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The KKE's Experience Since the Early 1990s¹

THE 90TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FOUNDING OF THE KKE: DRAWING CONCLUSIONS FROM ITS HISTORY

As you may perhaps know, in 2008 the KKE is celebrating the 90th anniversary of its life and action in Greece and internationally as an integral part of the international communist and anti-imperialist movement. We are organising events all over the country. We want this anniversary to give impetus to the Party's ideological and theoretical maturation, to improve its ability to fuse with the popular masses and to exert a vanguard influence on the movement, on developments, on constructive processes, on radical regroupings, and on changing the correlation of forces. It will be a year of taking more responsibility towards our country's working class and its people, as well as a year of making a greater contribution to the movement in Europe, the Balkans, the Middle East and internationally. It will be a year of increased demands from ourselves on the personal and collective level alike.

Since the 1980s, in implementation of a Party decision, we have been studying the history of our party. We have already published the first volume of the Party history, covering the period up to 1949, when the heroic three-year struggle of the Democratic Army ended, and now we are in the process of drafting the second volume of the history from 1949 to 1974. At the same time, for years now, we have at intervals been publishing the Party's OFFICIAL TEXTS that contain decisions by party organs and other documents, which give historians and other interested parties an opportunity to utilise them. Since mid-2007, in the house of Harilaos Florakis, which he donated to the Party, A LIBRARY AND HISTORICAL ARCHIVE IN DIGITAL FORM has been made set up and is constantly being enriched. This archive gives young people, academics and students of the history of the Party and the movement access to historical records.

In every issue of *Kommunistiki Epitheorisi* (Communist Review), the theoretical organ of the CC, historical party documents unknown to the general public are published as well as special issues.

¹ Speech by Aleka Papariga at the Rosa Luxembourg Conference, Berlin, 12 January 2008.

We believe that it is very important, after some time has elapsed, for a communist party to study its history and major historical events, and to examine them, taking into account the specific historical conditions under which they occurred but also subsequent experience, which provides insights not available at the time these events took place. Moreover, historical trends and their effects can be seen more clearly over a much longer period of time, which is why history exists as a discipline.

In our opinion, deeper study is also a central issue when a self-critical examination is required of party action, from the viewpoint of party strategy, but also in terms of its participation and stance in the international communist movement.

THE PARTY'S EXPERIENCE AND THE SHAPING OF ITS STRATEGY FROM 1989-91 TO THE PRESENT

In my speech today, I believe it will be useful to talk about the Party's experience, its choices, and the strategy it has charted and enriched from 1991 to the present. This period is characterised by the beginning of the process by which capitalism returned to the USSR and to the socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe, in conjunction with the contemporary strategy devised by imperialism under the banner of so-called globalisation.

On this occasion, we would like to emphasise that the strategy of imperialism was not developed as a result of any changes in the correlation of forces early in the 1990s; it was chiefly the result of its own internal needs, contradictions and conflicts. Its dissemination was simply facilitated by encountering less resistance than in the past. Certainly repelling and overthrowing the imperialist strategy for the benefit of the peoples and of socialism is a matter of reversing the correlation of forces on the national level, in one country, in a group of countries, on the international level.

The KKE went through its own internal crisis early in the 1990s, during which our country's bourgeois forces intervened actively. They openly supported that group of party cadres, particularly the members of the CC, whose aim was to dissolve the KKE and to merge it in a leftist form of collaboration that celebrated the defeat of the forces of socialism. Then it appeared possible that, by marginalising or dissolving the KKE, the view that socialism is utopian would prevail, and therefore that the main and basic issue was to humanise capitalism. It is not accidental that ever since then, we in Greece frequently hear about totalitarian capitalism, savage capitalism, extreme capitalism, and capitalism that discredits itself through its own barbarity. There is no greater utopia than going back to the period of the dawn of capitalism, to the period of the French Enlightenment and Romanticism, which became outdated a long time ago owing to the evolution of history. Nor of course can social-democratic prescriptions of a Keynesian or neo-Keynesian type provide solutions to the people's critical problems, to militarization and the imperialist war. Today the laws and trends inherent in

the capitalist mode of production cannot possibly be ignored. The solution can be found by going forward to socialism, which must today be enriched with the experience of building socialism in the 20th century, with the prerequisite of its objective scientific evaluation and critical review, wherever required.

The schism that appeared in the party was nothing more than a confrontation between right opportunism and the Party forces that, irrespective of international developments, continued to believe in the necessity of the revolutionary struggle for socialism and communism.

In 1991 the KKE was obliged to take a stand against unbridled anticommunism, against a series of attacks on it that bore some features of political intrigue. It was obliged, under conditions of retreat and the reduction of its forces, to stand on its own, to respond without delay to the need to organise resistance by the labour and popular movement to the first wave of privatisations, to the revocation of gains that had begun with the New Democracy government, and to the war that broke out in the Balkans.

These were conditions under which the Greek social democracy party PASOK was going through a phase of full aggressive adjustment to the contemporary imperialist world order. Greek social democracy then felt completely free of the anti-imperialist and anti-monopoly slogans it had used, especially during the 1970s, and that had survived to some degree in later years, without of course being reflected in its practice as government.

After the developments of 1989-91, we were fully aware that the KKE would not be able to continue its action without at the same time answering the great question that naturally arose as to whether “perhaps the victory of the counter-revolution and the return of capitalism placed the capability and realistic prospect of the passage from capitalism to socialism into dispute”. We were obliged to reply as to whether the return of capitalism was necessary, or whether it was part of the process of building socialism, and to verify what were the areas of the adverse change, and how they were hatched.

We were obliged to rebut theories that grew strong and spread, saying that capitalism could be transformed into socialism without the basic laws of the socialist revolution applying.

We became aware that replies could not be given by quoting selected excerpts from the works of classical authors, but only by studying the building of socialism in a concrete, objective way. We did not shift responsibilities to others, nor did we wash our hands of it, replying that it wasn't our fault, because we were not a party in power.

At the same time we had to study developments in Greek, European and international capitalism more profoundly, in order to work out the Party's new Programme, without which we could not have dealt with the daily problems.

Thus we arrived at 1996, when our 15th Congress was held as scheduled, a difficult course of regrouping the Party ideologically, politically and organisationally under the new conditions. We had to combine our action

around the sharpened problems of the people in the labour movement and more generally, with beginning theoretical study and organising the ideological counter-attack.

We did not agree with the views according to which the Party's strategy is determined and changed by the correlation of forces, or that the policy of alliances is shaped with an eye to the ballot box. An alliance must strengthen the labour and popular movement, must steel it, emancipate it, base it on social conflicts and interests, and serve strategy.

Irrespective of the deficiencies and hardships we were going through, we regard the period between 1991 and 1996 as somehow decisive in the Party's further course. We worked out our new Programme, the framework linking the goals of struggle for the movement, the rallying of forces into the basic fronts of struggle, and the alliance. We held a nationwide party conference that drew the first conclusions regarding the reasons for the restoration of capitalism. At this period we laid the foundations for passing from the stage of retreat and defence, to the counterattack, to improving our positions in the movement, and on the political field.

At this time, the class and political adversary adjusted its tactics towards the Party. It recognised that it had failed to marginalize the KKE, to dissolve it, and to isolate it from the people. It continued to hit the party openly, while combining this with sneakier indirect blows and throwing its weight in support of every inroad, preferably opportunistic, in order to prevent the radicalisation of people's minds.

It was proved that, what are annoying about the KKE are not its title or the hammer and sickle, but mainly its strategic orientation, its revolutionary strategy, and its revolutionary optimism.

We have created a solid foundation that will allow us, in the years to come, to play an even more active and effective role in the labour movement, and in positive processes and realignments.

Every year we improve our intervention and role in the mass movement. Today, using modern techniques, we have embraced a much wider range of problems in the realms of labour, housing and leisure time, on economic, social, cultural and democratic issues, on problems of the environment, and on issues related to migrants. We fight against racist and xenophobic views, against nationalism and chauvinism. In addition, our local organisations have partially succeeded in developing a more comprehensive programme of intervention across the full spectrum of problems, taking into account regional and local interventions around the axis of the fourth Community Support Framework and the programme of local investments in joint ventures with private individuals. Demands for the scientific study of the issues and a documented counter-proposal for struggle are much greater today. They are implemented by sections of the CC and the Centre of Marxist Studies.

Under present conditions, there are two main platforms on which we are building and further strengthening the party: our action among the working class and among young people, who today have become the particular target

of aggression and ideological disorientation that has been directed especially towards women and economic and political migrants.

The progress of the KKE is not a matter of making an impression: it is a matter of infrastructure and prospects, far from any petty-bourgeois impatience and any spirit of smugness.

HOW WE DEAL WITH DIFFICULTIES OF A SUBJECTIVE AND OBJECTIVE NATURE

We have difficulties adjusting to modern demands due to the inexperience that burdens some of the young cadres who were correctly promoted, but also to the fact that we older comrades still bear the weight of viewpoints and experiences from previous stages, which developments have now rendered out of date.

We had to deal with the modern choices of imperialism and indeed at a time, after the Treaty of Maastricht, when Greece was being ever more deeply assimilated into the EU.

Greek governments, both ND and PASOK, systematically promoted the capitalist restructuring package by means of de-nationalisation, upsetting labour relations, and fostering monopoly penetration into new sectors in which it did not have such a strong presence in the past. Old experienced members of the working class have become unemployed or pensioners. Traditional industrial sectors that once played a role in the growth of the movement are declining, while new forms of labour relations have been introduced, together with new sectors and new professions that are staffed by young workers and employees without trade union experience. There have been developments in the social and class structure. The KKE is obliged to act in new fields that demand fresh experience and new skills, as well as the correct utilisation of tried and tested previous experience under the new conditions.

Our Party was faced with the issue of giving priority to matters of party leadership, of the ability to include tactics in its strategy. Dissociating tactics from strategy is an ailment which, in our view, has struck at many communist parties, either as a result of ideological deviation or ideological and theoretical weakness, or under the pressure of persecutions, or when legal activity is banned.

It is an ailment that you need to keep your eye on constantly so that it does not affect you when you are preoccupied by current and timely issues. The main problem, however, was that the theoretical level of the party fell far short of demands. And this issue, in our view, is not solely a Greek phenomenon, or even just a contemporary one.

Our work is based on common action against the monopolies and imperialism and around the goals and demands of the struggle to meet the people's modern needs. This line of struggle can exert pressure, aims to prevent harsher anti-popular measures, and even wins a few temporary gains.

At the same time, this line of struggle helps create awareness of the necessity for struggle and alliance in order to resolve the problem of power.

THE POLITICAL PROPOSAL OF THE KKE

The line of rallying together and struggle that is proposed by the KKE takes into account that an alliance cannot be based on agreement over the issue of socialism. We do not require that there be agreement between us on our view of socialism, on how the passage to socialism will be accomplished, etc. We consider the basis for agreement to be the common interests of the anti-imperialist anti-monopoly social forces, i.e. the working class and the petty bourgeois strata of the city and countryside. On the other side of this line is assimilation into management of the system, defeat and retreat, and the sharpening of social, political and democratic problems.

The anti-imperialist anti-monopoly alliance that we are proposing aims at victory on the level of political power, at putting power in the hands of the people, who will create and organise the people's economy. Power to the people as governance, irrespective of its form, much less its content, is unrelated to centre-right and centre-left forms of collaboration. We are talking about class, not just party change at the level of power.

Its main features will be: the socialisation of the basic and centralised means of production, production cooperatives where centralisation has not been satisfactorily achieved, nationwide planning with sectoral and regional specialisation, labour and popular control, and the new institutions of the people's power; disengagement from international commitments and choices that hinder development by the people and for the people; Greece's withdrawal from imperialist campaigns and from participation in occupation forces. Central planning will include international cooperation based on mutual interest.

In the meantime, we certainly cannot postpone finding solutions to all problems until power is in the hands of the people under socialism. We are certainly convinced that the popular movement can have certain victories and successes in the daily struggle, but none of the major problems faced by the peoples today can be resolved by the political power of the monopolies and of capital more generally. Improving the correlation of forces can bring some relief, but it will be temporary and disputable unless there is an overthrow at the level of power.

EXPLORING THE BUILDING OF SOCIALISM IN THE 20TH CENTURY

We are likewise living at a time of discussions within the party regarding a new text about socialism that summarises the discussion that took place from 1995 on, and adds some new assessments and thoughts on issues related to the socialist economy and more specifically to socialist relations of production and the socialist political system, and to the role of the soviets in particular. We are treating the building of socialism in the 20th century as a single course

starting in 1917, with the revolution that generated the first socialist state in history. We are trying to see the problems that arose in building the society as no more than an incomplete stage in a process, the beginning of a communist society, not a self-sufficient system. We are focusing our attention on the new theoretical problems in particular that arose more urgently during the period when the building of socialism on its own foundation had been completed. These problems could not have been foreseen by either Marx or Engels, who focused their attention mainly on studying the capitalist system and on the historic necessity of communism, nor even Lenin, who shed light above all on the strategy of the socialist revolution and on that particular phase in which the shaping of the socialist foundation should begin, i.e. the transitional phase from capitalism to socialism.

This investigation obliged us once again to study the theory of scientific socialism and any practical expression it found or attempted to find in the course of building socialism. We concentrated systematically on historical material so that our conclusions would be based on actual events, and above all we tried to study all the official and significant discussions that took place in the course of building socialism. We endeavoured to study the various viewpoints that were expressed and the confrontation that took place, since there was no previous historical experience of building the new system from the ground up. After the internal discussion is finished, so that as many party members' opinions as possible can be heard, we will continue it in public, seeking especially opinions from all those who, irrespective of any criticism they may have, believe in the necessity and timeliness of socialism.

We are studying the issues of socialism, keeping our distance from both the spirit of easy nihilism and that of prettification and idealisation.

We defend the historic contribution and role of the socialism we knew, which cannot be erased, nor can the mistakes that were made, nor the deficiencies and deviations that occurred along the way and led to the reversal, to the counter-revolution.

The socialism we knew was not a parenthesis in the history of humankind. The bitterness and disillusionment precipitated by the developments of 1989-91 should not become either the cause or the excuse for ending the fight for socialism; and this applies not solely to communists, but also to the peoples themselves who can expect nothing from capitalism but suffering, wars, hunger, violence, crime, and misery. Whatever capitalism has to give, it gave a long time ago.

Our age remains an era of the passage from capitalism to socialism, the nature of the revolution is socialist; there is no intermediate social system between capitalism and socialism.

To recognise that one has lost a battle is necessary; but that is one thing, and it is something entirely different to give up the effort to draw conclusions, for only by drawing conclusions can one transform defeat into a factor contributing to a new victory.

For us, the cannons of the “Aurora” will be heard again, in one country, in many countries. What we are trying to do is to make our own contribution to the global struggle, to assume our responsibilities in our own country, which is where we are judged and where our main responsibility lies.

THE INTERNATIONALIST ACTION OF THE KKE

Throughout all these years, we never succumbed to the temptation of becoming dedicated exclusively to action at the national level. Since 1991, we have continued under the new conditions to develop bilateral and multilateral relations with more than 80-90 communist and workers’ parties, both older ones and new ones that have appeared. We have made new contacts with movements and action groups; we maintain contacts and have systematic relations with communist and anti-imperialist political forces on all continents, while participating actively in international organisations, in regional and international meetings. A large number of international meetings have been hosted in Greece.

Internationalist action today is more intricate and complex; it requires more work and time. On our part, drawing the necessary conclusions from the Party’s many years of positive experience, we aim for international relations that have substantial content and are characterised by dialogue and debate, without of course turning into interference in the internal affairs of other parties.

A large number of our visits to various countries are in the nature of work, i.e. to study developments in that country and the experience of other communist parties. We are especially interested in theoretical discussions and dialogues, in common research on issues related to the communist and anti-imperialist movement more generally, but also in more general developments in the policy of imperialism in each region, and in the course of intra-imperialistic conflicts and antagonisms.

POST-ELECTION DEVELOPMENTS IN GREECE

There are grounds for opening a broader discussion and dialogue around an alternative political proposal for power, since in Greece the bourgeois political system – of alternating the liberal bourgeois party with the social-democratic one that has become the second party of the bourgeois class – has experienced some setbacks. Both parties have suffered political losses, although they still retain significant electoral strength, as the people do not, for the time being, consider that under present conditions, they have the power to demand an overthrow at the level of government. The content of an alternative proposal is not yet clear; since a negative influence is still exerted by the process of reversal and the return of capitalism to the former socialist countries, despite the fact that the situation has improved in comparison to the early 1990s.

Some people manifest awe when facing the need to fight. They are certainly influenced by the prevailing ideology, and by the machinery of repression and coercion, bribery and influence-peddling. There is also terrorist military action on the part of imperialism, and the phobias cultivated by the EU that anyone who resists it will be destroyed. At the same time, the bourgeois political system provides fairly elaborate support for every reformist and opportunist viewpoint, i.e. every view that does not create a major headache is not regarded as a serious threat.

Recently, the bourgeois class in Greece, and in particular its hard core, feel that they must pave the way for a “bloodless” change on the political scene, and are studying the experience of Europe in guiding the popular masses through coalition governments. US imperialism has openly proclaimed that Greece is the most anti-imperialist country in Europe, based on the feelings of the people.

The two bourgeois parties prefer single-party governments, and have reservations about coalition governments; however, the idea of a coalition government has matured among some of the cadres in both these parties, even as an interlude until the classical two-party alternation in power can be restored.

A few years ago, new parties appeared that ultimately failed to remain in parliament or to become partners in a future coalition government. There is a fairly open discussion, and some fear that a centre-right government or a centre-left coalition may not obtain the maximum popular approval, then perhaps finally the road will be open for a turn by more significant numbers of the popular masses towards the KKE, because otherwise, anti-popular policy and its raids on the people’s rights will continue unabated.

An effort is currently being put forward to show the Synaspismos as a supplementary force that could contribute to a new political centre-left type scenario, so as to restore the lost “prestige” of the bourgeois political system. At the same time, LAOS – a small nationalist, racist party that recently entered parliament for the first time – is being used as a wild card either to remove some forces from the ND to the benefit of PASOK, or on the contrary, to detach some forces either from PASOK or the poor popular strata with a xenophobic attitude, to the benefit of ND.

Our answer will be given at the level of the mass movement and of the class struggle, with the main goal being for the people to understand that they can set their seal on developments if they are aware of their own power and weapons. Scenarios of reshuffling of the political system that take place at the top do not concern or frighten us.