in Asia Minor; and the governments' emergency measures — all combined together to affect drastically SEKE's stance. But at the core of the issue lay the insurmountable obstacle of the ideological deficiency of SEKE's leadership. Moving from passive acceptance of the campaign to similarly passive opposition, it attempted to overcome these defects. Lacking a Marxist theoretical tradition, the individuals in charge of SEKE became all the more receptive to the signs of their time. They adhered, albeit half-heartedly, to the revolutionary ideas and principles of the Third International, but were unable and perhaps unwilling to put them into practice, merely paying lip service to them. In national issues, the majority of them found it hard to disavow their social-patriotic beliefs, despite their ultra-internationalist protestations to the contrary. They attempted to solve this inherent contradiction by placing the issue of the Asia Minor campaign on a class struggle basis.

77. Benaroyias, p. 155, cited in *ibid.*

78. Kordatos, pp. 572-573, and Benaroyias, pp. 156-157. Stinas (p. 61) argues that the leadership was arrested not on account of their own activities but because of those of individual communists, and adds: «Οἱ ἄνθρωποι τὰ χρειαστήκανε καὶ δὲν ὑπάρχει ἐξευτελισμὸς καὶ ταπείνωση ποὺ νὰ μὴν ὑπέβαλαν τὸν ἑαυτὸ τους γιὰ νὰ ἀποδείξουν τὴν ἀθωότητά τους καὶ νὰ βγοῦν ἀπὸ τὴ φυλακή. Τὰ πὼ ἀπαράδεκτα, ὄχι γιὰ ἐπαναστάτες ἀλλὰ ἀπλῶς γιὰ στοιχειωδῶς ἀξιοπρεπεῖς ἀνθρώπους, μέσα χρησιμοποίησαν.» Similar arrests were made at the front as well; see Stavridis, p. 79, and Livieratos, p. 18.

In particular Georgiadis argued that when national issues are solved by the bourgeoisie they serve to accommodate that nation's bourgeois class to imperialism... Since there exists a working class, which is politically guided by [SEKE(K)], we deny the bourgeoisie the right to the solution of these issues. As political representatives of the working class of Greece we have every right to refuse any national solution and thus any war... The duty of the Greek socialists is to support as the only solution to Greece's national issues first the assumption of national power by the working class and then the Union of the various states in the form of a Soviet Federation of the Balkan and Eastern states in accordance with the general principles of socialism⁷⁹.

Irrespective of the validity of the theoretical framework of this political analysis, the fact remains that those responsible for «guiding», as Georgiadis put it, the working class, were unable to do so, partly on account of their opponents' strength, but largely due to their own defects. That individual communists in mainland Greece and the Asia Minor front spear-headed the anti-war campaign and undertook the heavy burden of bringing about this task, might lend credence to the communist cause, but it certainly does not exonerate the leadership. Actually, the latter instead of leading the «masses» was, much to its dismay, led by them, reacting to events instead of bringing them about. Notwithstanding the didactic nature of such an approach, SEKE's stance and policies in regard to the Asia Minor campaign can be tentatively characterized as the first, albeit not last, instance of the leadership failing its members.

In the seventy years that have elapsed since the Asia Minor débâcle, various participants and commentators have maintained that SEKE and the Greek communists in general were instrumental in spreading defeatism and bringing about the collapse of the army at the Asia Minor front. Kordatos argues that in late August 1922 a number of «bourgeois» newspapers vehemently claimed that the communists were responsible for the imminent disaster and demanded that the communist leaders held in prison be immediately executed⁸⁰. At the infamous «Trial of the Six» two of the accused, Hatzianestis and Stratos, and one defence witness, Major Panagakos, stressed the pivotal role of the communists⁸¹. In Lieutenant-General Spiridonos' assessment of the immediate causes

79. G. Georgiadis, «'Ο Σοσιαλισμός και τὰ ἔθνικὰ ζητήματα», *Κομμουνιστική Ἐπιθεώρησης*, vol. 1, no. 6 (June 1921), pp. 345-351. See Nutsos, vol. 2, part two, pp. 37-42, for a highly interesting exposition of Georgiadis' predicament.

80 Kordatos, pp. 575-579.

81. *Ἡ δίκη τῶν Ἑξ. Τὰ ἔστενογραφημένα πρακτικά*, 31 Ὀκτωβρίου — 15 Νοεμβρίου 1922, Athens 1931, pp. 339, 343, 454.

of the disaster, published in 1957, communist propaganda and activity ranks third in the list⁸². More recently, the journalist N. Mertzos in his uninhibited desire to show that the communists «undermined the struggle for the liberation of Hellenism in Asia Minor», characterizes their activities as one of the KKE's «ten mortal sins»⁸³.

Others, however, less passionate and in a better position to know, have failed even to mention the existence of communist activities, far less ascribe to them undue significance. Individuals like M. Rodas, secretary of Commissioner Stergiadis, General Papulas, commander of the army from November 1920 to the summer of 1922, the ferocious anti-communist Lieutenant-General G. Fessopoulos, the ex-communist E. Stavridis, and S. Maximos, a leading member of the KKE during the 1920s, have stressed that the collapse of the front came basically as a result of favouritism, poor organization and war-weariness. «The soul of the soldier had been prepared to be defeated»⁸⁴... «The soldiers were even deprived of their daily meals... The [officers'] complete indifference utterly destroyed the morale of the army»⁸⁵. Such ineffective administration made many soldiers and low-rank officers realize that perhaps what the communists told them, namely that they were driven like sheep to slaughter, was true; one in particular told his superior:

Πῶς νὰ μὴ γίνῃ κανεὶς κομμουνιστῆς, ὅταν βλέπει τοιαύτην διοίκησην⁸⁶.

This in turn implied lack of confidence on the part of the soldiers towards their officers and the victorious outcome of the war. «The Greek soldiers scoffed so tragically their superiors for their abandonment, to the extent that in various places from where their division commanders were to pass they placed rotten herrings as a sign of protest»⁸⁷... «How could they be moved, how could they be excited since they met only alien people with hidden or apparent hostile intentions»⁸⁸. Under such disheartening circumstances communist propaganda was

82. Spiridonos, pp. 224-225.

83. N. Mertzos, *Τὰ δέκα θανάσιμα ἁμαρτήματα τοῦ Κ.Κ.Ε. Ἐπίσημα κείμενα*, Athens n.d., pp. 24, 26-41 and *passim*. Similar assessments in T. Papayiannopoulos, *Στρατάρχης Ἀλέξανδρος Παπάγος: ὁ ἐκλεκτός τῆς ἱστορίας*, Athens 1987, pp. 40-43; K. Antoniu, *Ἱστορία τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς Βασιλικῆς Χωροφυλακῆς 1833-1965*, vol. 2, Athens 1965, pp. 1197-1198. A more critical approach in Agtzidis, pp. 81-90.

84. M. Rodas, *Ἡ Ἑλλάδα στὴ Μικρὰ Ἀσία (1918-1922)*, Athens 1950, p. 337.

85. A. Papulas and I. Passas, *Ἡ ἀγωνία ἐνὸς ἔθνους*, vol. 2, Athens 1925, pp. 172-173.

86. G. Fessopoulos, *Αἱ διχόνοιοι τῶν ἀξιοματικῶν μας καὶ ἡ διάλυσις τοῦ στρατοῦ μας ἐν Μ. Ἀσίᾳ*, Athens 1934, p. 111. Stavridis (p. 63) mentions that a number of «educated lads» participated in the anti-war campaign at the front and were «one hundred times more active» than members of the party.

87. Rodas, p. 337.

88. S. Maximos, *Κοινοβούλιο ἢ δικτατορία*, 2nd ed., Athens 1975, p. 19.

bound to make «steady inroads among the troops at the front»⁸⁹. When Kemal launched his major offensive, the communists urged their fellow-soldiers not to fight, but lay down their arms and make their way to Smyrna⁹⁰. But the Greek soldiers needed little prompting.

Ten years of warfare, the knowledge that whether they defended the country they had occupied or not, they would in any case have to evacuate it in the end, the reports that supplies and military stores were reaching their opponents from France, Italy and Russia — all these combined as a canker to eat away the heart of the army⁹¹.

The soldier gave way to the human being who does not believe in the cause for which he became a soldier. And this human being condemned inside him the war. He prefers a decisive defeat to a victory that will nail him in the front. That is why he accepted the collapse of the front with delight. It was a solution. A means to return to his *patrida*. He did not feel humiliated by the defeat. His *ethnismos* had been extinguished⁹².

Undoubtedly, the process of demoralization, the feeling of defeatism and the extreme war-weariness were strengthened by communist propaganda. However, it would be an over-simplification, an attempt to find scapegoats, if we were to argue that communist activists produced the débâcle. They did little more than accelerate an inevitable process that other salient factors had set in motion and as a result of which the Greek army «gave way, broke and eventually degenerated into something like a rabble»⁹³. And as General Papulas has indignantly pointed out in his book, appropriately entitled *The Agony of a Nation*,

δυστυχῶς, αὐτὸ ἀποδεικνύουσι τὰ πράγματα... Καὶ μόνον οἱ ἐπιμένοντες σκοπίμως νὰ μυωπάζουσι, θὰ ἐξακολουθοῦν σκιαμαχοῦντες κατὰ ἀνυπάρκτων ἐτέρων αἰτιῶν⁹⁴.

89. FO 371/7889 E9456: Bentinck (Athens) to Curzon, 9 September 1922.

90. Stavridis, pp. 90ff.

91. See note 89.

92. Maximos, p. 20.

93. See note 89.

94. Papulas and Passas, p. 173.