

## The Historical Review/La Revue Historique

Vol 21, No 1 (2024)

The Historical Review / La Revue Historique

The *H*istorical Review  
La Revue *H*istorique



VOLUME XXI (2024)

Section de Recherches Néohelléniques  
Institut de Recherches Historiques / FNRS

Section of Neohellenic Research  
Institute of Historical Research / NHRF

### A Man and his Times: Nikos Karvounis, from Nationalism to Communism

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doi: [10.12681/hr.43848](https://doi.org/10.12681/hr.43848)

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### To cite this article:

Moutsianou, O. (2025). A Man and his Times: Nikos Karvounis, from Nationalism to Communism. *The Historical Review/La Revue Historique*, 21(1), 271–309. <https://doi.org/10.12681/hr.43848>

## A MAN AND HIS TIMES: NIKOS KARVOUNIS, FROM NATIONALISM TO COMMUNISM

*Olga Moutsianou*

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**ABSTRACT:** During the interwar period, public intellectuals and politicians engaged in debates within the public sphere, attempting to define and address the urgent issues of their time. The writings of Nikos Karvounis offer a particularly telling case study of the Greek interwar context, one that is deeply intertwined with the events that transformed Greek society. His confrontation with Fotos Politis in the columns of the *Πρωϊα* newspaper reflected the concerns of the intellectual world regarding the rise of fascism and the impending war. Their exchanges also revealed the ideological origins and the evolution of the thought of both figures, making a significant contribution to the intellectual dialogue of the time. An analysis of the writings of both Karvounis and Politis reveals the contours of these debates, particularly Karvounis' ideological shift from conservative idealism to dialectical materialism.

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The most significant period in the life of Nikos Karvounis (1888–1947) was during the interwar period, as it represents a pivotal moment in his ideological shift towards communism. Through the parallel study of the feuilletons of Karvounis and Fotos Politis (1890–1934), a vivid intellectual dialogue emerges, reflecting the inquiries of their time through texts that encapsulate the pursuits of their era. This article traces the evolution of Karvounis' thought, which, though initially rooted in conservative idealistic principles, ultimately converged towards dialectical materialism.

The purpose of this article is to highlight this transition and examine how it unfolded during a period characterised by dense political events as well as intense ideological and intellectual pursuits and conflicts. Another aim is to explore the ideological and artistic trends of the period under examination and how they were received by the subject of the study, in order to shed light on the liminality in which Karvounis found himself during this transitional phase and to underscore the contradictions of the interwar era. Did Karvounis, ultimately, in this state of liminality, attempt to change the “world” around him?

The confrontation between Karvounis and Politis in the feuilletons published in the *Πρωϊα* newspaper expressed the intellectual community's concerns about the rise of fascism and the looming war. It captured their ideological foundations and the transformations in their thought while making a decisive contribution to the dialogue of ideas.

The article is based on archival research, primary and secondary sources and a bibliographical review of related studies. The examination of Karvounis' published writings in the daily press, aimed at investigating his intellectual journey, was conducted in the Library of the Greek Parliament, which houses the most extensive archive of the Greek press.

*Nikos Karvounis: A Man Betwixt and Between*

Nikos Karvounis arrived in a Greece under transition at the end of the nineteenth century, a time when the old world was slowly and painfully collapsing, evoking feelings of escape from a bleak present and an ominous future. Following Greece's humiliating defeat in the war of 1897, the country was in a state of widespread social, economic and political turmoil.<sup>1</sup> Deeply influenced by the social and familial environment of Romania – where his father served as president of the Ellinismos association,<sup>2</sup> which, under the leadership of Neoklis Kazazis, promoted the Great Idea and inspired its members towards “strengthening national consciousness and defending national rights and interests”,<sup>3</sup> Karvounis was gripped by a romantic nationalist fervour, which manifested in his voluntary participation in the Macedonian Struggle, a commitment he maintained even in the postwar period.<sup>4</sup>

His voluntary involvement in wars continued through the Asia Minor Campaign. He fought with the Garibaldi corps in the Balkan Wars, in the Northern Epirus struggle and at the front in World War I, later following Prince Andrew's corps in the Asia Minor Campaign.<sup>5</sup> His passion for war, his reverence for the “land and the dead” and his idealisation of heroic death were reflected in the poems he wrote at the time and in the dispatches he sent from the front,

<sup>1</sup> Mark Mazower, “The Messiah and the Bourgeoisie: Venizelos and Politics in Greece, 1909–1912,” *Historical Journal* 35, no. 4 (1992): 885–904.

<sup>2</sup> “Κανονισμός της Εταιρείας ‘Ο Ελληνισμός’” is a handwritten letter from Kazazis to Spyros Karvounis, appointing him president of the Hellenism Society and setting out its regulations. The copy consulted is held at the Archive of Contemporary Social History (ASKI), under the classification K1/Φ1 (Τεκμήρια Σπυρίδωνα Καρβούνη (1893–1899): Αλληλογραφία Σ. Καρβούνη με την “Εταιρεία ο Ελληνισμός”) in their rare pamphlet series. “Letter 1, regarding his election as a member of the Society,” 31 July 1893, articles 1, 21, 35, 44, 53, 61, 75.

<sup>3</sup> Neoklis Kazazis, “1897–1927: Εθνική δράσις της Εταιρείας,” *Ελληνισμός*, October 1928, 608–13.

<sup>4</sup> Ioannis S. Koliopoulos, ed., *Αφανείς γηγενείς Μακεδονομάχοι* (Thessaloniki: Society for Macedonian Studies; University Studio Press, 2008).

<sup>5</sup> Aristos Kampanis, “Ίδού ένας άνθρωπος, Ν. Καρβούνης,” *Νέα Ελλάς*, 22 June 1914, 3.

leading his readers to idealised worlds beyond harsh realities and contributing to the collective project of nationalism.<sup>6</sup>

After his participation in every armed conflict between 1904 and 1922, Karvounis turned away completely from the “real” and directed his existential anxieties towards secret societies, Theosophy, Hindu mysticism and the salvific teachings of Jiddu Krishnamurti.<sup>7</sup> He rose through the ranks of the Masonic hierarchy, became a founding member of the Theosophical Society and led Krishnamurti’s Order of the Star in Greece. With his writing and rhetorical skills, he introduced Greek intellectual life to the new philosophical and literary trends spreading across Europe, particularly regarding irrational conceptions of the world. After a long period of metaphysical pursuits, Karvounis deepened his theoretical reflections but remained a humanist idealist for some time before being captivated by the October Revolution and the Soviet model of development, fully positioning himself with the Communist Party of Greece (KKE).

In the 1930s, Karvounis aligned with Dimitris Glinos’ views, accepting the Soviet model. In the *Νέοι Πρωτοπόροι* literary magazine, alongside Glinos, he took a leading role in the ideological struggles of the era,<sup>8</sup> clashing with conservative intellectuals like Spyros Melas, Giorgos Theotokas and Politis. They provoked intense discussions among the intellectuals of the time by presenting the Soviet model as the revolutionary force capable of transforming the grim present.<sup>9</sup>

A significant moment in Karvounis’ career was his collaboration with *Πρωϊά*, where, through his renowned columns, he left his intellectual mark and contributed to the dialogue of ideas with his theoretical expertise.<sup>10</sup> The debate he initiated in 1932 with Politis revealed the crisis of meaning confronting Greek society during the interwar period and highlighted Karvounis as an enlightened thinker who envisioned a new, better world.

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<sup>6</sup> Panagiotis Matalas, *Κοσμοπολίτες και εθνικιστές: Ο Μωρίς Μπαρρές και οι ανά τον κόσμο “μαθητές” του* (Heraklion: University of Crete Press, 2021); George Margaritis, “Οι περιπέτειες του Ηρωϊκού Θανάτου: 1912–1920,” *Μνήμων* 12 (1989): 89–116.

<sup>7</sup> Jiddu Krishnamurti, *Η ατραπός*, ed. Nikos Karvounis (Athens: Theosophical Publishing House, 1928).

<sup>8</sup> Maria Sakellariou, *Νέοι Πρωτοπόροι (1931–1936)* (Thessaloniki: University Studio Press, 1999); Panagiotis Noutsos, ed., *Η σοσιαλιστική σκέψη στην Ελλάδα: Η εδραίωση του Μαρξισμού-Λενινισμού και οι αποκλίνουσες ή οι ετερογενείς επεξεργασίες (1926–1952)*, vol. 3 (Athens: Gnosi, 1993).

<sup>9</sup> Dimitris Glinos, “Πνευματικές μορφές της αντίδρασης,” *Νέοι Πρωτοπόροι*, no. 10 (September 1932): 350.

<sup>10</sup> Stelios Makris, “Νίκος Καρβούνης: Γνωριμία μ’έναν άνθρωπο,” *Νέα Εστία*, 15 February 1978, 219–222.

From the outset of his dictatorial regime, Ioannis Metaxas outlawed the KKE and severely persecuted communists through imprisonment and exile. After the party's key leaders were arrested, he created a "fake" KKE to completely dismantle the party. This move plunged the KKE's leadership and members into chaos and confusion. In this atmosphere of suspicion, Karvounis distanced himself from the party and fell out of favour.<sup>11</sup>

He continued to fight alongside the KKE until his reinstatement in 1943. In the 1944 elections held by the Political Committee of National Liberation (PEEA), he was elected to the National Council and appointed head of PEEA's press office, a position he continued to hold after the war.<sup>12</sup>

After the Varkiza Agreement in 1945, the National Liberation Front (EAM) decided to present the issue to the international public, in a last effort to uphold the agreement's terms. It sent a delegation to Britain, France and the United States, comprising, alongside Karvounis, Dimitris Partsalidis, Giorgos Georgalas, Alkiviadis Loulis and Neokosmos Grigoriadis.<sup>13</sup>

While abroad, the delegation attempted to raise awareness of postwar Greek realities and the impact of British intervention in Greek affairs. Their campaign focused on the prevailing White Terror and the impossibility of conducting genuine and untainted elections. However, their tour yielded meagre results, and when Parliament passed the Third Resolution on 18 June 1946,<sup>14</sup> the persecution, imprisonment and assassination of those involved with EAM were effectively legitimised. Eight months later, on 18 February 1947, Karvounis died, leaving behind writings that reflected his eternal quest for spiritual freedom.

Karvounis was deeply involved in every intellectual process in both Greece and Europe, especially during the interwar period when ideological disputes reached their peak, and public dialogue created opposing camps, each striving for dominance in the political and social arena.

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<sup>11</sup> Spyros Linardatos, *Πώς εφτάσαμε στην 4η Αυγούστου* (Athens: Themelio, 1988); Petros Rousos, *Η μεγάλη πενταετία (1940–1945)*, vol. 1 (Athens: Synchroni Epochi, 1976).

<sup>12</sup> Yiannis Skalidakis, "Πολιτική Επιτροπή Εθνικής Απελευθέρωσης (1944): Ένας τύπος επαναστατικής εξουσίας" (PhD diss., Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, 2012), 361; Skalidakis, *Η Ελεύθερη Ελλάδα: Η εξουσία του ΕΑΜ στα χρόνια της Κατοχής (1943–1944)* (Athens: Asini, 2014).

<sup>13</sup> John Sakkas, "The League for Democracy in Greece and the Greek Civil War, 1946–49," *Thetis*, no. 3 (1996): 243–54; "Documents of Nikos Karvounis (1940–1946)," Archive of Contemporary Social History (ASKI), Επισκέψεις της αντιπροσωπείας του ΕΑΜ στο εξωτερικό, K1, F3 [Visits of the EAM delegation abroad, K1, F3], Athens, 1996.

<sup>14</sup> The Third Resolution (Τρίτο Ψήφισμα) was a parliamentary decree submitted by the Tsaldaris government, which was passed on 18 June 1946, condemning communism and any activity perceived as threatening the state and legitimising repressive measures during the early postwar years.

The interwar period in Greece was marked by a density of political events, following the Europe-wide rise of fascism and culminating in the Metaxas dictatorship. With the rise of fascism across Europe, the challenge to parliamentary democracy had grown significantly. Authoritarian and fascist movements accused parliamentary systems of failing to defend national interests. By 1933, Europe responded to the Bolshevik threat by establishing authoritarian or fascist governments, preparing the ground for a new world order. The political developments of the period did not leave Greek intellectuals indifferent, as they joined their voices with many intellectuals and artists worldwide.

In Greece, following the victory of Panagis Tsaldaris in 1933, the political atmosphere was highly polarised, and in the context of government purges targeting Venizelist elements, the political situation had reached civil war-like dimensions. During the same period in Germany, Adolf Hitler's Nazi party secured 33 percent of the vote, and Hitler was appointed chancellor by President Hindenburg after the Nazi and German People's parties agreed to collaborate. Hitler's rise to power in 1933 fuelled intellectual mobilisations, with committees, unions, conferences and gatherings attempting to expand the antifascist front.

### *The Feuilletons of Πρωΐα: A Thinker's Transition*

From 1931 to 1933, Karvounis wrote for the anti-Venizelist newspaper *Πρωΐα*.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> The political newspaper *Πρωΐα* was launched in March 1879 as the journalistic organ of Theodoros Deligiannis' party, which it supported for over 30 years, though it never achieved significant circulation. Its first editor was I. Antonopoulos, who remained in the position until 1894, when N. Rados and G. Matthopoulos took over. During that period, *Πρωΐα* and *Σκριπ* were typeset in the same printing house. Many intellectuals of the time collaborated with the newspaper, publishing news often sourced directly from Deligiannis. In his role as either prime minister or opposition leader, Deligiannis had the privilege of providing exclusive news unavailable to other newspapers. This period of *Πρωΐα* ended in 1905, shortly after Deligiannis' assassination. (Kostas Mayer, *Ιστορία του Ελληνικού Έθνους*, vol. 1, 1790–1900 (Athens: s.n., 1957), 173–76). In November 1925, *Πρωΐα* was relaunched by the brothers Georgios and Stefanos Pesmazoglou, aiming to stay clear of the political conflicts of the time. However, with Georgios Pesmazoglou on the editorial team – who later became a minister and governor of the National Bank of Greece – the newspaper fought hard for the dominance of the anti-Venizelist faction. *Πρωΐα*'s editors-in-chief included Georgios Vrachninis, Aristos Kampanis, Kostas Papalexandrou, Platon Metaxas and Georgios Karatzas, who took over in 1941 and maintained the position until the newspaper ceased publication in September 1944, as well as Petros Papakonstantinou. During its second period which lasted two decades, *Πρωΐα* had contributors from across the intellectual spectrum. Some of them were Pavlos Nirvanas, as a columnist; Fotos Politis, who wrote feuilletons and reviews; Kostis Chairopoulos, who published memoirs under the pseudonym “Apomachos”; Timos Moraitinis, with short

Although he had begun to align himself with the KKE in 1932, he continued his collaboration with *Πρωΐα* and the entire intellectual bourgeoisie of the time, including Politis, Aristos Kampanis, Sotiris Skippis, Sofia Spanoudi, Konstantinos Papalexandrou, Dionysios Kokkinos, Giorgos Theotokas, Constantinos Th. Dimaras, Kostis Bastias and others. These individuals contributed to the famous feuilletons of *Πρωΐα* that highlighted the acute problems of the era.

The feuilletons of *Πρωΐα* and Karvounis' intellectual dialogue with Politis, with the breadth of their intellectual contributions, would act as a cultural school of thought while contributing to the exchange of ideas. They also vividly outlined the ideological conflicts of the interwar period. Their dialogue was conducted in a calm tone, with both sides maintaining theoretical rigour. Karvounis unequivocally declared his ideas about individual freedom within society and the threat of impending fascism, while Politis, by 1934, shortly before his death, came to praise dictatorships, Hitler, racial theories and proclaimed his anti-Bolshevism and antisemitism.<sup>16</sup>

The period from 1931 to 1933 marks Karvounis' gradual abandonment of idealism, as his thinking shifted towards a form of humanistic materialism, though it still retained some pantheistic tones.<sup>17</sup>

On 20 April 1931, he wrote his first feuilleton in *Πρωΐα*, entitled "The Tyranny of Specialisations". After 91 feuilletons and his compelling exchanges with Politis, on 9 January 1933, he wrote his last one, titled "Art and Academicism".<sup>18</sup> Indeed, his collaboration with *Πρωΐα* became sporadic, and, until 1935, he only published a short story (in six parts), titled "The Stories of the Humble". During this period, when his feuilletons in *Πρωΐα* became topics of discussion and debate, Karvounis

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stories; Dionysios Kokkinos, who published historical monographs on the 1821 Revolution; and Nikos Karvounis, who also wrote feuilletons, articles, notes and impressions from his travels. Other contributors included Georgios Serouios as a columnist, Dimitris Lampikis, who described his walks in the Attica countryside; Aristos Kampanis, with political articles from 1914; Stratis Myrivilis, with essays and studies; Nikolaos Giokarinis; Georgios Aspreas; Kostis Bastias; Kostas Varnalis; Emilia Karavia; Leon Koukoulas; Gerasimos Anninos; Fotos Giofyllis; Theodoros Vokos; Kostas Vidalis; Kostas Paraschos; Elias Venezis; Giorgos Theotokas; Angelos Terzakis; and many more literary and artistic figures. These collaborators, with their high journalistic standards, secured *Πρωΐα* a significant place during the critical decades of the interwar period and contributed to shaping public opinion. See Kostas Mayer, *Ιστορία του Ελληνικού Τύπου*, vol. 2, *Αθηναϊκά εφημερίδες 1901–1950* (Athens: s.n., 1959), 257–65.

<sup>16</sup> Tasos Vournas, "Μια επισκόπηση των πνευματικών αξιών στην Ελλάδα κατά την περίοδο 1930–1936," *Επιθεώρηση Τέχνης*, no. 89 (May 1962): 521, 535; Fotos Politis, "Δικτατορίες," *Η Πρωΐα*, 26 January 1934, 2–3.

<sup>17</sup> Makris, "Νίκος Καρβούνης: Γνωριμία μ'έναν άνθρωπο."

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.



also published in *Νέοι Πρωτοπόροι*,<sup>19</sup> which mainly hosted left-leaning writers and intellectuals.

In 1960, Panos Politis compiled 32 of Karvounis' *Πρώτα* feuilletons, writing a preface and editing them. In his preface, Politis writes:

the period from 1931 to 1933 marks N. Karvounis' break with idealism and his turn towards dialectical materialism. The selection was made with complete objectivity and with the exclusive criterion of addressing issues of broader and more general interest, rather than matters of lesser significance or outdated relevance to the interwar period.<sup>20</sup>

Politis divided the texts into six thematic categories: Life and evolution; Individual and society; Work and creation; Intellect; Art; and Peace. In doing so, he attempted to present a more comprehensive picture of Karvounis' political and philosophical thought, though the selection process did not clearly reflect the ideological transition that occurred over time.

If we examine the texts from when they were first written in 1931, during which time Karvounis was still actively involved with the Theosophical Society and the Order of the Star, we can discern the mysticism still running through his writings and thoughts.

The Eastern religions, Plato, Pythagoras, Goethe, Nietzsche, Maurice Barrès and the occult intellectuals he studied provided the theoretical foundation for his public discourse, which initially had strongly idealistic characteristics

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<sup>19</sup> *Νέοι Πρωτοπόροι* was the successor to *Πρωτοπόροι*, founded in 1930 under the literary direction of Petros Pikros (Ioannis Genaropoulos or Genar, 1900–1956) and the editor-in-chief Galatea Kazantzaki (Galatea Alexiou, 1886–1962, the first wife of Nikos Kazantzakis and later married to Markos Avgeris). From December 1931 until August 1936, when its publication was discontinued due to the Metaxas dictatorship, it was one of the most significant journals of the 1930s, both in the fields of ideas and literature, and for its influence on leftist intellectuals. In addition to Pikros, the editorial team of *Νέοι Πρωτοπόροι* included Ilias Apostolou, Persa Vlasi, Asimakis Panselinos, Miltiadis Porphyrogenis, Giannis Sideridis, Panagiotis Skytalis, and Foula Chatzidaki-Porphyrogeni. In mid-1933, the editorial board was replaced, with the exception of Chatzidaki-Porphyrogeni, who remained in her position, and the new members included Dimitris Glinos, Yannis Zevgos, Karvounis and Porphyrogenis. Especially in the early issues, the magazine brought together a broad spectrum of writers and intellectuals who were not necessarily part of or influenced by the KKE. Authors like Demosthenis Voutyras, Kostas Varnalis, Nikolas Kalas, Galatea Kazantzaki, Manolis Kanellis, Kleandros Karthaios, Napoleon Lapathiotis and Stratis Tsirkas published poems, reviews and translations in many issues. Sakellariou, *Νέοι Πρωτοπόροι*; Panagiotis Noutsos, *Η Σοσιαλιστική σκέψη στην Ελλάδα από το 1875 ως το 1974*, vol. 3, *Οι σοσιαλιστές διανοούμενοι και η πολιτική λειτουργία της πρώιμης κοινωνικής κριτικής (1875–1907)* (Athens: Gnosi, 1993)

<sup>20</sup> Panos Politis, *Νίκος Καβούνης: Εκλογή από το έργο του* (Athens: Eklekta Vivlia, 1960), 11.



imbued with a deep humanitarianism that gradually led him to dialectical materialism, which he embraced until his death. When this transition took place, he definitively abandoned freemasonry, Theosophy and metaphysical idealism, dedicating himself entirely to political struggles.

In the early 1930s, Karvounis' writings are permeated by his pantheistic-theosophical tendencies and his holistic, irrational understanding of the world. The features he wrote for *Πρωΐα* in 1931 were still published in theosophical journals, proving that his connection to the Theosophical Society was still active and that his thinking remained oriented towards esotericism and Eastern mysticism.<sup>21</sup> As Solon Makris observes, "it was evident that Karvounis had not yet shaken off the echoes of pantheistic mysticism, and now he dressed them in the bold garb of 'humanity'. This was, after all, the same humanity praised by the most 'materialistic' Messiah, Buddha."<sup>22</sup>

Karvounis' first feuilleton, titled "The Tyranny of Specialisations", is inspired by a German archaeologist's questioning of the authenticity of the statue of Hermes of Praxiteles. He uses this as an opportunity to discuss the necessity of art for humanity and how it can lead to spiritual and emotional elevation towards archetypes: "Everyone who looks upon it experiences greater or lesser emotion and pleasure, which again depends on the degree of their personal connection to the 'archetypes' of the beautiful." He dismisses the questioning of "wise 'specialists'", rejecting their attempts to categorise and label, noting that they have "purchased their wisdom and expertise at the cost of sacrificing every pulse of true life".<sup>23</sup> Karvounis' critique was endorsed by comments in *Νέα Εστία*, which found that he "rightly argues that the people should not be guided by the specialists' erudition, but by their own sensitivity".<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Kostis Melissaropoulos, a high-ranking freemason and a key figure of the Theosophical Society, founded the theosophical magazine *Ήλιος* in 1956. A close associate of Karvounis for many years, he wrote that Karvounis "joined the Theosophical Society on 9 June 1923, and left on 17 April 1934, to avoid associating it with leftist ideologies, as he himself had been labelled due to his free expression of ideas and his struggle during the interwar period against fascism and Nazism, which cast their destructive shadow over suffering Europe". *Ήλιος* consistently published stories, speeches, tributes, poems and studies by Karvounis since its founding in 1956 until 2010. "During his tenure at the Theosophical Society (1923–1934), his spirituality shone like a bright meteor and warmed like a pillar of fire," the magazine wrote. The magazine *Πελεκάν* (1962–1967) is another theosophical publication that featured articles by Karvounis. Pythagoras Drousiotis, "Πνευματικό μνημόσυνο Νίκου Καρβούνη," *Ιλιός*, no. 278 (December 1959): 274–302.

<sup>22</sup> Makris, "Νίκος Καρβούνης: Γνωριμία μ'έναν άνθρωπο."

<sup>23</sup> Nikos Karvounis, "Η τυραννία των ειδικοτήτων," *Πρωΐα*, 20 April 1931.

<sup>24</sup> "Περιοδικά κι εφημερίδες," *Νέα Εστία*, 15 May 1931, 500.

The influences of the theosophical thought of Helena Blavatsky, particularly regarding ancient Greek philosophers and Eastern religions, are clearly evident in Karvounis' vision of the world, which contains metaphysical dimensions regarding the transition to the New World. "The God of change – say the distant Orientals of Asia – wears silk sandals and walks on tiptoe; most do not notice His presence, and only the wise, whose minds and ears are open, realise that He is passing."<sup>25</sup>

The same reverence for ancient Greek ideals and belief in Platonism is evident in his article "The Acropolis without its History", written some days later. Here, he is concerned with the "museification" of art and "the absence of any genuine emotion from the sight of it, which is replaced by pedantic nitpicking and technical curiosity". He believes that the works of art are the "total expression of the divine self" of those who created them, and that "every person, in every era, has within them a god that they must discover".<sup>26</sup>

He rejects the museumification and monumentalisation of the past, advocating instead for modern Greeks to discover and adopt the "spirit" and "soul" of antiquity. He continues by referring to the "geometrised Pythagorean people, who knew the creative language of numbers, which is the secret of proportion, ratio, and harmony – the essence of colour, sound, shape – the language of God".<sup>27</sup> He calls for spiritual freedom and the elevation of the human mind towards light and perfection. The divine origin of the soul, the Pythagorean eschatology of the elevation of the soul for those who sought archetypes, and the metaphysical view of reincarnation demonstrate Karvounis' belief in the metaphysical interpretations of Pythagoras and Plato.

The intellectual threads connecting Karvounis to Palamas and his co-authors, visible already from his time at the *Ηγησώ* literary journal, retained strong influences on his thought. Considering artists as priests-mystics, a common belief in Palamas' circle, he calls on them to offer humanity the visualisation of archetypes.

At the same time, he criticises the social and economic elites who want works of art to be privatised rather than accessible public goods.

Artists and their creators did not create for private galleries or the so-called "elite". These are the fruits of the tree of human decadence – private museums, private collections, expensive concerts for the "good class", luxurious books published by great poets ... the real artistic production is the ritual of extraordinary people who celebrate in

<sup>25</sup> Nikos Karvounis, "Προς ποίαν κατεύθυνσιν," *Πρωϊά*, 30 November 1931.

<sup>26</sup> Nikos Karvounis, "Η Ακρόπολις χωρίς την ιστορίαν της," *Πρωϊά*, 4 May 1931, 2.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

white robes in the temple of the creation of life; and the incomparable privilege of these people is that they can and do offer the visualisation of archetypes to the human multitude as a sacred blessing.<sup>28</sup>

In the same month he wrote about Antoine Bourdelle (1861–1929), who had recently died. The French sculptor, a pupil of Auguste Rodin (1840–1917), had several Greek students during the interwar period and his work was very popular in local art circles. His personal relationship with Jean Moréas would lead him to sculpt his bust, and he would be preoccupied with artistic themes from Greek antiquity. His admiration for Krishnamurti, the New Master, is reflected in the bust he dedicated to him. Bourdelle's mysticism was known as early as 1892, when he participated with other artists in the annual Salons de la Rose + Croix organised by Joséphin Péladan.<sup>29</sup>

Of Bourdelle, Karvounis argues that he felt the need to harmonise his work with the universe, paraphrasing the sculptor's words: "When you do something well, you place it in the Universe. A line must relate to the All ... A line is part of everything that exists."<sup>30</sup>

In order to create the bust of Krishnamurti, Bourdelle would have to rise "from the human form, to the spiritual lines, which must harmonise with the rhythms of the stars".<sup>31</sup> The artist had penetrated the sacred mystery of the universe and the divine mystery that resides everywhere in all beings in the divine idea of the cosmos.<sup>32</sup>

Karvounis, as already mentioned, was Krishnamurti's representative in Greece and the founder of the Greek section of the Order of the Star, and in 1930 he accompanied him during his visit to Athens. In concluding his text, he returns to the archetypes, writing that "Bourdelle's works and life are a ceaseless effort of harmonisation towards the Universe – an effort that characterises those who were fortunate enough to envision the eternal Archetypes".<sup>33</sup> The universe for Karvounis is full of life and meaning; the creative power of man's soul imitates the creative power of God.

Karvounis' discourse, rich in occult symbolism, reveals his firm belief in mysticism. He quotes various sayings of Bourdelle addressed to his students that

<sup>28</sup> Nikos Karvounis, "Προς τα Αρχέτυπα," *Πρωϊα*, 31 August 1931.

<sup>29</sup> Makris, "Νίκος Καρβούννης"; *Η τέχνη πτεροφύει εν οδύνη: Η πρόσληψη του νεορομαντισμού στην Ελλάδα* (Athens: Potamos, 2005).

<sup>30</sup> Nikos Karvounis, "Αντώνιος Μπουρντέλ: Ο σκεπτόμενος και ο ποιητής," *Πρωϊα*, 31 August 1931.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Matthiopoulos, *Η τέχνη πτεροφύει εν οδύνη*.

<sup>33</sup> Karvounis, "Αντώνιος Μπουρντέλ."

introduced them to another reading of art, linking it directly to the metaphysical. “Art is the presence of the eternal spirit in mortal form. It is the illuminated shadow, the material shadow, inhabited by the sound and the senses ... the material diathesis, if not handled by the spiritual hand, carves its circles in death.” And he concludes with one of Bourdelle’s poems, in which he addresses the Lord, asking Him to “make me live in your presence the circles of the spirit, which are the laws of all creation”. Bourdelle left his message, according to Karvounis, “with a clear and steady voice, a message of seeking the truth, which is the only eternal beauty, which is the anarchic, the indestructible, the all-embracing life”.<sup>34</sup>

In July Karvounis published an article on Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822), the English philhellene poet and friend of Lord Byron who wrote the lyrical drama *Hellas*, presenting “a Greece that is an exaltation of spirit and soul, light, human triumph, a Greece home of all free men, regardless of the race to which they may belong”. He comments on Shelley’s poem and described him as a poet-prophet, because in envisioning the future of Greece after its liberation he considered that “New Athenians will be born and in the long centuries to come, they will inherit as the sun sets, the glow of their youth, and will leave – if it is not possible to live something so glorious – what the earth can accept and the heavens can give.” And he concludes; “Behold the real Great Idea – the claim of our debt for the spiritual uplift of mankind.”<sup>35</sup>

In August of the same year, he returns to archetypes and Shelley. Analysing Plato’s *Phaedrus*, he interprets the path that human cognition must travel in order to approach the eternal hypostases, the archetypes. In support of his assertions, he quotes verses from Shelley’s poem “Hymn to Intellectual Beauty”, which appeals to the invisible powers to reveal the spirit of beauty, which is the messenger of the archetypes and can attest to human divinity.

The awe-inspiring shadow of some invisible Power hovers among us, though we do not see it ... like everything that is precious for its grace, but more precious for its mystery ... Spirit of Beauty, who sanctifies all things with thy colours ... Man would be immortal and omnipotent, if you, unknown and full of awe, as you are, (the spirit of beauty) would want to settle, with all your glorious escort, in his heart.<sup>36</sup>

Platonic idealism still pervades Karvounis’ thought, which was also imbued with the Hindu mysticism of Krishnamurti, the occultism of Shelley, the prophet

<sup>34</sup>Nikos Karvounis, “Το μήνυμα ενός καλλιτέχνη,” *Πρωϊά*, 22 June 1931.

<sup>35</sup> Nikos Karvounis, “Ο Σέλλεϋ και η Ελλάς,” *Πρωϊά*, 30 August 1931.

<sup>36</sup> Karvounis, “Προς τα Αρχέτυπα.”

Walt Whitman,<sup>37</sup> and, through his writings, initiates his readers into another reading of reality through the mirror of his mystical quest. In the modern age of materialism and rationalism, Karvounis counters mysticism and seeks to rise above everyday life in order to approach global problems.

In the essay entitled “Prince Athanasius”, he refers to an unfinished poem by Shelley, who wrote it before he became interested in Greece, and praises him because “every poem of that beautiful man of the soul pulsates with so much love for humanity ... that whoever is fascinated by his music feels deeply that he is being beautified and purified mentally and spiritually by listening to it”. He is concerned with the theme of universal love and considers that “every human being feels the need of the great, endless love that will give the divine wings to the soul”.<sup>38</sup> Like Whitman, the poet who loved to translate and recite, Karvounis believes that the rationalism of the European spirit cuts us off from our mystical roots, our ties with nature and the divine. A year later, when he renounced mysticism and proposed revolution as a way of changing the economic and political regime, he attributes his admiration for Whitman’s “vitalism” and Leo Tolstoy’s neo-Christian mysticism to an attempt to divert some intellectuals from the real problems of life.<sup>39</sup> And in another epigraph of 1932, he renounces the mystical urges that drive the individual to escape from “Mother Earth to a heaven that his cowardice towards Life has interfered with”.<sup>40</sup>

On the occasion of the organisation of the Delphic festivals by Angelos Sikelianos in 1930 and the performance of Aeschylus’ *Prometheus Bound* directed by Eva Palmer-Sikelianos, Karvounis describes Palmer-Sikelianos as the only true Greek woman who represents this ancient drama in the right way, in an article entitled “Esoteric Rhythm.” In the same article he praises antiquity for its spirituality and freedom of thought and reason, which is the awareness of human divinity, the conscious rhythm of the great life, the great, harmonious pulse of its eternity. Karvounis also seeks, alongside Angelos Sikelianos, to find “in the ruins of the past the sources of the future” and describes the Delphic festivals with dithyrambic comments.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> The term used by Kostis Palamas to describe Whitman, who wrote about the poet-philosopher, “the one who recently passed into the eternity of vast dreams of pantheism, the American prophet Whitman.” Kostis Palamas, *Άπαντα*, vol. 15 (Athens: Govostis, 1984).

<sup>38</sup> Nikos Karvounis, “Ο Πρίγκηψ Αθανάσιος,” *Πρωϊά*, 21 September 1931.

<sup>39</sup> Nikos Karvounis, “Η άλλη χρεωκοπία,” *Πρωϊά*, 10 October 1932.

<sup>40</sup> Nikos Karvounis, “Νέους ρυθμούς,” *Πρωϊά*, 10 October 1932.

<sup>41</sup> Eleni Ladia, *Ποιητές και Αρχαία Ελλάδα: Σικελιανός – Σεφέρης – Παπαδίδτσας* (Athens: Οι Ekdoseis ton Filon, 1983).

Karvounis believes that the rhythm of life conceived by the ancient Greeks, which created the high ancient civilisation, should be followed by all humanity in order to recreate a new, more worthy, brighter and more human civilisation.<sup>42</sup> His search for primordial forces, archetypal forms and his obsession with the “soul” and the “spiritual”, lead him to the archetypal idea of death and rebirth of people and civilisations. The transition to the new civilisation will be achieved, according to Karvounis, through the cooperation of man and nature, not by the domination of man over nature. Man and nature in antiquity were in harmony, and the ancient Greeks “lived so harmoniously and so intensely in her maternal womb, were so united with her that it was enough for them to live and grow humanly in her ... Nature was for those people full of divine meaning – the meaning of immortal Life.”<sup>43</sup>

The “soul” dominates much of his thought and he approaches reality through the mental state in which people or peoples find themselves. “The gradual subordination of civilised societies to the homogenisation of life brought about by this Western civilisation of ours ... is gradually robbing them of their soul. And woe to the peoples, as well as to the individuals, who are losing their soul.”<sup>44</sup>

Insisting on the existence of the soul, in another article he writes: “There are no, it is not possible for there to exist, people without a soul ... everyone has the right ... to broaden his soul so that he can receive as much as possible of the total, immortal soul of humanity.”<sup>45</sup>

His Platonic influences on the connection between the soul and the world of ideas are evident, even tracing Orphic and Pythagorean concepts that contain features of Eastern religions.<sup>46</sup> Even the “soul” becomes the means to access this

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<sup>42</sup> Nikos Karvounis, “Ο εσωτερικός ρυθμός,” *Πρωΐα*, 19 October 1931.

<sup>43</sup> Nikos Karvounis, “Χωρίς ‘Φυσιολατρείαν’,” *Πρωΐα*, 7 September 1931.

<sup>44</sup> Nikos Karvounis, “Ψυχική Τοπογραφία,” *Πρωΐα*, 3 August 1931.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> The Orphics and Pythagoreans, likely influenced by Eastern doctrines, believe that the soul is divine in nature, that it has been imprisoned in the body, and that it reincarnates. The Orphics claim that the final liberation of the soul from the cycles of reincarnation and its permanent residence in the Elysian Fields is achieved through three virtuous lives. Conversely, the souls of the unjust suffer punishments and additional incarnations. The Pythagoreans teach that a moral life leads to higher reincarnations until union with the divine is attained. The abstinence of the Orphics and Pythagoreans from meat has been interpreted as a sign of respect towards reincarnated souls. Holger Thesleff, “Pythagoreanism,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/science/Pythagoreanism>.

“higher reality”, as Édouard Schuré (1841–1929)<sup>47</sup> notes when he writes that “the Soul is the key to the Universe”.<sup>48</sup>

Karvounis concludes that the “main result of the degeneration of our mechanical civilisation is the spiritual starvation that plagues our so-called civilised societies ... This mental famine is called ‘spleen’ by the ‘intellectuals’ and they turn it into a demonstration of the pitiful excellence of civilisation, ... while humanity is tragically hungry for more spirituality.”<sup>49</sup>

In another of his articles, he again deals with the “soul” and conveys the views of Franz Werfel (1890–1945),<sup>50</sup> who described the world’s predicament as a “crisis of the soul”, resulting in a materialistic realism that turns the individual towards sport, the glorification of the body, healthy eating, the “life according to nature” and is rooted in the “fear of emptiness” – horror vacui. He cites the work *The World Without a Soul* by the anticonformist Henri Daniel-Rops (1901–1965), who believed that the “whole world is now living without a soul, without realising it. Ford has definitively replaced Orpheus.” And he goes on to praise once again the ancient Greeks, who had mastered the symmetrical development of body, morals, soul and mind, while the Romans, on the contrary, created “professional sport and the practice of physical education” in arenas and circuses. Christianity condemned the body and described the physical world as a

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<sup>47</sup> Édouard Schuré was a French philosopher, poet, playwright, novelist, music critic and publicist of esoteric literature. His greatest work was *The Great Initiates*, which was used extensively by esoteric philosophy.

<sup>48</sup> Matthiopoulos, *Η τέχνη πτεροφύει εν οδύνη*.

<sup>49</sup> Nikos Karvounis, “Ο Λιμός των Ψυχών,” *Πρωϊά*, 6 July 1931.

<sup>50</sup> Franz Viktor Werfel was a Jewish Austro-Bohemian novelist, playwright and poet, whose literary activity began during World War I, continued during the interwar period, and ended with his death in California after World War II. He was awarded the Grillparzer Prize in 1925 and the Schiller Prize in 1927. His early works show mystical expressionist tendencies. Werfel’s significant theatrical output began with *The Trojan Women* (1916), a play inspired by Euripides, and passed through mystical tendencies in plays like *Idol* (1921) and *The Song of the Capricorn* (1922), reaching nonpoetic expressionist dramas like *Juarez and Maximilian* (1925), *Paul Among the Jews* (1926), and *The Path of the Promise* (1937), which was inspired by the tragedy of the Jews and was performed in America with music by Kurt Weill. His most important work is considered to be *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh* (1933). With Hitler’s rise to power, Werfel was expelled from the Prussian Academy of Arts, and his books were banned. He collaborated with the publishing house Kurt Wolff in Leipzig, contributing to the publication of a series of expressionist texts. In 1929, he married Alma Mahler, the widow of Gustav Mahler, and in 1938 they emigrated to France, where they stayed until 1940 when Hitler’s troops occupied the country. They fled through the Pyrenees and eventually settled in Beverly Hills, California, where they lived for five years until Werfel’s death. “Franz Werfel,” *Encyclopedia Britannica* (2022), <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Franz-Werfel>.



valley of tears from which one had to leave as quickly as possible in pursuit of the afterlife. As a result, a form of “spiritual slavery” prevailed for many centuries. It was only towards the end of the eighteenth century that the need for physical exercise to free the mind began to be recognised. But with “the dumbing down of the materialistic spirit throughout the mechanised ‘civilised’ world, moderation was lost and people were driven to the apotheosis of the body, which is yet more proof of the spiritual void created by the now worn-out Western civilisation.” Karvounis concludes the article with the statement that “the human being has, at last, the right to regain his soul”.<sup>51</sup>

Towards the end of 1931, Karvounis returns to the “Rights of the Soul” in reference to the Soviet state, where “a most important human factor has been discovered: the Soul”. But he offers a clarification: “In order to avoid any misunderstanding, one should rather say ‘spirituality’.”<sup>52</sup>

He praises Anatoly Lunacharsky (1875–1933),<sup>53</sup> people’s commissar of education, who, during a visit to Athens, devoted a series of lectures to the study of ancient Greek culture. There Lunacharsky “recognised the spiritual

<sup>51</sup> Nikos Karvounis, “Δια τον Φόβον του Κενού,” *Πρωΐα*, 23 November 1931.

<sup>52</sup> Nikos Karvounis, “Τα δικαιώματα της Ψυχής,” *Πρωΐα*, 7 December 1931, 1–2.

<sup>53</sup> Anatoly Lunacharsky, a Marxist intellectual, became the first commissar of education following the October Revolution in 1917, exerting a decisive influence on education and culture. After Lunacharsky’s death, Trotsky wrote an obituary: “In school, Lunacharsky astonished with his variety of talents. He wrote poetry, easily grasped philosophical ideas, and gave wonderful lectures at student evenings. He was an unmatched orator, and no color was missing from his writing palette. At the age of twenty, he was able to lecture on Nietzsche, challenge the categorical imperative, defend Marx’s theory of value, and discuss the comparative virtues of Sophocles and Shakespeare ... Lunacharsky was connected to the revolution and socialism for forty whole years, meaning for the entirety of his conscious life. He endured prisons, exile, and banishment, yet remained a steadfast Marxist. Over those long years, thousands of his old comrades from the same circle of the bourgeois intelligentsia switched camps to Ukrainian nationalism, bourgeois liberalism, or monarchist reaction. Revolutionary ideas were not, for Lunacharsky, a youthful enthusiasm; they had permeated him to the very depths of his nerves and blood vessels. This is the first thing we must say before his newly-dug grave. During the dark years of reaction (1908–1912), when broad sections of the intelligentsia seemed to be struck by a mysticism epidemic, Lunacharsky, together with Gorky, who was closely tied to him by friendship, paid his dues to mystical searching. Without breaking with Marxism, he set out to present the socialist ideal as a new form of religion and seriously engaged in seeking a new ritual. Sarcastically, Plekhanov dubbed him ‘Saint Anatoly’, and this nickname stuck with him for a while. Lenin flogged him no less mercilessly, his former and future comrade. Though tensions gradually eased, the struggle lasted until 1917 when Lunacharsky, not without resistance and strong external pressure, this time from me, rejoined the Bolsheviks.” Leon Trotsky, “Anatol Vasilyevich Lunacharsky,” 1 January 1933,

freedom of ancient Greek civilisation” and admitted “that Russia must first pass through industrialisation before reaching, after being organised materially, other more spiritual levels”. In the same article, Karvounis reports on the spiritual movements emerging among the young people in the Soviet Union, to whom *Vozrozhdenie* (Renaissance), a Russian émigré journal published in Paris by Russian political refugees, was clandestinely distributed via underground networks. Two of these movements refer specifically to religious trends either within Orthodoxy or among Baptists, Chiliastics, Tolstoyists and various other Christian sects, who are “fanatically attached to dogma, for whom freedom of thought is a mortal sin and who are all related to the individual problem of the soul”. But the third movement, as the author notes, represents a new spiritual direction that could be described as “‘cognitive-mystical’”. This is particularly striking in a context that is otherwise materialistic and rationalistic ... They reject all dogma and advocate that only those who live the life of the Spirit can know divinity ... They have formed a secret society and call themselves ‘Knights of the Radiant City’.”<sup>54</sup> And he concludes that the emergence of such movements reflects “an outburst of the Russian soul, neglected in the desert of materialism.” He also embraces the critique of the October Revolution put forth by self-exiled Russians in Paris.

And while in 1931 he concludes with the publication of a mediaeval allegorical tale from the Frankish era with a strong irrational element, in the epigraph of the “Rights of the Soul”, he considers that “the nostalgia of legends, the lure of mystical symbols, is a spiritual weakness. It is a retreat of the higher spirituality, which transcends tradition, legends, the past, the symbols.”<sup>55</sup>

The turbulent times he lived through, his ceaseless struggle with himself, his vacillations, are defused in the writing of historical tales that demonstrate, in addition to his metaphysical quests, his scholarship on historical subjects. Seeking the soul, the deeper substance of the world, the meaning found in the spirit, his writing transforms into a heroic representation of the past in the form of a distant echo that extends into the present. “He was deeply, hypostatically connected to that distant past, and felt the sacred shudder of a redemptive uplift – an unburdened departure for the utopian absolute of transcendent contemplation.”<sup>56</sup>

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Marxists Internet Archive: Greek section, <https://www.marxists.org/ellinika/archive/trotsky/works/1933/01/01/luna.htm>.

<sup>54</sup> Karvounis, “Τα δικαιώματα της Ψυχής.”

<sup>55</sup> Nikos Karvounis, “Η Μετάνοια του Κεκοιμημένου,” *Πρωΐα*, 28 December 1931.

<sup>56</sup> Giannis Kouchtsoglou, “Νίκος Καβούνης,” *Νέα Εστία*, 1 March 1947, 306–8.

In his writings in 1931, Karvounis expresses scepticism not only towards capitalism but also communism. In the aftermath of World War I, confronted with the loss of meaning that pervades humanity in an increasingly industrialised world and the social injustice and misery around him, he blames capitalism for social misery but also criticises communism for focusing solely on material security while ignoring the spiritual dimension. For Karvounis, neither system could satisfy the innermost needs of people.

Karvounis knew French and could keep in touch with the work of Daniel-Rops and the nonconformist movement that had emerged in France in 1930. Seeking solutions to the economic, political and social crises that arose during the interwar period, he himself seeks a third way between socialism and capitalism and initially opposes both liberalism and fascism. Karvounis opposes fascism, capitalism, individualism, economic liberalism and materialism. He believes that the conditions existed that would lead humanity to a “spiritual revolution” beyond individualism or centralism.

Using Solomos’ verse, “ill-fated world in decay”, he adds his judgement on capitalism, which was dying with the constant accumulation of wealth in the hands of the powerful, resulting in the global economic crisis, but he also criticises socialist regimes, which are only interested in the economic progress of their peoples and have misappropriated their spiritual entity. He is sharply critical of Western civilisation, condemning its internal contradictions and antinomies, citing, for example, the support of capitalism by Western socialist leaders such as Léon Blum (1872–1938), who argued that it was absolutely necessary for the French people to assist German capitalism and who supported the vital effort of the Labour government in London to save capitalism.<sup>57</sup>

In another epigraph, Karvounis cites Blum’s call on European states to unite to avert the crisis. He replies that the capitalist states are “seeking the cure for the

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<sup>57</sup> Annie Lacroix-Riz, “Λεόν Μπλουμ και η πρακτική της εξουσίας, 1936, 1946,” *Waltendegewalt*, September 12, 2022, <http://www.bit.ly/42hFS2w>. Léon Blum, a French politician of Jewish descent, joined the ranks of the left in 1902 when he sided with the defenders of the Dreyfus Affair. In 1919, he was elected as a deputy, and shortly thereafter, in December 1920, at the Socialist Party congress, while the majority of socialists decided to join the Third International, which had just been founded by the Soviet Communist Party, Blum and a few other members disagreed and led the French Socialist Party into a split. After the split and the creation of the French Communist Party by the majority, Blum emerged as the leader of the French Socialist Party with the remaining members. Early on, he expressed his anti-Bolshevik sentiments, writing for *Le Populaire* and portraying the Soviet model as the ultimate example to avoid. After World War II, Blum embraced the theory of the

crisis with the same methods and the same doctrines that brought it about ... life cannot be bound by doctrines from the beginning. Capitalism has lived on.”<sup>58</sup>

He also refers to “Austria, where the Social Democrats vote with the government for the salvation of capitalism, while in Berlin, the Social Democratic Party is the staunchest supporter of Chancellor Heinrich Brüning, against whom all the chauvinist right, Alfred Hugenberg and Hitler, the steel factories and the trusts, together with the communists, together with the extreme left, are rallying!”<sup>59</sup>

For Karvounis, the triumph of materialism is also responsible for the wars: “The civilisation of mechanical vertigo and pointless speed created states and societies of lies, cultivated greed and rapacity, drove the peoples into the dishonourable mutual destruction of the great war.”<sup>60</sup>

With the end of World War I, Karvounis’ antiwar shift is evident, as he introduces messages of universal peace, the elimination of inequalities and opposition to the “powerful”. However, he proposes these goals be achieved through a “spiritual revolution”, insisting that love must prevail among people to bring about the “great change”. He begins to distance himself from the Great Idea and the nationalisms of figures like Kazazis, Ion Dragoumis and Barrès, as his thinking entered a transitional phase.

The glorification of war, which he once embraced while writing fiery articles about the joy of victory at the frontlines, is now in the past. He now praises peace and condemned wars as “a great crime, which enabled the terrible degradation of humanity in a global conflict”. Sensing the possibility of more wars, he writes:

Where is the general cultivation of love and goodwill in human souls?  
The powerful continue to exploit the weaker. The competition among individuals in human societies, and the rivalry among states in the community of nations, cultivates the seeds of new conflicts ... Did the millions of people slaughtered over four years in the mud of the trenches die in vain? Did this vast ocean of human blood merely purchase a guarantee of repetition?

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“third way”, which positioned itself between the two opposing socioeconomic models of the USSR and the US, keeping equal distance from both. Annie Lacroix-Riz, “Léon Blum et la pratique du pouvoir, 1936, 1946” (paper presented at the colloquium “Socialisme, République, Démocratie, 1936, 1946, 1956, 1966,” Lille, 17–18 November 2009, <http://www.historiographie.info/actlblum.pdf>).

<sup>58</sup> In November 1932, Karvounis began his alignment with the Left and started collaborating with *Νέοι Πρωτοπόροι*. Nikos Karvounis, “Εἰς το Σταυροδρόμι της Αποφάσεως,” *Πρωΐα*, 7 November 1932, 2.

<sup>59</sup> Nikos Karvounis, “Κρίσις πολιτισμοῦ ὄχι κρίσις οικονομική,” *Πρωΐα*, 10 August 1931.

<sup>60</sup> Karvounis, “Ἡ Ἀκρόπολις χωρὶς τὴν ἱστορίαν της.”

Now influenced by Mahatma Gandhi's teachings, he hopes for the definitive triumph of peace and the disarmament of states, which "will only be achieved when spiritual and mental disarmament is accomplished".<sup>61</sup>

Espousing that change is necessary in the political-economic systems of states, he turns to a humanist idealism and proposes the elevation of the human spirit through spirituality: "It is necessary that all injustice should disappear and a new world should be created ... the great change, towards a bright humanism, is knocking at the gate of every human soul". And for the new civilisation of tomorrow that will arise and "replace the civilisation of mechanical vertigo and mental emptiness called Western civilisation, it will not be similar to the civilisation of the ancient Greeks in its manifestation and form ... but will certainly be characterised as it was by free spirituality".<sup>62</sup>

At the same time, quoting John Ruskin's (1819–1900) words about a "high" education, he calls for the reform of education towards the more spiritual, so that it becomes the starting point of spiritual elevation. To this end, he proposes the creation of public libraries where everyone would have access to the most precious products of the human spirit, the immortal works of the great intellectual creators.<sup>63</sup> And his discourse takes the form of an executive address on the right of every human being to come into contact with the works of the ancient classics because "they are the works of the cool and inexhaustible sources of high humanism. Their books are like open gates, from which a life-giving air of spiritual freedom blows, through which one can pass through the narrow wall of spiritual slavery and anarchy of materialistic Western civilisation, to an infinity of spiritual possibilities."<sup>64</sup>

At this point in his life, Karvounis seeks to strike a balance between irrationalism and humanism, spirit and matter. Through his public discourse in the press, he attempts to shape the consciousness of his readers and lead them to a "spiritual revolution" aiming at creating the utopian society he envisioned. The need for spiritual freedom runs through almost all of his writings in 1931, freedom from the impasses of "materialistic Western civilisation", freedom of the mind and of the human being.

At the beginning of the previous century, Victor Hugo (1802–1885) proposed the founding of a United States of Europe, which found little resonance in the heyday of Romanticism.<sup>65</sup> After World War I, Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi

<sup>61</sup> Nikos Karvounis, "Δια τον οριστικόν καθαρισμόν," *Πρωΐα*, 9 November 1931.

<sup>62</sup> Nikos Karvounis, "Προς τον Νέον Κόσμον," *Πρωΐα*, 11 September 1931.

<sup>63</sup> Karvounis, "Ο εσωτερικός ρυθμός."

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> Victor Hugo, *Ύμνος στην ενωμένη Ευρώπη: Έργα και λόγοι από την εξορία* (Athens: Poikili Stoa, 2015), 33–63.

(1894–1972), adopting some of Hugo’s views, published a book entitled *Pan-Europa* (1923), in which he proposed the unification of Europe in order to withstand international economic competition and to avoid another war between the European peoples. Achieving these goals would require the replacement of all national identities and consciousnesses by a common, European one. Ten years later, Kalergi, on a visit to Rome to meet Mussolini, declared, in an interview with the magazine *Il Regime Fascista*: “It is my firm conviction about the transnational mission of Fascism that brought me to Rome, where I had the honour of being received twice and with great cordiality by the Duce.” In 1933 Kalergi believed that Mussolini’s Fascist Italy had solved the problem of constitutional and social reform, expressing the belief that the genius Mussolini was destined to deal effectively with the European question.<sup>66</sup>

Drawing on Kalergi’s ideas, Karvounis suggests that Western leaders “should form states that do not fall into the prejudice of border divisions. In other words, a Pan-Europe would have arisen naturally – the Pan-Europe that some dreamers envision today and that some present-day leaders of European nations do not dare to openly contemplate.” However, he anticipates

a new civilisation which will regulate the relations of men in a completely different way from today. The wretchedness called “frontiers” will be abolished and new generations will try to forget, for the sake of the honour of mankind, how many crimes against its highest interests were caused by the prevention of “frontiers”.<sup>67</sup>

In another column, he stresses the need to abolish frontiers in order to end state exploitation: “Let borders be abolished ... otherwise there will always be imperialists and exploiting states.”<sup>68</sup> But for the creation of the new civilisation he brings forth the example of Gandhi, who, with his spiritual weapons, overpowered the British Empire, and prophesised that: “A new day is in store for Mankind. A day, whose sun will be, a sun of love and goodwill among men of every race. It is the dawn of Tomorrow.”<sup>69</sup>

In 1932, with the shift in his ideological pursuits towards dialectical materialism, he recognises the utopia of this paradigm and concludes that it is impossible to realise

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<sup>66</sup> Julius Evola, *Άρθρα για τον Φασισμό και τον Εθνικοσοσιαλισμό*, trans. Olga Avloniti (Athens: Nea Genia, 2019).

<sup>67</sup> Nikos Karvounis, “Ο όρθρος της αύριον,” *Πρωΐα*, 13 July 1931.

<sup>68</sup> Nikos Karvounis, “Και άλλη πλάνη που καταρρέει,” *Πρωΐα*, 14 December 1931.

<sup>69</sup> Karvounis, “Ο όρθρος της αύριον.”

a true federation whose members would be divided into victors, defeated and former neutrals ... Instead of pursuing these monstrous chimaeras, the soul of which would be the injustice and the positive consequence of which would be the strengthening and spreading of the exploitative tendency, it is much simpler and more reasonable to seek the elimination of the root cause of those evils which it is said would be cured by the Pan-Europe ... and this cause is the state system which is founded on the principle of the exploitation of man by man.<sup>70</sup>

He subsequently proposes a collectivist pan-European system, rejecting “the Pan-Europe of Coudenhove-Kalergi”.<sup>71</sup> He takes a stand against philosophical dogmas, social systems and artistic movements that enforce submission to institutions and ways of thinking, abolishing the intellectual and moral freedom of the individual and erasing personal independence in thought, feeling and creative abilities.<sup>72</sup>

The period during which Karvounis wrote these essays is characterised by a prolonged search for new “national visions”. As his reflections revolve around issues of nation, national identity, nationalism and race, an ideological and intellectual shift from his earlier positions becomes evident. Although he has abandoned the nationalism promoted by Kazazis and Dragoumis, he still maintains ideological ties with those theorists who, towards the end of the nineteenth century, sought a reconnection with the ancient world. “Above all, it is necessary to pursue the cultivation of ‘measure’ – that harmonious and calm balance, which was the most beautiful and valuable characteristic of ancient Greek civilisation.” He expresses the need for an educational renewal, where the ancient classics are translated so that young people can participate in the centuries-old Greek heritage. However, through the “sanctification” of the past, he promotes a specific worldview by establishing a new value system that includes nationalist elements but ones that “will offer humanity its true face, as pure and beautiful as possible for perpetual evolution. For this reason, and from this broad perception of a global common interest, one must be a nationalist.” He distances himself from the

other nationalism that divides nations, that develops the selfishness of one at the expense of others, that is motivated by hatred of others, and that some “intellectuals”, alas, boast about – or at least do not feel the need to conceal, as one hides a natural flaw for reasons of decency. It is a degree of human degradation.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>70</sup> Nikos Karvounis, “Το παραμύθι της Πανευρώπης,” *Πρωϊά*, 15 March 1932.

<sup>71</sup> Nikos Karvounis, “Ανθρωπίνη υπερπαραγωγή,” *Πρωϊά*, 16 May 1932.

<sup>72</sup> Nikos Karvounis, “Έθνη και ανθρωπότητα,” *Πρωϊά*, 7 March 1932; Pavlos Nirvanas, “Από την ζωήν και από την Τέχνην: Το Πνεύμα της Αγέλης,” *Νέα Εστία*, 15 November 1931, 1180.

<sup>73</sup> Nikos Karvounis, “Δια να σφυρηλατηθεί ο εθνικός μας χαρακτήρ,” *Πρωϊά*, 13 June 1931.



He defines the concept of nationalism in a modern sense, renouncing his earlier views and advocating a collective nationalism that realises a universal common purpose for the good. He declares his firm belief in a broad international perspective, respecting the values of other nations, proclaiming peace. “The politicians, economists, industrial magnates of the whole world must be forced to put aside their disputes and henceforth serve the common interests of mankind in the future.”<sup>74</sup>

In his essays, we also discern the certainty that the old systems of governance are collapsing, and he rejects dead models that refer to the past. He identifies sterile ancestor worship and the blind imitation of European models as adversaries: “It is true that this slavish imitation of states and societies can be seen not only in Greece but everywhere.”<sup>75</sup> To validate his stance on the imitation of foreign models and the use of the ancient Greek past to boost the national imagination, which he sees in contemporary artistic expression, he writes a critique of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. The monument was erected on 25 March 1932, during the premiership of Eleftherios Venizelos, on Palace Square (now Syntagma Square), though the decision to build it had been made in 1926 during the dictatorship of Theodoros Pangalos. There, he emphasises the imitation that characterises Greek thought and artistic expression, denouncing the monument’s sculptor Fokion Rok, the final recipient and creator of the artistic competition announced in 1926.

And Greece? First, it lagged astonishingly in imitation. Then ... the unbearable, foolish and tasteless monstrosity was designed in the square of the Old Palace – a pit that destroys the symmetry of the facade of the Palace building, with a marble lining that comically reminds one of the Pelasgians, with a Gothic-concept crypt and as a climax, a relief representation of a naked, supine, submerged, ancient warrior in an ugly and unlikely pose of arcuate overturning; almost crushing his spine.

He continues: “Why all this stony nonsense? Simply because, out of mental laziness, we slavishly imitate something that does not speak at all to the Greek soul, to the Greek mind, to the Greek perception.”<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> The excerpt refers to the column titled “Προς ποίαν κατεύθυνσιν” where Karvounis quotes the publicist H.G. Wells, who proposes drafting a new Magna Carta for the civilised humanity of the new century. Karvounis considers Wells a rationalist, grouping him with realists but noting that he focuses solely on the economic and social problems of the time, neglecting humanity’s spiritual needs. Karvounis, “Προς ποίαν κατεύθυνσιν.”

<sup>75</sup> Nikos Karvounis, “Ανεργία του νου,” *Πρωΐα*, 24 August 1931.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

Yet, his thought, still devoted to Eastern mysticism, rejects both materialism and communism, which he views as abolishing individual spirituality and the triumph of matter, diagnosing them as the root of all evils suffered by humanity.

The famous “Western civilisation”? At its core, it is nothing more than the triumph and systematisation of materialism. The degradation of science to serve the humblest material needs of man ... Can the Western world defend itself against the wave of barbarism that today threatens it from the East ... the danger inherent in communist materialism?<sup>77</sup>

Karvounis’ views on issues of nation, national identity, Hellenism and race appear as a call to reinterpret tradition so that it can act as a foundation for creating a new Hellenism. In this way, he attempts to bridge the ancient roots of classical civilisation with the present, invoking the ontological continuity with the past. To overcome the crisis, he advocates for a new worldview that transcends all borders – a new humanism that will bridge ancient civilisation with the modern era, while heralding the creation of a new world emerging from the ruins of the old one.

He harshly criticises capital and capitalists, believing they are leading the world’s future to destruction: “The crisis stems from the current system of production and consumption, from the injustice of distribution, from the greed of those exploiting the sweat of the masses” and “above all, the exploitation of labour and the sweat of others by the individual must be abolished”,<sup>78</sup> because “the entire political and economic structure is shaking and collapsing daily”.<sup>79</sup>

He holds the forces of capital and labour responsible for social collapse and the existential terror of the void that has paralysed modern man. According to Karvounis, today’s civilisation is primarily characterised by capitalism, machinery, uniformity, urbanisation, mass education and nationalism, which, however, “failed to remove from man the feeling of the great, terrifying void – the void of his soul”. To address the problems brought about by Western civilisation, he proposes

respect for the human condition both in the individual and in the group; the securing of harmonious coexistence of people through the just distribution of labour and its product; collectivist labour for common material prosperity, which will not be an end and goal but a necessary condition and prerequisite for the free development of love for beauty and the free individual pursuit of satisfying the spiritual thirst for Truth.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>77</sup> Karvounis, “Η Ακρόπολις χωρίς την ιστορίαν της.”

<sup>78</sup> Nikos Karvounis, “Η ασυναρτησία ενός τέλους,” *Πρωΐα*, 26 October 1931.

<sup>79</sup> Nikos Karvounis, “Όταν υποχωρούν τα θεμέλια,” *Πρωΐα*, 16 November 1931.

<sup>80</sup> Karvounis, “Προς ποίαν κατεύθυνσιν.”

The luminous humanism that Karvounis envisions emerging for the world still had many idealistic nuances. However, a gradual ideological shift can be traced in his need to investigate the causes behind the grim social problems that arose following the global financial crisis of 1929 and Britain's abandonment of the gold standard, as their devastating consequences began to affect Greece as well. His awareness that the individual and states are in bondage to historical and technological developments leads him to seek solutions for the individual's freedom, both spiritual and real, from the deadlocks brought about by Western industrial civilisation. His romantic origins lead him to address the "soul", urging a spiritual approach to life towards exaltation and the search for freedom. Karvounis conceives the soul as something innate and internal that seeks redemption in a universal environment marked by instability and doubt, and he expresses concern for those who are led to the loss of their soul. The deeper essence of man is what interests Karvounis, who deeply believes that everything goes back to the soul. The course and future of civilisation depend on a return to the archetypes that will bring stability and harmony to a world that has lost its rhythm. If progress is identified with technology and economics, then we must deny logic and seek a psychocentric and metaphysical approach to lead to a spiritual revolution that will free us from the terror of the void. The contrasts he outlines in his writings between logic and soul, modern reality and ancient Greek civilisation pose philosophical and social questions.

The Asia Minor Catastrophe and the painful experience of World War I for humanity force him to distance himself from hero worship, the glorification of war and all that characterised his early thinking. He now believes that materialism, which dominated Western civilisation, is to blame for everything, and only a metaphysical force can break the cycle of violence that he sees approaching again. Having severed ties with nationalism, monarchism and anti-Venizelism, he seeks a new direction to guide his utopian visions and hopes. He seems to waver between the third way ideologies that emerged during the interwar period and attempts to move beyond the contradictions of right-left, capital-labour, which, by advocating positions against materialism, rejecting individualism and promoting solidarity and spiritual rebirth, appears to attract Karvounis with the avant-garde promise they bring.

Through his human-centred perspective, he denounces in his writings the "aristocracy," whether economic elites or intellectuals who consider themselves spiritually superior to others. His passion and faith in humanity lead to his transformation from an intellectual of the bourgeoisie with conservative views into an idealist communist.

*Karvounis and Politis at the Crossroads of Ideas*

Karvounis' intellectual development is clearly reflected in the articles he published throughout 1932 in *Πρωΐα*, the year that marked his confrontation with Politis and the beginning of his collaboration with *Νέοι Πρωτοπόροι*. Karvounis and Politis had already been colleagues in *Ηγησώ* since 1907, shortly before Politis left for Germany. They later collaborated in the monarchist *Πολιτεία* and then in the anti-Venizelist *Πρωΐα*. Initially, through the articles he published in *Νουμάς*, Politis seems influenced by the socialist ideas of Giorgos Skliros, who had just published *Το κοινωνικόν μας ζήτημα*. However, he signed his poems in *Ηγησώ* as Siegfried, which directly referred to his early reception of Wagnerism and Nietzscheanism. Returning from Germany in 1913 due to the Balkan Wars, he represented German Idealism, which was expressed through anticommunism, "ethnicity" instead of nationalism and a veneration of antiquity in his role as the first director of the National Theatre. "Fotos was the fiery apologist of Helleno-Christian idealism in Hegelian terms," Makris notes.<sup>81</sup>

In 1931, already director of the National Theatre, with Georgios Pezmazoglou, editor of *Πρωΐα*, as a member of the theatre's executive committee, Politis also became a columnist in *Πρωΐα*. His topics initially concern theatre, book and art criticism, which project his ideology, his aesthetics and his views on the language question. Politis worships the high and absolute of the ancient classics and uses antiquity ideologically for a critique of the present, reflected in his encouragement to young people to cultivate national self-awareness and to turn both to antiquity and to tradition. "In the ancient Greeks, who are the unshakeable rule of the highest human creation, we feel clearly the transubstantiation of life into rhythm and harmony."<sup>82</sup> He continues with the conviction that ancient Greek theatre expresses the high, strong will, individualism and leads individuals to become conscious of their individual freedom.

He passionately criticises imitation and the transfer of European models into intellectual life, while believing in the power of the modern Greek tradition and urging a broad immersion in national sources. "The creator, poet or artist – makes the same observation, the daily fraying of old values, at the expense of his spiritual work. For he lacks the freedom that exists in law and tradition."<sup>83</sup> In another column he claims that Greece has produced only two true creators, Dionysios Solomos and Alexandros Papadiamantis: "Literature, random and

<sup>81</sup> Makris, "Νίκος Καρβούνης: Γνωριμία μ'έναν άνθρωπο."

<sup>82</sup> Fotos Politis, "Επεισοδιακή λογοτεχνία και συνολική σύλληψη ζωής," *Πρωΐα*, 17 June 1931.

<sup>83</sup> Fotos Politis, "Νέοι καλλιτεχνικοί δρόμοι, εξ αφορμής μιας εκθέσεως," *Πρωΐα*, 6 May 1931.

episodic, is as if it did not exist. But only two poets are not enough – Solomos and Papadiamantis – to spiritually transfigure the new Greece.”<sup>84</sup>

Politis’ vision for the future is shaped by a new reading of the past, one rooted in stable values and a healthy and regenerated national community, free from the social conflicts of contemporary society. He believes in unbroken national continuity, the absolute uniqueness of Greek culture and the authenticity of popular tradition, expressed in his reaction to the introduction of those elements of European culture that he maintains distort the uniqueness of the Greek nation. According to Politis, “internal self-awareness” could be achieved through the study of ancient Greek culture and folk tradition, but always with a paternalistic top-down view of the folkloric and the people. His messianic search for a leader who would impose himself on the masses reflects his conservative views with authoritarian overtones.

During this period, certain affinities existed with the views of Karvounis, such as the distance both writers expressed from materialism, rationalism and communism, the search for the spirituality of the individual and the soul, the need to restore the relationship between man and nature. Politis writes:

Extreme realism, which dominates the world with all its side effects – historical materialism, biologism, pragmatism, positivism, economism – is the opposite of what it wants to mean ... it is not a theory, it is a mindset ... the enemy of realistic thinking, an object of hatred for it, is the inner nature of man, his soul, his creative spirit.<sup>85</sup>

Politis continues to defend the spirit over matter, concluding that “both capitalism and communism forget that the human interiority may be silenced for decades, but not forever. Both forget that within us lies the kingdom of heaven, within us is the possibility of redemption. They forget that happiness is spirit.”<sup>86</sup> In his denial of the realistic prosaicism brought about by environmental materialism, Politis advances a mystical vision with strong idealistic overtones.

His fundamental difference with Karvounis lies in the fact that the central concept of Politis’ philosophy is the individual, not the collective whole. Politis, unlike Karvounis, sees the whole as simply the sum of self-contained units, and the individual as the prime mover of change. The individual becomes the “hero of individual will” and leads to intellectual and political revolution. “It is close to the mind that the revolutionary passage from the old to the new conceptions

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<sup>84</sup> Politis, “Επεισοδιακή λογοτεχνία.”

<sup>85</sup> Fotos Politis, “Ρεαλισμός και εσωτερικότης,” *Πρωΐα*, 24 September 1931.

<sup>86</sup> Fotos Politis, “Η επανάσταση του μουσικού ανθρώπου,” *Πρωΐα*, 30 September 1931.

was brought about by men who were brave and unconcerned, titanic in their will, with the robust joy of their individual independence.”<sup>87</sup> Distinction from the crowd and leadership ambitions are praised, particularly as duties of young people. However, Karvounis argues that “the subordination of the individual to the whole is a primary condition of the restoration of justice in societies” and returns to Plato and the *Republic* to demonstrate that “the individual has value not as such, but as part of the social whole”.<sup>88</sup>

Karvounis also rejects Romanticism, which he considers to represent individualism – “romanticism that sickening manifestation of a disembodied individualism and an absolute contempt for the Whole” – and once again calls on the wisdom of the ancient Greeks, referring this time to Solon, who “sought to teach his fellow citizens that the cowardice of ego-centrism, the carefree indifference to the fate and interests of the Whole, is not permitted to the individual”.<sup>89</sup>

Politis stubbornly rejects the banality of realism, maintaining that he addresses the masses:

And then realism came here too. We imitated the European evolution of theatre, which was justified there by other conditions. The stage lost its magic at once. It now attracted the semi-educated, the half-cultured, the intellectual proletariat of urban centres ... The people have always been foreign to personal creation. This is a manifest anomaly in our intellectual evolution, which must be attributed either to the inadequacy of personal creations, or conversely, to the inability of the masses to follow the lofty meanings and personal style of individualist poets.<sup>90</sup>

Providing Werfel’s definition of realism, he clarifies that “he explicitly distinguishes realism from the narrow-minded, blind and unreflective ideological stance of the masses”.<sup>91</sup> As much as Karvounis opposes the intellectual and social elites, Politis supported them, seeing himself as part of the elite that stood apart from the masses.

Politis felt stifled by the contemporary materialistic cowardice and sought to distinguish himself from the masses. He urges the youth to resist the materialistic drive for economic advancement and instead listens to their souls to become “musical people [not just referring to artists] in order to elevate their inner self”. He views society as antispiritual, lacking interiority and imagination, and strongly believes that the revolution of the spirit and soul will come just as the material revolution did.

<sup>87</sup> Fotos Politis, “Θεατρική Κρίσις,” *Πρωΐα*, 20 May 1931.

<sup>88</sup> Nikos Karvounis, “Ἡ Δύσις του Ατόμου,” *Πρωΐα*, 11 January 1932.

<sup>89</sup> Nikos Karvounis, “Ατομον ή Σύνολον,” *Πρωΐα*, 8 August 1932.

<sup>90</sup> Fotos Politis, “Ο Καραγκιόζης: Το κοινό και ο θεατρικός του Ρυθμός,” *Πρωΐα*, 15 July 1931.

<sup>91</sup> Politis, “Ρεαλισμός και εσωτερικότης.”

Karvounis also refers to the idealistic musicality of individuals, in a column criticising the elitist stance of intellectuals: "If this musicality, this soulfulness can be maintained as long as the Mind is awakened into action, then human thought will never risk becoming 'mere intellectualism' – one of the saddest characteristics of the decadent over-intellectual culture of the West."<sup>92</sup>

Politis' anticommunist stance remains consistent throughout his intellectual journey: "Communism, as we know it today, is a tyrannical dictatorship." His trust in liberal institutions is evident in all his writings, as he asserts: "Respect for the state is essential for the social individual to live peacefully and freely. The State, as a concept, is an expression of the citizens' self-respect, as it embodies the ethics of self-discipline." Finally, he maintains that "to respect a leader, a king, and to grant him superhuman charisma and power means to honour the concept of the state, and consequently, to respect oneself."<sup>93</sup>

Politis concludes 1931 with an article titled "The Symbolism of the Divine Infant" where, on the occasion of Christ's birth, he addresses the individual's need for myths, symbols and miracles, while attacking rationalism once again. He reintroduces the issue of returning to ancient traditions, old symbols and old beliefs, observing that, in his time, "humanity has reached a point in its existence where denial, like an unchecked storm, rages over the spiritual and moral life of individuals and societies, uprooting everything that once stood firm". He returns to the necessity of the Divine: "Christ lives within us in two forms, as a child and as a hero", concluding that in "this critical turning point of humanity, where the colourless, dry rhythm of social life threatens to narcotise the spirit, revolution becomes inevitable".<sup>94</sup>

During this period, alongside Bastias, Ioannis Gryparis and Pavlos Nirvanas, Politis defended the National Theatre against attacks by playwrights, journalists and critics from various ideological backgrounds, who, despite their differences, were united in their opposition to the institution and, specifically, Politis himself.<sup>95</sup> Since the idea of establishing a National Theatre had originated with Georgios Papandreou, education minister in Venizelos' government, a heated controversy erupted between the pro- and anti-Venizelist press. One of the fiercest opponents of the National Theatre was Georgios A. Vlachos, publisher of *Καθημερινή*, who dedicated libelous articles targeting the theatre's

<sup>92</sup> Nikos Karvounis, "Τα Κορακίστικα της Διανοήσεως," *Πρωΐα*, 4 January 1932.

<sup>93</sup> Fotos Politis, "Το αίσθημα του σεβασμού," *Πρωΐα*, 9 December 1931.

<sup>94</sup> Fotos Politis, "Ο συμβολισμός του θείου βρέφους," *Πρωΐα*, 22 December 1931.

<sup>95</sup> Gregorios Xenopoulos (Faidon), "Η εκστρατεία εναντίον του Εθνικού Θεάτρου," *Νέα Εστία*, 1–15 December 1932, 1265–1266.



board members, referring to Politis as “the negation of everything”.<sup>96</sup> Politis responded: “A person without negation is like life without pulse ... where there is no negative disposition, routine dominates and culture fades away.”<sup>97</sup> At the beginning of the new year, Politis reflects and optimistically predicts that as long as “the world, the peoples, the individuals continue to provide evidence of intense moral life, there is no reason for us to cross the threshold of the new year sullenly”. Politis’ moral reflection is not a vague idea about the common good but a normative political discourse containing transcendental concerns. “Those who are captivated solely by the material aspect of events and cultivate pessimism, contribute, perhaps unknowingly, to the delay of positive solutions.”<sup>98</sup> He is optimistic about the future because he believes that people provided proof of moral life, and the positive solutions and social changes he anticipates would come, despite the efforts of materialists to impose their values. A structural element of Politis’ historical thinking is evolutionism, the belief that change would come organically and gradually, not through revolutionary processes, but through moral and psychological development.

For this article, Politis once again faced harsh criticism from *Νέοι Πρωτοπόροι*<sup>99</sup> on account of his staunch anticommunism, which he expresses consistently across many of his writings.

The Scythians, or to put it more ... correctly, the Bolsheviks, don’t seem to have stopped at their noses. Who would have taken them seriously, really, if they hadn’t given a “religious” content to their revolution, if their social system wasn’t an “ideology”? ... The Russian, who crushes his individuality under the Five-Year Plan to open a new era for humanity with “common labour, common goods, and freedom”, is entirely a “religious” type of person.<sup>100</sup>

*Νέοι Πρωτοπόροι*, which regarded Politis as a representative of conservative-reactionary intellectualism, dismissed him during his lifetime. However, its obituary of him acknowledges his undeniable intellectual and artistic abilities.

In the theatre, his impact was far more significant. He endowed the Greek stage with modern technical mechanics, created his own method for staging a play – and in this field, his capabilities were rich ... Fotos Politis stood as a characteristic intellectual representative

<sup>96</sup> Giorgos Vlachos, “Το Θέατρον Α΄ και Β΄,” *Η Καθημερινή*, 22–23 January 1931.

<sup>97</sup> Fotos Politis, “Άρνηση και αντίδραση,” *Πρωΐα*, 4 November 1931.

<sup>98</sup> Fotos Politis, “Στο κατώφλι του νέου χρόνου: Υλικά γεγονότα και ηθική αντοχή,” *Πρωΐα*, 1 January 1932.

<sup>99</sup> “Το παραμληγτό του κόσμου που πεθαίνει,” *Νέοι Πρωτοπόροι*, no. 3 (February 1932): 117.

<sup>100</sup> Fotos Politis, “Λυτρωτικά πικρόγελα,” *Πρωΐα*, 16 January 1932.

of the bourgeois regime in our country, which sought ideological renewal through a strange combination of ancient ... recipes from Kant, Carlyle, the German commentators on Shakespeare, and a poorly digested perception of the ancient tragedians.<sup>101</sup>

Through the column “The Ramblings of a Dying World”, it frequently criticised Politis’ feuilletons, as well as those of Giorgos Theotokas, Dimaras, Stratis Myrivilis and many others, whom it classified as part of the reactionary intelligentsia.

Writing in *Néoi Πρωτοπόροι* on the topic of the “Intellectual Figures of Reaction”, Glinos notably mentions that

the bourgeois press has expanded its reactionary activities on social issues ... They provoke and support all the repressive measures taken by the government against the enlightening movement and attempt through their feuilletons, like those of Melas<sup>102</sup> and Politis, to “nullify” revolutionary ideology and restore the demolished values of bourgeois civilisation.<sup>103</sup>

Bastias responded by publishing a feuilleton titled “Lands and Seas”, where Politis claims that Bastias highlighted “a general moral illness of the modern Greek, ... the fear of the Greek of falling behind what his superficial mind imagines from time to time as ‘progress’ and ‘revolution’. And facing the crowd of ‘progressive’ modern Greeks, he decided to praise ‘reaction’.” Defending his position against both Bastias and himself being labelled as reactionaries, Politis concludes that “negation and reaction require strict self-discipline and self-control”.<sup>104</sup>

<sup>101</sup> “Fotos Politis,” *Néoi Πρωτοπόροι*, no. 1 (January 1935): 35–36.

<sup>102</sup> Glinos is referring to Spiros Melas (Fortunio), who initially participated in the Sociological Society, along with Dimitris Chatzopoulos (Boem) and later supported Alexandros Papanastasiou, but then became one of the strongest supporters of the Metaxas dictatorship, Franco and, eventually, Nazism. During the interwar period, he turned toward nationalism and the Hellenocentrism of Periklis Giannopoulos, aligning himself with Giorgos Theotokas, Panagiotis Kanellopoulos, Konstantinos Tsatsos and other conservatives, advocating authoritarian solutions. Over time, he changed many positions and ideologies, eventually requesting to become a member of the EAM literary group during the occupation. Theotokas claimed that Melas was driven by “the passion of the man who is drawn to power. To whatever power exists at the time.” Melas was a controversial figure depending on the historical period in which his work was examined, but he was one of the most prolific Greek writers, engaged in nearly all forms of writing, such as poetry, short stories, novels, chronicles, criticism, essays, biographical novels, travel literature and theatre. Glinos, “Πνευματικές μορφές της αντίδρασης.”

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Politis, “Άρνηση και αντίδραση.”

Politis faced a similar reception from *Νομιά*, where he was ironically labelled as the “wisest scholar”, an overcritical expert on metaphysical criticism, who managed to turn every critique into a reactionary sermon, into the formal establishment of social misery and the wretchedness of the poor.<sup>105</sup>

An admirer of the authoritarian regimes of the Renaissance, as he openly declares, Politis equates communism with fascism, stating that “Sovietism and fascism originate from the same source” and concludes that “parliamentarianism has become a farce”.<sup>106</sup> Although he claims to maintain equal distance from both communism and fascism, on several occasions he clearly sides with fascism, stating that it “revitalises existing moral values, bases itself on ethnism, Christian teaching – Hitler clearly declares this in his programme – believes in the absolute laws of the spirit ... believes in the superhuman nature of the idea ... which allows man to overcome time and dominate matter”.<sup>107</sup> Three years later, he does not hesitate to support the “reformer” Engelbert Dollfuss. In his article “Austrian Fascism”, he concludes that “the bankruptcy of the bourgeois regime is final and irrevocable”. Analysing Dollfuss’ programme, he recognises that “Austrian fascism is interested in the radical overturning of Marxist ideology, which is outdated, and in liberation from the ideology of class struggle”.<sup>108</sup>

In early 1932, Karvounis welcomes the new year with a lyrical short story, filled with nostalgia for Sulina, the place of his childhood, and captured the metaphysical anxieties that still haunt him. “Over there, in the lands of the marsh, where life has no breadth, the soul of man deepens, deepens, and there is room for all the unspoken and the secrets.”<sup>109</sup>

Bastias published his “New Year’s Predictions” under the title “A Wizard Predicts a Grim 1932 if Ministers and Party Leaders do not Undergo Phrenological and Palm Readings – In the Lair of a Palmist”. He uses this metaphysical inquiry to project his anti-Venizelism and anticommunism. Maintaining appearances, he conveys his views through the voice of a palmist, whom he bids farewell “completely happy, for on this first day of the year I am giving my readers the way to solve the Greek problem, even if it is through

<sup>105</sup> “Φιλολογική και καλλιτεχνική Ζωή,” *Ο Νομιάς*, no. 794 (June 1932): 141.

<sup>106</sup> Fotos Politis, “Το αίτημα της δικτατορίας,” *Πρωΐα*, 24 June 1932.

<sup>107</sup> Fotos Politis, “Δεξιοί και αριστεροί,” *Πρωΐα*, 17 March 1933.

<sup>108</sup> Fotos Politis, “Αυστριακός Φασισμός,” *Πρωΐα*, 16 February 1934.

<sup>109</sup> “The marsh is an entire world for those living on the banks of the Danube. To the right and left of the majestic river, in the plains it waters, its overflowing waters form a shallow, endless lagoon covered with thick, tall reeds – the ‘kamsia’.” Nikos Karvounis, “Από το παραμύθι της ζωής: Το μυστικό του Πετρούσκα,” *Πρωΐα*, 1 January 1932, 8.

palmystry".<sup>110</sup> The legitimization of metaphysics in a large part of Greek society is still evident, and Bastias uses these tendencies to project his liberal ideological-political views, which would later align with those of Metaxas, under whose regime he would serve as General Director of Letters and Fine Arts.

The crisis experienced by both Greece and the wider world during the interwar period is vividly reflected in Karvounis' 1932 feuilletons. The intensification of social problems, rising unemployment, the ineffectiveness of the League of Nations and the interventionist policies of states all shaped his public discourse, shifting his thoughts from metaphysical concerns towards more realistic directions. The painful experience of World War I and the resulting social crisis lead him to sense that the world is collapsing and that there is an urgent need to imagine a new one, freed from the pathologies of the modern worldview. Karvounis feels that he is on the threshold of a new world, one freed from modernity's goal of continuous material progress, a world that would have a collective, and not an individualistic, character.

In January, he engaged with the international conferences regarding Germany's war reparations, which he believed should be cancelled as they were driving nations to destructive poverty. On the issue of disarmament, he argues that it was impossible for states to disarm because, on the one hand, they fostered fear in neighbouring countries, leading to continuous armament and, on the other, the current socio-economic systems has constructed the idea of the modern nation through nationalism, chauvinism and imperialism, making militarism a structural necessity.

Neither racial unity, linguistic unity nor religious unity are the factors of national unity ... Every such differentiation of human groups – racial or national (which are not at all the same) – has value not as an expression of separation of one human group from another but, on the contrary, as an opportunity to enrich in kind and quality the individual human contribution to the general evolution of humanity. Nationalisms are useful when they serve the cooperation of all human groups that have their own way of development, expression and manifestation – races or nations – their distinction is humanly legitimate. When it serves only to divide the people of the earth ... then it is a deadly crime against humanity.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Kostis Bastias, "Πρωτοχρονιάτικοι χρησμοί: Ένας Μάγος προβλέπει δυσάρεστον το 1932 αν οι υπουργοί και οι αρχηγοί κομμάτων δεν εξετασθούν φρενολογικώς και χειρομαντικώς: Εις το άντρον ενός χειρολόγου," *Πρωΐα*, 1 January 1932.

<sup>111</sup> Karvounis, "Έθνη και ανθρωπότης."

He opposes the actions of the League of Nations, which he considers ineffective, saying that it “belongs to states, not peoples”, citing Japan’s invasion of Manchuria and its ambitions in Mongolia. Karvounis calls for cooperation among states because he observes all countries turning inward, trying to salvage their own national interests — economic stability, political control or territorial integrity — while ignoring the broader international crisis and the need for collective solutions. On the other hand, Politis considers that the disarmament conferences and the proposals for global peace were “signs of the psychological fatigue of nations” and the absence of hegemonic personalities and peoples. He sees Europe’s embrace of “modernisms” and attraction to Eastern religions as indicative of a deeper cultural exhaustion – what he interprets as a loss of *élan vital*. Eight years before the outbreak of World War II, he writes: “The victors still tremble before the defeated” and “no European government today believes that mobilisation for war purposes is possible”.<sup>112</sup>

By the end of 1932, as he begins to adopt the Marxist viewpoint, Karvounis sharply criticises philanthropy as a social phenomenon created by economic and ideological motives. “The organisation of exploitation became an attractive diptych: on the one hand, human misery is created; on the other, the means of philanthropic action are organised.” He continues that “every effort must be made to abolish philanthropy so that there is no need for charity and philanthropists. How? By decisively and permanently eliminating the inequality that creates those in need of charity.”<sup>113</sup> Writing in *Νέοι Πρωτοπόροι* in 1933, he describes philanthropy as “an invention of the bourgeois ruling class, a purely capitalist invention”,<sup>114</sup> a position that directly contradicts one of the core principles of his earlier Masonic affiliation.

Karvounis engages extensively with intellectuals, so much so that Panos Politis, in his collection of Karvounis’ essays, dedicates a chapter to him. As Giorgos Chatzinis notes in a review in *Νέα Εστία*, “the quintessential intellectual attacks with unusual ferocity the intellectuals, ‘these spiritual cripples’, whom he also regards as a kind of harmful intruder in the grand carnival of life”.<sup>115</sup> Karvounis believes that many intellectuals operated in an overly individualistic and egocentric manner, “absorbed egocentrically by themselves, they exhibit highly selfish

<sup>112</sup> Fotos Politis, “Αναγκαστική ειρηνοφιλία,” *Πρωΐα*, 17 December 1931.

<sup>113</sup> Nikos Karvounis, “Η Φενάκη της Φιλανθρωπίας,” *Πρωΐα*, 28 November 1932.

<sup>114</sup> Nikos Karvounis, “Φιλανθρωπία-Αλληλεγγύη,” *Νέοι Πρωτοπόροι*, no. 1 (January 1933): 3–4.

<sup>115</sup> Giorgos Chatzinis, “Νίκου Καρβούνη: Έκλογη από το έργο του,” *Νέα Εστία*, 15 February 1961, 275.

expressions of an overgrown individualism".<sup>116</sup> They seek to distinguish themselves from the anonymous masses, "perched atop a pile of books and encyclopaedias, climbing a precarious scaffolding of philosophical gleanings, we believe we are at the summit of an Olympus, which allows us to mock a blind humanity floundering below."<sup>117</sup> But "the masses, towards whom they stand egotistically opposed, are for them the 'clientele', destined to consume their 'intellectual' production".<sup>118</sup> Bourgeois intellectuals, through institutional positions, align themselves with state policies, promote their individual interests, ignore the needs of the whole and end up becoming spiritual exploiters of the masses. But true thinkers should merge their individual with the collective consciousness and become leaders of great revolutions. Today, "intellectualism is simply an unworthy spiritual parasitism that seeks to sustain itself at the expense of the human whole," he writes.<sup>119</sup> In his opinion, intellectuals should not function as spiritual leaders but as fighters for the masses because "without revolution, nothing has changed radically",<sup>120</sup> criticising Stefan Zweig (1881–1942) and Jean-Richard Bloch (1884–1947) for their passive stance towards the rise of fascism in Europe.

In a discussion with Solon Makris, a law student, during one of their hiking expeditions, Karvounis remarks:

Intellectuals must abandon blind egocentrism, mercantile egoism and sterile narcissism and re-enter the whole. Rather than losing themselves in it, as they fear, they will, on the contrary, restore their individuality's creative potential because they will draw directly from the rich juices of life ... True thinkers stand at the forefront of change not because they believe themselves "above" others or spiritual leaders "by divine right", but because they have succeeded in liberating their individualism by merging it with the collective consciousness ... Today's intellectualism is an unworthy and unacceptable parasitism that is sustained at the expense of the human whole.<sup>121</sup>

He does not condemn intellectualism wholesale, nor does he reject the contributions of great intellectual figures to humanity. While he often references the contributions of significant thinkers to the spiritual evolution of individuals, he emphasises the importance of a dialectical relationship between the individual and the whole for the advancement of society. He refers to Goethe and

<sup>116</sup> Nikos Karvounis, "Η κρίσις και οι 'διανοούμενοι'," *Πρωΐα*, 27 June 1932.

<sup>117</sup> Karvounis, "Ψυχική τοπογραφία."

<sup>118</sup> Karvounis, "Η κρίσις και οι 'διανοούμενοι'."

<sup>119</sup> Nikos Karvounis, "Πνευματικός παρασιτισμός," *Πρωΐα*, 4 July 1932.

<sup>120</sup> Karvounis, "Η άλλη χρεωκοπία."

<sup>121</sup> Makris, "Νίκος Καρβούνης: Γνωριμία μ' έναν άνθρωπο."

Shakespeare “as if they each, in their own way, bravely and fearlessly expressed the multifaceted, eternal, universal Life ... consciously attuned to the rhythm of Life, not as individuals, but as humanity”.<sup>122</sup> For Karvounis, great creators succeed in courageously immersing themselves into the greater human whole, not as individuals, but as part of the collective.

In April 1932, after he failed to secure new loans and was unable to service the foreign debt, Venizelos devalued the drachma, declared a moratorium and restricted imports. These policies deepened social insecurity and intensified Karvounis’ political doubts. To overcome the social, economic and political deadlocks, he argues that people must realise that to create the New World, they must liberate themselves from the existing political-economic system that exploits labour, creates unemployment, wars, imperialism and colonialism.

Another social problem that emerged after the 1929 crisis was unemployment. Karvounis addresses this issue repeatedly in his writings, arguing that unemployment, especially among young people, deprives them of their right to life.

Capitalism is responsible for the armies of the unemployed, created by the reduced demand for products, which results in a decline in job positions. The glorification of labour by bourgeois regimes, whose sole purpose is the accumulation of wealth by the few, leads to the exploitation of workers by capitalists and deprives society of the right to a dignified life.<sup>123</sup>

He is especially concerned with young people from lower middle-class and rural backgrounds, who, despite their efforts to study, end up unemployed, forming a “spiritual proletariat” with no future. Whether they graduate from university or leave school earlier, they face unemployment in the competitive urban society. “The problem of life looms before them as the city fills with crowds of people, for whom life is a true condemnation. Young people who wither away every day, waiting for an opportunity for subsistence work.”<sup>124</sup> At the same time, he notes the rise in urban migration, which was beginning to swell the population of the capital.

Karvounis is convinced that the bourgeois worldview was collapsing, a conviction he reiterates in every article throughout 1932. He attributes the causes of this decline to capitalist development, which bases its prosperity on machinery, while capitalists are exclusively concerned with their profits, leaving the working class to struggle merely for survival. He is not opposed

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<sup>122</sup> Karvounis, “Νέους Ρυθμούς.”

<sup>123</sup> Nikos Karvounis, “Που κατάντησε η αποθέωσις της εργασίας,” *Πρωΐα*, 14 November 1932.

<sup>124</sup> Nikos Karvounis, “Και η πόλις χωρίς τουρισμόν,” *Πρωΐα*, 5 September 1932.



to progress and acknowledges the benefits of industrial development, but he believes that these should be linked to industrialisation and used for the benefit of all: "If machines cease to belong to trusts, capitalist enterprises and private individuals, and become the property of the whole, the solution follows automatically." Referring to the Soviet model, where technology is being incorporated into the political programme through the five-year plans, resulting in unprecedented growth compared to the Western economies sinking into recession, he proposes that "the political-economic system be radically transformed," so that the production and distribution of material goods be managed by representatives of the whole, preventing profits from accumulating in the hands of a few.<sup>125</sup>

Karvounis opposes proposals from some groups advocating the destruction of machines to combat unemployment and overproduction, stating that machines are essential for human prosperity and represent a sign of humanity's evolution. "The machines are not at fault; rather, it is the fact that they do not belong to the whole," he states. "Should modern man, then, abandon his highest quality – the ability to use his mind to uncover the secrets of Nature and harness its forces to serve his needs, to advance his prosperity?"<sup>126</sup>

The debate over the dominance of mechanisation had already brought Karvounis and Politis into opposition. While both supported technological progress, they advocated different approaches to how technological advancement should be made accessible to different social groups. Their ideological split had become definitive, as reflected in subsequent articles in which their intellectual conflict grew increasingly pronounced.

The different role they attribute to labour is reflected in the theoretical perspective each adopted. Politis believes that the outdated concept of "homo economicus" is concerned only with production and consumption, not with material poverty but with moral poverty. When asked about the future course of society, he responds, "let each person look to liberate themselves, and that is the best guarantee of society's welfare", while pondering the fate of the individual in his day: "With socialism – and especially with communism – a system of social life is certainly being outlined (communism knows the future inside out), a system that ensures the security of the masses; a societal framework with specific goals and aspirations is being drawn. But how does individualism manifest in social reality?"<sup>127</sup>

<sup>125</sup> Nikos Karvounis, "Ο άνθρωπος και η μηχανή," *Πρωΐα*, 1 February 1932.

<sup>126</sup> Nikos Karvounis, "Η χαρά της Δημιουργίας," *Πρωΐα*, 1 August 1932.

<sup>127</sup> Fotis Politis, "Ο οικονομικός άνθρωπος," *Πρωΐα*, 5 August 1932.

In contrast, Karvounis is concerned with labour as a source of human prosperity, not merely as a means of survival that strips individuals of their capacity for thought and action. He highlights the contradiction of capitalism, which theoretically glorifies labour while condemning workers to unemployment and hunger.<sup>128</sup>

Later, Politis hardened his stance on communism and aligned himself with the views of Konstantinos Tsatsos (1899–1987), who, alongside Panagiotis Kanellopoulos, was a leading proponent of liberal anticommunist ideology. In an article “Freedom and Spirit”, Politis refers to a letter Tsatsos had sent him in recognition of his efforts and concern for the moral development of Greek youth. In the letter, Tsatsos notes that the most troubling feature of the era is the worship of the masses and the denial of freedom, adding that the struggle must be for ideocracy and against the pursuit of vulgar material happiness, represented by communists, whom he sees as unfree and bound to dogma.

By fighting the unfree, we are not merely fighting those who have elevated unfreedom to dogma, the “dialectical materialists” ... Historical materialism has made unfreedom a dogma, something that capitalism dared not do; and yet communism has created, in practice, an atmosphere for intellectual creation that is worse than any capitalist tyranny. For this reason, of the two regimes, which are both hostile to the intellectual, the worst and most dangerous is communism.<sup>129</sup>

Karvounis was now decisively distancing himself from his earlier ideological views, abandoning monarchy, bourgeois liberal parliamentarism and the search for metaphysical solutions. He had already begun collaborating with *Néoi Πρωτοπόροι* and Glinos, seeing in communist Russia the revolutionary embodiment of his hopes and visions for transforming the world. Convinced that the multitude of problems that had emerged after World War I could not be resolved within the existing frameworks, he saw in the October Revolution a model for radical change – believing that only a revolutionary process could break through the deadlocks of his time. He wrote: The millions of farmers whose sweat from their sunburnt bodies fertilises the land, the millions of workers who build, who construct ships, who navigate the seas ... who set in motion the machines made by other humans, and who will lighten human toil when they multiply and are given to the masses, not to their exploiters.<sup>130</sup>

<sup>128</sup> Karvounis, “Που κατάντησε η αποθέωσις της εργασίας.”

<sup>129</sup> Fotos Politis, “Ελευθερία και πνεύμα,” *Πρωΐα*, 9 September 1932.

<sup>130</sup> Nikos Karvounis, “Είδωλα και πραγματικότητα,” *Πρωΐα*, 26 June 1932.

His references to the Soviet Union's five-year plans are clear. Presenting the Soviet Union's economic development as driven by class cooperation, which maximised production for the benefit of all, he attempts to subtly convey the message of historical materialism. Glinos, too, ardently supports the five-year plans, believing that:

the Soviet Union is today a vast labour camp, a fiery furnace of creation, where without coercion, with wholehearted internal participation and perseverance, but also with passion, fire and enthusiasm, millions of workers are building a new world. And the material level of life for this entire mass is gradually but steadily rising.<sup>131</sup>

For Karvounis, capitalism can no longer be equated with communism; the concept of collectivism has taken on a positive connotation, and he adopts terms such as imperialism, militarism and nationalism to describe the "current rotten social, economic, and political system".

In his critique of the old bourgeois world and outdated aesthetic values, Karvounis embraces the demand for modernism and praises the new housing trends emerging in Athens. The middle-class apartment buildings constructed to address the housing problem caused by the influx of refugees and urbanisation were facing harsh criticism. Ilias Iliou wrote that they were seen as "a novelty and, moreover, incompatible with the individualism of the Greek, whose ideal is the single-family home".<sup>132</sup>

Five years before Iliou wrote in defence of the new architectural trends and challenged their critics, Karvounis speaks positively about the modernist architecture that was beginning to appear.

Clean-lined symmetrical masses, quiet surfaces, architectural ensembles designed for the needs of collective life, collective work, are beginning to appear here and there. Cubes, calm geometric volumes of apartment buildings, factories, buildings of public use, without the unbearable and degrading rhetoric of the unnecessary, the "elegant", the false, the useless.<sup>133</sup>

According to Karvounis, the simplicity that characterised these new buildings, free from the pretentiousness of neoclassicism, shows greater concern for the individual and society as a whole.

He was criticised for these views and accused of presenting aesthetic poverty, as his preferences did not contain elements of a healthy and moral aesthetic concept. His detractors charged him with

<sup>131</sup> Dimitris Glinos, *Εκλεκτές σελίδες*, vol. 4, ed. Loukas Axelos (Athens: Stochastis, 1975).

<sup>132</sup> Ilias Iliou, "Κουτιών εγκώμιο," *Νεοελληνικά Γράμματα*, 17 July 1937.

<sup>133</sup> Karvounis, "Νέους ρυθμούς."

rejecting tradition, the institutionalisation of inspiration, the formulas and rules in art, while admiring the simple aesthetic approaches applied by architectural art in a modern apartment building. In other words, you embrace the idea of the modern aesthetic spirit while simultaneously rejecting its cultivators, mistreating them, and morally equating them with the “right-wingers”.<sup>134</sup>

“Art and Academicism” was Karvounis’ final feuilleton published in *Πρωΐα* during the interwar period. Through these writings, he not only articulated public discourse but also acted as a representative and a producer of ideology and new cultural forms. His growing influence on public affairs became evident, as did the ways in which he shaped the social and political landscape of the era. His gradual ideological transition, marked by a state of liminality, became particularly apparent during that transitional period, as he remained suspended between past convictions and a new, not yet fully formed, ideological stance.

Ultimately, through his articles Nikos Karvounis served as a conduit for ideas and currents in the public sphere. His writings, along with his fertile exchange of ideas with Fotos Politis, reflect his role as an active citizen in an increasingly interconnected world, one who used all available means to resist the spread of Nazism across Europe.

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<sup>134</sup> Nikos Karvounis, “Τέχνη και ακαδημαϊσμός,” *Πρωΐα*, 9 January 1933.

