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An unexplored case of political change: A research note on the electoral history of Cyprus

Paschalis M. Kitromilides

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an unexplored case of political change

*A research note on the
electoral history of Cyprus*

by
Paschalis M. Kitromilides, *Ph.D.*

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This brief paper is no more than a research note aiming to offer some hints on the electoral history of Cyprus and on the nature of sources of pertinent data that might be of interest to students of political change and political behaviour. Considered in a comparative framework this entirely unexplored material appears quite promising as a source for the study of political mobilization and political cleavages in the context of a changing society.

In the perspective of Cypriot history, these phenomena are characterized by particular complexity given the multidimensional nature of political conflict in an ethnically segmented society, highly vulnerable to external influences because of its geographic location and historical ties. Accordingly political change as registered in electoral politics, has been the product of conflict on four distinct but interconnected levels: intracomunal social and political conflict; intercommunal antagonism escalating in violent ethnic conflict; native resistance to the foreign colonial regime whose establishment, however, inaugurated the process of modernization; and finally international conflict among external powers with interests in the strategically sensitive geopolitical space of the island. It is amidst all these interlocking pressures and tensions that the contest of democratic government through electoral participation had to be fought. The systematic study of the relevant evidence therefore, could derive fruitful insights in connection with some central empirical, but also evaluative, concerns of political analysis.

Electoral politics before Independence, 1878-1960

The experience of Cyprus with electoral politics did not begin with the island's advent to independent statehood. Different forms of institutionalized popular participation in public affairs had been known since the beginning of British rule. The island's transfer from Ottoman to British administration in 1878 marked the establishment of formal ties that connected integrally traditional Cypriot society with modern Western practices. Among the latter was the introduction of popular suffrage by the new British rulers through the institution of a Legislative Council. A typical institution of British administrative practice in the colonial territories,¹ the Legislative Council was in essence meant to be an agency for the legitimation of foreign rule through the semblance of consultation of the native population. It was composed of both elected native members and appointed members among the British officials of the colonial administration.²

The mechanisms of operation of the Council were such that the elected members could never block the passage of official legislation because their majority vote could be overridden by decrees issued by the British High Commissioner or Governor. The Council, as established in 1882, was composed of six appointed official

1. See Martin Wight, *The Development of the Legislative Council*, London, Faber and Faber, 1946, pp. 66-99.

2. See G.S. Georgiades, *A Political and Administrative History of Cyprus 1918-1926 with a Survey of the Foundations of British Rule*, Nicosia, Cyprus Research Centre, 1979, pp. 41-47.

British members, nine elected Greek members and three elected Muslim members. The twelve non-official members were elected on separate electoral lists for Greeks and Turks and this was one of the crucial policy measures that tended since the beginning of British rule to institutionalize ethnic distinctions in the island. The balance in the Council was such that the Muslim members could—and they usually did—block the promotion of legislation proposed by the elected majority by siding with the official members. However even when inter-ethnic cooperation in the Council could assure a majority vote for legislation favored by a majority of the elected members, such legislation could—and was—annulled by executive orders-in-council.³

For electoral purposes Cyprus was divided in three constituencies, each one comprising two of the six normal administrative districts instituted by the British in the island. The suffrage was enjoyed by the great majority of the island's male population over the age of 21, specifically by all payers of some form of property or income tax. In 1925, under the constitutional changes introduced upon the declaration of Cyprus as a Crown Colony, the number of official members of the Legislative Council was increased from six to nine to counter-balance an increase in the number of Greek elected members from nine to twelve.⁴ Although this increase in the number of Greek members corresponded more faithfully to the numerical proportion of Greeks in the overall population of Cyprus (four fifths), the constitutional changes left the former balance of forces in the Council unaffected.

Despite the virtual annulment of the essence of representative government in the operation of the Legislative Council, its presence among the political institutions of Cyprus exposed the population for the first time to the experience of modern balloting.⁵

Elections to the Council were held in 1883, 1886, 1888, 1889, 1890, 1891, 1896, 1901, 1904, 1905, 1906, 1911, 1916, 1925 and 1927.⁶

The relevant statistical data which have remained in the archives of the colonial administration of Cyprus and have never been examined by scholarship concerned either with the political history of Cyprus or with electoral studies of any sort, constitute the most impor-

tant source for a historical study of the forms and constraints of political mobilization in a rural and impoverished society.⁷ These initial forms of political participation were suppressed with the abolition of the Legislative Council by the British administration following the nationalist uprising in October 1931.⁸

British rule also brought to Cyprus the institutions of local government with the popular election of municipal and communal councils.⁹ These elections too provided outlets for the contest of local political forces. Municipal and communal elections over the years registered the increasing disaffection with British rule as reflected in the growth of the nationalist movement in favour of union with Greece. Despite the growth of Greek Cypriot nationalism however, the practice of local self-government which remained freer from the obstruction of official intervention, provided also opportunities for interethnic cooperation between Greek and Turkish Cypriots. This constitutes another significant aspect of the politics of Cyprus under British rule that deserves closer scrutiny.

In connection with the process of political mobilization in the history of Cyprus, the municipal elections provide perhaps the most important indicators in that they not only registered the strides of nationalism in the 1920s as observed so perceptively by Arnold Toynbee,¹⁰ but, following the repressive measures of the 1930s, the expansion of the leftwing movement in the 1940s as well.¹¹ In this regard the municipal elections of 1943, 1946 and 1949 are of particular interest for the study of political change.

The experience of modern electoral politics introduced in Cyprus by the institutions of colonial government was not the only form of the popular exercise of the suffrage in the history of the island. Another form of electoral experience more integrally connected with the traditional culture of the island has been the popular participation in episcopal elections in the Greek Or-

7. On this point the testimony of Sir Ronald Storrs opens an important perspective. See *Orientations*, London, Nicholson and Watson, 1939, p. 491.

8. For the relevant background, see Arnold Toynbee, *Survey of International Affairs*, 1931, London, Oxford University Press, 1932, pp. 354-94.

9. See C. W. J. Orr, *Cyprus under British Rule*, London, 1918, reissued, London, Zeno Publishers, 1972, pp. 74-75. See also Zannetos, *op. cit.*, pp. 143-44.

10. Toynbee, *op. cit.*, pp. 364-68.

11. A Communist Party of Cyprus (KKK) was founded in 1926. It was proscribed by the British in 1931 and reemerged under the name of AKEL (Working People's Uplifting Party) in 1941. It has been since then the largest and best organized political party in the island controlling through its mass front organizations between one third and two fifths of the electorate. A study of the implantation of the communist movement in Cyprus on the model of Sidney Tarrow, *Peasant Communism in Southern Italy*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1967, could be a very valuable contribution both theoretically and empirically.

3. On the long-term consequences of this policy for ethnic relations, see Paschalis M. Kitromilides, «From Coexistence to Confrontation: The Dynamics of Ethnic Conflict in Cyprus», in M. Attalides, ed., *Cyprus Reviewed*, Nicosia, 1977, pp. 35-70, esp. pp. 45-46.

4. See Georgiallides, *op. cit.*, pp. 335-37.

5. For an interesting view by a contemporary observer see, G. Louka, «Η ἐν Κύπρῳ μέχρι τῆς 4ης/17ης Ἰουνίου 1908 τριακονταετίας ἀγγλικὴ κατοχὴ» ed. by Th. Kypre, *Kypriakai Spoudai*, Vol. XL (1976), pp. 115-59.

6. See Filios Zannetos, *Ἡ Κύπρος εἰς τὸν Αγῶνα τῆς Παλιγγενεσίας 1821-1930*, Athens, 1930, pp. 142-43. On particular elections, see Georgiallides, *op. cit.*, pp. 235-36, 345-48.

thodox Church of Cyprus. An old tradition of the Christian Church, participation of the laity in the election of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, has survived to this date in the Church of Cyprus alone among all Orthodox Churches. The practice has been incorporated in the constitutional charter of the Church of Cyprus that was approved by the Holy Synod in 1914. The procedure involves indirect lay participation in episcopal elections in two stages: the male members of age 21 and over in each parish of the Church elect the so called «special representatives» who in turn elect the «general representatives» of each diocese who along with the higher clergy compose the electoral assembly that elects the bishops by majority vote.¹² This practice has been observed in every episcopal and archiepiscopal election in twentieth century Cyprus and constitutes one of the factors of the intimate involvement of the Church in the political life of the island. In certain occasions the ecclesiastical elections were intensely politicized as it happened during the so called «Archiepiscopal Question» of 1900-1910 and again with the archiepiscopal elections of 1946-47 which reflected the intense polarization of the politics of Cyprus between Left and Right.¹³

II. electoral politics in the Republic of Cyprus

After a four year anticolonial revolt in 1955-59, Cyprus emerged as an independent republic within the British Commonwealth and the United Nations. The independence of the island and its constitutional status were settled by the Zürich Agreements concluded in February 1959 by the Prime Ministers of Greece and Turkey and were formalized later on that month in the London Agreements between Great Britain, Greece, Turkey and the official representatives of the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities.¹⁴ No plebiscite was held in Cyprus to consult popular opinion on the Agreements. This issue was contested in the first presidential elections held in December 1959 which produced a two third majority vote for Archbishop

Makarios who stood in favor of the Agreements. The 1960 Cyprus Constitution¹⁵ provided for a presidential regime with a President elected directly by universal suffrage by all Greek Cypriots over 21 years of age and a Vice President elected separately in the same manner by all Turkish Cypriots. Legislative authority has been vested in a fifty member House of Representatives comprising thirty five Greek Cypriot and fifteen Turkish Cypriot deputies elected in six electoral constituencies coinciding with the six administrative districts of Cyprus with separate electoral lists for each ethnic community. The electoral system provided for universal suffrage of all citizens over 21 years of age, multimember constituencies and election based on simple majority or plurality of the popular vote polled by each candidate regardless of party affiliation. All elective offices in the executive and legislative branches are for five year tenure. The distinctive characteristic of electoral politics in the Republic was the institutionalization from the outset of the ethnic cleavage in the society.¹⁶ It thus precluded any form of political integration from developing in the context of democratic politics.

The operation of electoral politics in the republic was seriously obstructed by the constitutional crisis of 1963 and the ensuing ethnic violence and communal segregation.¹⁷ One important political consequence was the withdrawal of Turkish Cypriot officials from the government of the republic and from the legislature. Another technical consequence were the serious delays caused in holding elections in Cyprus. This explains the irregular intervals between electoral contests in the 1960s. Contested presidential elections were held in 1959 and 1968 with Archbishop Makarios winning both of them. In 1973 and 1978 the incumbent president was returned unopposed.¹⁸ General elections to the House of Representatives were held in 1960, 1970 and 1976. The 1960 election was settled by an electoral pact between the two major political formations, the nationalist Patriotic Front composed of followers of Archbishop Makarios and the leftist AKEL. It was contested at the polls by a few right wing supporters of union with Greece who however received a completely

12. See *Καταστατικόν τῆς Ἀγιοτάτης Ἐκκλησίας τῆς Κύπρου*, Nicosia, 1914, pp. 8-12, articles 20-31. Cf. John Hackett, *A History of the Orthodox Church of Cyprus*, London, Methuen, 1901, pp. 261-63, 282-303.

13. In connection with the political activities of the Church of Cyprus one should add the plebiscite organized by the Church in 1950 which produced a vote of over 95% in favor of union with Greece.

14. On the relevant background, see Stephen G. Xydīs, *Cyprus: Conflict and Conciliation*, Columbus, Ohio, Ohio State University Press, 1967 and *idem*, *Cyprus Reluctant Republic*, The Hague and Paris, Mouton, 1973. François Crozet, *Le conflit de Chypre*, Brussels, Bruylant, 1973, 2 vols, offers a magisterial synthesis. On the anticolonial rising, the most recent and detailed though analytically naive source is Nancy Crawshaw, *The Cyprus Revolt*, London, Allen and Unwin, 1978.

15. For the text, see A. J. Peaslee, ed., *Constitutions of Nations*, 3rd ed., The Hague, Nijhoff, 1968, Vol. III, pp. 138-216 and for a good analysis, see S.A. de Smith, *The New Commonwealth and Its Constitutions*, London, Stephens, 1964, pp. 282-96.

16. Another institutional expression of ethnic separation was the creation of separate Greek and Turkish Communal Chambers whose jurisdiction covered the affairs of each community in the fields of education, culture, religion, personal status etc.

17. See Stanley Kyriakides, *Cyprus: Constitutionalism and Crisis Government*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1968.

18. Archbishop Makarios, reelected President in 1973, died in office in August 1977 and was succeeded according to the Constitution by the Speaker of the House Mr. Spyros Kyprianou who was in turn elected President in February 1978.

negligible share of the vote. The 1970 and 1976 electoral contests reflected the differentiations undergone meanwhile by the political sociology of independent Cyprus, and were contested by five political parties in each case. The one year delay in holding the 1976 parliamentary elections was due to a new major upheaval in the history of contemporary Cyprus, the Turkish invasion of 1974.¹⁹ Local government elections to the village communal councils were held in 1962 for the first time since 1931 but their results were soon annulled amidst the constitutional crisis of 1963.²⁰

Despite all these pressures, all electoral contests in Cyprus have been remarkably free and orderly. Electoral statistics pertaining to all these elections have been officially published by the Public Information Office of the Republic and were reproduced in the local press. The statistics for the 1970 and 1976 elections, published in several volumes, are particularly detailed. The data are available on precinct and district level with specific counts for each candidate as well as for party lists. For parliamentary candidates both a personal and a party count of the vote are available and this allows very interesting comparisons which can yield important insights into the political sociology and the character of political mobilization in Cyprus.

Cypriot electoral data could be subjected to quan-

titative analysis in conjunction with the rich census statistics collected annually by the Statistics and Research Department of the Republic (demographic, economic, social, educational and other indicators). Despite the interesting evidence that electoral studies of this sort could produce for the comparative study of political change, practically nothing has been done in this direction by political scientists. The only exception is a detailed study of the 1970 parliamentary election, which attempted to examine the workings of democratic politics in the context of a society dominated by networks of personal ties and obligations.²¹ A similar study of the 1976 parliamentary election is highly desirable for comparative purposes in that it could examine the question of the impact of the trauma of the 1974 invasion on the character of political behaviour. One partial explanation of the paucity of electoral studies dealing with Cypriot politics, is the fact that the domestic political life of the island, though fascinating in its complexity, has been overshadowed by the international aspects of the Cyprus Question which has received considerable attention by political historians and students of international politics.

It is hoped nevertheless that this brief note on Cypriot electoral politics will alert students of comparative politics to the research possibilities of an unexplored and quite promising case which can adduce new evidence to the study of politics and social change in a Mediterranean perspective.

19. The most informative source is Laurence Stern, *The Wrong Horse*, New York, Quadrangle Books, 1977. On the domestic background, see Kyriacos C. Markides, *The Rise and Fall of the Cyprus Republic*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1977 which offers an account of the political sociology of the republic referring also tangentially to the electoral contests of the period.

20. See Kyriacos C. Markides, Fleni S. Nikita, Flengo N. Rangou, *Lysi: Social Change in a Cypriot Village*, Nicosia, Social Research Centre, 1978, pp. 63-66.

21. See Pasehalis M. Kitromilides, *Patterns of Politics in Cyprus*, Honors Thesis, Wesleyan University, 1972, pp. xi + 263. Peter Loizos, *The Greek Gift: Politics in a Cypriot Village*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1974, pp. 235-88 discusses the impact of this election on the life of a rural community.