

# Building a new old left: The first period of the Greek Marxist-Leninist movement (1963-1967)

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**Abstract** This paper analyses the first period of the Greek Marxist-Leninist movement, from its birth in 1963 until the military coup of 1967, which brought this period to an abrupt end. The movement is often referred to as ‘Maoist’, but, as will be detailed in brief, this is a misnomer in the Greek case. Before discussing the all-important 1963-1967 period, I will provide a brief pre-history of the movement, tracing its roots back to the 1950s. The central discussion within the article is the various activities of the Greek Marxist-Leninist movement in the 1963-67 period – namely, its publishing, trade union activity and student activism.

**Keywords** Marxist-Leninist, Maoism, Greece, 1960s

This paper aims to provide a historical overview of the first period of the Marxist-Leninist movement in Greece, which is widely – albeit erroneously – referred to as ‘Greek Maoism’.<sup>1</sup> As I shall discuss in further detail, the term ‘Maoism’ as applied to the Greek case is a misnomer. The first step in this argument is an account of the movement’s pre-history – namely, the processes that led to the Marxist-Leninist organisation(s) springing up in the 1960s. I will then focus on the historical course that led to the formation of the first and most prominent Marxist-Leninist political organisation of the period – namely, the *Orgánosi Marxistón-Leninistón Elládas* (Organisation

of Marxist-Leninists of Greece or OMLE). In 1976, the OMLE split, with the majority establishing a new group named the *Kommounistikó Kómma Elládas (marxistikó-leninistikó)* (Communist Party of Greece (marxist-leninist) or KKE(m-l)), and the minority forming the *Marxistikó-Leninistikó Kommounistikó Kómma Elládas* (Marxist-Leninist Communist Party of Greece or M-L KKE). Both groups faced a crisis by the end of the 1970s, leading to further splits and subsequent contraction. Since the overall history of OMLE and its successors is beyond the scope of this paper, I will focus on its early years.

As mentioned, the term 'Maoism' is a misnomer. It fails to accurately describe this historical movement, at least during the 1960s. The principal reason for this inaccuracy is a *lack of conceptual specificity* in the term itself, despite the fact it is widely used to label the groups, organisations and parties that aligned with China and Albania upon the Sino-Soviet split of 1963-1964, or were formed after the Communist Party of China's (CPC) 1963 call to form Marxist-Leninist parties.<sup>2</sup> As I have noted elsewhere, from the mid-1960s onwards the term Maoism was used to refer both to the ideology of China, and to supporters of Mao in the rest of the world; and it then began to be used to refer to an ideological trend that emerged during the 1960s that upheld the ideological and political views of Mao and Chinese politics in general, but rejected Stalin's views and rule of the Soviet Union.<sup>3</sup>

Recently, Julia Lovell has offered a robust scholarly defence of the term 'Maoism' because: 'for all its imperfections ... it has become the most commonly used term for a successful Chinese Communist programme from the 1930s to the present day'.<sup>4</sup> While the term's ubiquity is unquestioned, certain questions arise as to its utility. For example, how to interpret the phrase 'successful Chinese Communist programme'? Successful on what basis? And even if one adopts the hypothesis that Mao Zedong was the heart and soul of such a programme from the mid-1930s when he became the party's leader until his death in 1976, what makes the 'Chinese Communist programme' Maoist after 1976? Although an assessment of the uses and misuses of the term is beyond the scope of this paper, it bears repeating that vague definitions often obscure as much as they clarify.

The term was never used by Mao, nor by those actually labelled as

Maoists.<sup>5</sup> Clearly, any such definition could therefore reasonably require of its adoptees that they define the term. I find it more appropriate to use the term adopted by the political subjects that are being discussed – namely, ‘Marxist-Leninists’ – especially since there was indeed a minority trend within this movement that also used this term. An alternative term that could be used, since the Marxist-Leninists themselves also used it, is ‘anti-revisionist’. Both ‘Marxist-Leninist’ and ‘anti-revisionist’ were used to refer to opposition to the Soviet Union and its counterparts. By the time of the Sino-Soviet split, the Soviet Union was considered by the Chinese Communist Party and its counterparts worldwide to have abandoned Marxism-Leninism and turned revisionist. Thus, those aligning with China during the split considered themselves as upholding true Marxism-Leninism, and fought against revisionism.<sup>6</sup>

Although a general examination of the Sino-Soviet split is useful for contextualising the birth and development of this global movement, it is equally important to analyse each particular national case. This movement was not uniform, on either a global or national level. We often encounter numerous groups within a single country. In the case of Greece, for example, one may count more than half a dozen ‘Marxist-Leninist’ groups, organisations and parties in the mid-1970s.<sup>7</sup> Thus it is necessary to investigate the particular conditions within which these groups emerged in each country. Such conditions vary, and are related to the history of the local communist movement, as well as its ties to the various parties involved in the split (e.g., the Soviet Union, China, Albania).

### **The pre-history: The formation of a Greek anti-revisionist current before Mao’s call**

The post-war Greek Communist movement found itself in a dire position. It was outlawed in 1947, and then forced into exile in 1949, following its defeat in the Greek Civil War (1943-1949).<sup>8</sup> According to the Communist Party of Greece (KKE), almost 56,000 men, women and children fled Greece, mainly settling in the Soviet Union and other Eastern European communist states. The biggest settlement, of approximately 12,000 refugees, was in Tashkent.<sup>9</sup>

Those who remained behind were either imprisoned or exiled to distant Greek islands. They were organised in communist cells within these places of exile and imprisonment, and those who were released were organised in a leftist party that was legal, *Eniaía Dimokratikí Aristerá* (New Democratic Left or EDA). Those abroad, dispersed around the Eastern Bloc, participated in the exiled Communist Party of Greece.

The death of Stalin on 5 March 1953 marked the beginning of the political developments that concluded with Nikita Khrushchev's 'secret speech' during the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in February 1956. A month later, on 11-12 March 1956, the Sixth Wide Plenum of the Central Committee of the KKE was held, at which it adopted the political line of the Twentieth Congress; its General Secretary, Níkos Zakhariádis, was overthrown. These political developments in the Soviet Union are by and large known as de-Stalinisation, but the majority of Greek communist refugees saw them as a betrayal of the revolution. Only a minority of the Party membership welcomed the decisions of the Sixth Wide Plenum of the KKE and the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU, but this minority had the backing of the new Soviet leadership. This led to a political conflict within the communities of political refugees. The majority of the membership were no longer aligned with the Soviet leadership, and continued to support the former leadership of the KKE, which meant that they became outcasts in exile.

The first major clash between the two wings of the Greek communist refugee community had preceded the Congress and Plenum of 1956. In September 1955, violent clashes broke out in Tashkent, where the greater majority of the Greek political refugees in exile were situated.<sup>10</sup> The two camps were, broadly speaking, one that was loyal to the leadership of the then General Secretary, Níkos Zakhariádis (who was supported by the vast majority of the party membership), and a minority faction that was opposed to Zakhariádis and the party leadership, but was supported by the post-Stalin Soviet leadership. Although tensions ebbed and flowed over time, these divisions were always visible. Moreover, they were embedded in all the Greek political refugee communities and not just in Tashkent, where the major clashes took place. Those opposing the

new Soviet leadership and its Greek supporters were unconstitutionally expelled from the KKE and persecuted by the local authorities.<sup>11</sup> We can trace one of the roots of what was to later become the Greek Marxist-Leninist movement to this majority faction. A number of these political refugees eventually set up a Marxist-Leninist organisation in exile.<sup>12</sup>

These events also had an impact on Greek communists living in Greece. The Sixth Wide Plenum of the KKE was subject to intense debate, especially in places of exile such as the island of Ái Strátis, where thousands of communists were exiled. The vast majority in Ái Strátis were also against the Sixth Wide Plenum's decisions, while the party leadership in Greece was in favour.<sup>13</sup> Over time the exiles were gradually released, and in 1962 the camp was shut down. This release of imprisoned and exiled party members triggered the beginning of the Marxist-Leninist movement within Greece. The two political pro-Zakhariádis streams, one within Greece and one in exile, knew of each other's existence but were not able to meet until after the 21 April 1967 military coup, finally convening in autumn of the same year in Europe.<sup>14</sup> However, about a year before this in-person meeting, the two groups found themselves together on the pages of the *Peking Review*.<sup>15</sup> To my knowledge, this was the first time either group was mentioned in the Chinese media.

## **Publishing as a means of political activity and party building**

After their release, these former political exiles became politically reactivated within the legal political entity of the Eniaía Dimokratikí Aristerá (EDA). Many of them now aligned with the leadership, or were neutralised, but a small proportion of former exiles remained firmly against the post-Stalinist political line of the Soviet leadership and the EDA. A handful of them took the initiative to establish a publishing house, while remaining in the party.

The *Istorikés Ekdóseis* (Historical Editions) publishing house was founded in Athens, sometime within the second half of 1963; its legal structure consisted of a general partnership between four former exiles, Yíannis Khontzéas, Isaák Iordanídis, Aristídis Tsampázis and Dimítris

Kaniáris. The four had met in exile in Ái Strátis, and through their common struggle in exile had forged a friendship, and a common ideological and political standpoint, which had ultimately led to their joint political and publishing activity upon their release. Khontzéas and Iordanídis worked full-time on the publishing side and became key figures within the nascent Marxist-Leninist group; and they also became two of the most prominent leaders of the movement. The other two assisted them: Tsampázis was the only one with experience of working in the book trade (as a door-to-door salesman), while Kaniáris, being an accountant, helped with the group's finances.<sup>16</sup>

Khontzéas was born in 1930 in Koroni, a village in the Peloponnese. He was active in the left-wing movement from the age of 11 until his death in 1994. He was in exile from 1947 to 1958, when he returned to Athens, which had been his home prior to exile. Despite his political differences with the party he was politically active within the EDA's youth branch in Athens, and functioned as a party member.<sup>17</sup> Just before the establishment of the new publishing house, he had been the publisher of two volumes of collected articles from the Chinese newspaper *The People's Daily*. The collections were entitled *Chinese Viewpoints: Articles and Speeches*, and were later included in the *Istorikés Ekdóseis* catalogue. This publication was a political act rather than a commercial activity. According to Khontzéas:

Acquiring documents that carried Chinese positions was like 'committing political suicide'. They [the EDA party leadership] bought the editions of *Peking Information* containing the original letters of the Communist Party of China to make them disappear.<sup>18</sup> ... Those who attempted to find documents from the Communist Party of China, apart from the disciplinary measures they were likely to incur (expulsion from the Communist Party or threats of expulsion), typically faced tremendous and often insurmountable obstacles ... Publishers supported by leaders of communist parties loyal to the 'head'<sup>19</sup> printed the documents and then made them vanish. Whenever there was a discussion on the polemics [between the Chinese and the Soviet leadership], they didn't provide the original Chinese letters; instead, under close

supervision, they offered concise ‘summaries’ and called on those present to make a decision [on who is right and who is wrong]. This was the exception – the democratic one. Those who eventually obtained the originals were faced with blackmailing threats.<sup>20</sup>

The first book published by *Istorikés Ekdóseis*, which came out in 1963, was *A History of the Modern Chinese Revolution*, edited by Ho Kan-Chi. The book had been originally published by the Chinese Ministry of Higher Education in 1958, and was translated into Russian a year later by the foreign Literature Editions in Moscow. Isaák Iordanídis then translated the work from Russian to Greek. Iordanídis had been born in the Soviet Union in 1928, where he and his family lived until 1939, when they migrated to Greece. This was the source of his good command of the Russian language.

The book was leather-bound and very long, and was quite costly to produce, and thus absorbed most of the collective’s limited financial resources. But they had no alternative than to publish it: they wanted to publish a book that would highlight the pro-China position amid the heated and ongoing Sino-Soviet conflict. However, there was no Chinese presence in Greece, and it was impossible for them to acquire any other material suitable for publication. They needed a book that would make an *explicit political statement*. They wanted to side with China in the debate within the international communist movement, and wanted that choice to be broadcast loud and clear. This they managed to do. The book raised awareness of the existence of a pro-Chinese collective, and led to a collaboration with the *Énosis Phílon tis Néas Kínas* (The League of Friends of the New China).

The League had been established in the mid-1950s and was led by a well-known leftist, Beáta Kitsíki, who had been sentenced to death for espionage in 1948 but not subsequently executed. Her husband, Níkos Kitsíkis, was a leading figure in the EDA and was a member of the Greek Parliament. The League functioned as an unofficial channel to China, since Greece and China had no diplomatic relations. It did not carry out any direct political activity but promoted cultural exchanges between the two countries, organising lectures, sponsoring publications, and organising trips to China for prominent figures from within the Greek world of

arts and letters as well as politics (from both the left and the centre). The underlying motivation of Beáta Kitsíki, and of other Greek progressives and leftists, was to help China fight its international isolation, which had been brought about by the actions of the ‘capitalist-imperialist states’.<sup>21</sup> She had succeeded in persuading intellectuals and moderate politicians and members of the Greek parliament to join, including Dimítrios Papaspírou, who was at the time president of the parliament.<sup>22</sup> Her success in forging strong ties with moderate academics and politicians was demonstrated in 1982, when Periklís Theokhárís contributed a preface to her highly ideological and political book on the Chinese Cultural Revolution – *I Met the Red Guards*. Theokhárís was an academic and president of the Academy of Athens – the most prominent but also the most conservative intellectual institution in Greece at the time. In his three-page-long preface, Theokhárís refers to the work of Kitsíkis through the League, including its organised visits to China, on one of which he had been participant; and he speaks very fondly of both Kitsíkis and China.<sup>23</sup>

The League’s relationship with *Istorikés Ekdóseis* started when members of the collective were visiting Athenian bookstores to promote their newly arrived book. When they visited the bookstore of the Phéxi publishing house, its owner offered to act as a mediator between them and the League. The timing is likely to have been good for Phéxi, since the League had probably offered them a deal to translate the highly polemical works of Mao Zedong and the CPC. Their existing series on China, produced by the League in collaboration with Phéxi, lay more within the cultural sphere, but this latest proposition would see the publisher wade deep into politics. An established trade publisher like Phéxi knew better than to get involved in left-wing politics, and more specifically in a left-wing civil war, which had the potential to jeopardise its fame and clientele.

Collaboration between the League and *Istorikés Ekdóseis* would certainly assist in this potentially awkward situation, but the partnership was not solely in Phéxi’s interests – everyone was set to gain. The League would find a publisher who was more than willing to publish its material, and the collective would get its hands on Chinese material to disseminate and assess for its own political purposes. In one of their early joint titles, *Istorikés Ekdóseis* and the League announced that they had collaborated to



create a book series, 'The People's China and the Contemporary World'. From then onwards, *Istorikés Ekdóseis* had its own direct ties with China, and acquired, translated and published books by the Peking Foreign Language Press with no need for intermediaries.

In October 1964, the collective behind *Istorikés Ekdóseis* decided to take on an additional challenge – the launch of the monthly review *Anayénnisi* (Rebirth). *Anayénnisi* was also heavily based on Chinese texts, as well writings from other fellow believers worldwide. But in addition it included articles and comments critical of the EDA, its viewpoints and its practices. This soon led to a clash between the circle of people around *Anayénnisi* and the EDA.

Dear Aristídis,

I returned the History [of the Chinese Revolution] to your old address. Please see to it. I am of the impression that your publishing activity exceeded any permitted limit. From this, I conclude that there are other deeper objectives and aspirations; judging from the actions of your representatives, you[r publishing endeavours] offer a lousy service.<sup>24</sup>

This undated note was sent by Menélaos Alexiádis, an EDA cadre from Thessaloniki, to Aristídis Tsampázis. Alexiádis was a representative of a number of Athenian publishing houses in Thessaloniki.<sup>25</sup> He had also been in exile with the founding members of *Istorikés Ekdóseis* and, according to Iordanídis, approaching him through sending the book was not a chance act – they had all been politically aligned during their exile.<sup>26</sup> But Alexiádis had realised that *Istorikés Ekdóseis* represented more than simply a new publishing venture, and nor was the book that had been selected to initiate its publishing activity a random choice.

While communism was illegal at the time, left-wing politics, in general, was not, and this was why the EDA presented itself in this way. However, no open criticism of the Soviet Union and its political leadership from its Greek counterparts would be tolerated. Publishing something favourable to China was considered anti-Soviet, and since Soviet communism was seen as the only acceptable kind of communism, being anti-Soviet would be tantamount to being anti-communist, and

therefore hostile to the cause. While the group may not have engaged in dialectical thinking of this sort, the underlying logic is nevertheless characteristic of the mentality and way of thinking within the Greek left at the time.

Within the historical context of the intensifying Sino-Soviet struggle, no-one would see the publication of a book on the Chinese communist movement as accidental. Everyone would know it signalled the collective's ideological and political alignment. Alexiádis's expressions – 'exceeding any permitted limit' and 'offer lousy service' – as well as his reference to 'deeper objectives and aspirations' – all written within a total of three sentences on the back of a business card, show just how frustrated he was. While he does not state who the recipient of the 'lousy service' was, Alexiádis is likely to have meant 'the Cause, the Movement, the Left'. My use of capital letters here is fully intentional. At that time, this 'holy trinity' was sacred and came together in the indivisible Communist Party of Greece and its legal front, the EDA.

By April 1967 the publishing house had printed more than fifty different titles. All but one were translations of Chinese texts, primarily the works of Mao Zedong.<sup>27</sup> This activity even drew attention in China:

The Greek edition of *Quotations From Chairman Mao Tse-tung* was recently published in Athens by the History Publishing House [sic]. In recent years, many works of Chairman Mao have been translated and published in Greece. In 1966 alone, 16 titles were published in pamphlets ...<sup>28</sup>

Around this time, Iordanídis visited China via France, to represent the collective in a meeting with the CPC.<sup>29</sup> It is safe to assume that its consistent publishing activity since 1963 was the source of the collective's 'ticket' to China.

## **Transforming a publishing collective into a political one**

Sometime in the summer of 1964, a meeting took place in Athens initiated by the group that had formed Istorikés Ekdóseis and various

comrades drawn to the notion of differentiating themselves from the EDA. Yet, what 'differentiating' meant in practice varied among those involved. Some were convinced that a decisive split was the order of the day, while other participants were more reticent, waiting for the cadres that had led the struggle in *Ái Strátis* to be the first to break with the EDA. Nevertheless, the meeting decided to form a Marxist-Leninist core, and to publish a political and theoretical monthly review. Thus was *Anayénnisi* born.

After the launch of *Anayénnisi* the EDA retaliated. According to the collective, the EDA attacked their personal backgrounds spread rumours that the review's cadres were snitches, agents of the police and/or intelligence services.<sup>30</sup> It very soon launched a round of expulsions of both members and supporters of the collective, in Athens, Thessaloniki, Piraeus, Komotini and Xanthi.<sup>31</sup> This meant that the collective gradually gained more visibility; it became more organised and reached out to connect with the growing student movement of the 1960s. It also began to initiate new forms of activity in the labour and student movements, and also the neighbourhood movement (in Drapetsona, Piraeus). This may be related to the fact that those who left or were expelled from the EDA and its various front organisations retained the need to be politically active.

### **'Reconstituting the consistent progressive working-class forces'<sup>32</sup>**

In November 1965, the collective formed its own faction within the 'Énosis Ipallílon Estiatoríon-Zithestiatoríon-Inomayiríon-Kéntron Diaskedáseos-Exokhikón Kéntron and Apophíton Touristikís Skholís' (Trade Union of Restaurants-Taverns-Clubs Employees and Tourist School Graduates). The faction was named *Sinépís Proodeftikí Sindikalistikí Parátaxi* (Consistent Progressive Syndicalist Organisation or SPSP).<sup>33</sup> According to a letter published in the review and signed by a 'trade unionist waiter', despite the EDA's war against the SPSP the latter had managed to get 190 votes and one seat on the union's board, and had missed a second seat by just nine votes.<sup>34</sup>

These attempts to create contacts and factions in the labour movement were led by Iordanídis, and the membership primarily came from among

the former political exiles. *Anayénnisi* also managed to expand its influence to include working youth, especially young construction workers, who were working in one of the most militant sectors of the Greek labour movement.<sup>35</sup> The collective also gradually made contacts with Greek immigrants in West Berlin and Australia;<sup>36</sup> and there were some looser contacts in the Eastern Bloc, mainly subscribers of *Anayénnisi*.<sup>37</sup>

It would be wrong to discuss these dynamics-in-the-making as primarily a reflection of the Sino-Soviet dispute. I argue that one should read them primarily as discontent by left-wingers with the EDA's approach: those on the left increasingly saw the EDA as neither militant nor 'consistent' in terms of leftist ideology. The EDA's shifts had partly been made in response to the increasing popularity of the recently founded party *Énosi Kéntrou* (Centre Union or EK).<sup>38</sup> The EDA had made a number of attempts to collaborate with the EK, and some critics accused it of 'tailism' (the practice of blindly following popular opinion; in this case, blindly following EK).<sup>39</sup> Frustration with the EDA's apparent lack of militancy was even more intense among the growing youth movement.<sup>40</sup>

Such frustration is also evident in the discursive practices of the collective. The EDA and the labour organisations or trade unions it controlled were accused of 'class collaboration' or of being 'revisionist', 'opportunist' or 'reformist'. At the same time, *Anayénnisi* and its supporters proclaimed themselves as 'consistent' left-wingers, trade unionists and working-class militants.<sup>41</sup> Of course, 'consistency' has no real value unless it is being contrasted against something 'inconsistent' – in this case (according to the collective), the EDA.

### **'Consistent left-wing students chart new directions in the student movement'<sup>42</sup>**

As already mentioned, the collective initially orientated itself towards creating a political group based on former exiles. In fact, when people left or were expelled by the EDA, the announcement in *Anayénnisi* was often accompanied by a short biography that focused on the expelled militant's past.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, it seems that Khontzéas also saw great

potential among young people, and was opposed to a simple reconvening of all the 'old timers'. This may reflect the fact that the EDA had tasked him with working with the party youth after his release from exile.<sup>44</sup> Thus there was an article on youth in the very first issue of *Anayénnisi*, entitled 'I neolaía kai to proodeftikó kínima' ('Youth and the progressive movement'); this was not signed by Khontzéas but was certainly his handiwork.<sup>45</sup> An even longer article was published in the next issue, titled 'To proodeftikó kínima ton néon sti khóra mas' ('The progressive movement of the youth in our country').<sup>46</sup> The first article was rather general, but the second one heavily criticised the EDA and its youth branch and – in its final paragraphs – called for the 'creation of a vanguard, consistent youth organisation, in practice, and not in words' (p38). In *Anayénnisi*'s continuing articles and comments on student youth, the existence of ties between the review and members of the EDA youth wing can be traced in the many comments that are clearly a result of inside information.<sup>47 48</sup>

In June 1965, *Anayénnisi* published a letter written by ten cadres and members of the youth section of the EDA, Dimokratikí Neolaía Lampráki (Lambrakis Democratic Youth or DNL (named in honour of the murdered by the parastate EDA MP Grigoris Lambrakis)), primarily from Athens; a declaration written by 14 cadres of the student organisation of the DNL in Thessaloniki; and a letter from two technical education students-cadres of the DNL in Athens.<sup>49</sup> In spring 1966, less than a year after the first appearance of student dissidents in the pages of *Anayénnisi*, the Proodeftikí Panspoudastikí Sindikalistikí Parátaxi (Progressive All-Students Syndicalist Organisation or PPSP) was formed. This student organisation was active in the universities of Athens and Thessaloniki but soon also grew among Greek students in Paris.<sup>50</sup> The organisation's 51-page long founding declaration was signed by 37 university students from 14 different schools in Athens and Thessaloniki.<sup>51</sup>

Given that the military coup took place less than a year after the PPSP formed, we cannot be certain about its precise dynamics. However, it seems that the group was gaining steam. Ten days before the military coup, on 11 April 1967, when the newly elected members of the board of the Student Union of the School of Architecture of the National Technical University of Athens (Síllogos Spoudastón Arkhitektonikís EMP) convened for the first time to elect officers and

decide their agenda, two of the posts, including that of vice president, went to members of PPSP.<sup>52</sup> According to a right-wing student magazine published in spring 1967, the left won 12 of the 71 seats on the Student Union board of the National Technical University of Athens, of whom two were 'sinophiles'.<sup>53</sup> At Panteion University, the PPSP received 92 votes in the Student Union's elections of (presumably) 1966.<sup>54</sup> We cannot be certain from this about the results, but one student magazine reported in the following year that, a few weeks before the student elections, 434 students had voted in the General Assembly of the Student Union.<sup>55</sup> It thus seems likely that the PPSP had received around 25 per cent of the student vote in 1967. Meanwhile, in the Student Union of the Athens School of Medicine, two members of the PPSP were elected to a 'struggle committee' by the Union's General Assembly, along with ten other students.<sup>56</sup>

At the Third Congress of the *Ethnikí Phititikí Énosi Elládas* (National Student Union of Greece or EFEE), in 1966, the PPSP had 6 delegates out of a total of 80, and two of these delegates performed well in elections for membership of the Board of EFEE, one of them coming close to being elected.<sup>57</sup> In 1967 the General Assembly of the Student Union of the School of Engineering of Thessaloniki set up a 'struggle committee', the majority of whom were PPSPers.<sup>58</sup> We also know that the PPSP doubled its votes at the School of Engineering Student Union of Thessaloniki elections in 1967, but unfortunately there are no further figures or percentages available.<sup>59</sup> As well as establishing a strong presence in Athens and Thessaloniki, the PPSP also had supporters in the newly formed University of Ioannina, established in 1964 as a charter of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki.<sup>60</sup>

The PPSP began to publish its own monthly student magazine – or, to be more precise, it revived *Spoudastikós Kósmos* (*Student World*), a defunct magazine of left-wing students from Thessaloniki that had been set up in the early 1960s. *Spoudastikós Kósmos* was more advanced than *Anayénnisi* in terms of form and content, and was closer to the New Left perspective then developing in the West. The first issue under the auspices of the PPSP was accompanied by a very short note declaring that *Spoudastikós Kósmos* was 'the only student magazine in Athens and Thessaloniki that is not financially supported by anyone'.<sup>61</sup> This

comment seems odd unless it is seen as a response to allegations about the funding of the PPSP, but it does make sense in the light of the accusations by the EDA, mentioned earlier, that the *Anayénnisi* circle were agents of the state. The PPSP was probably not trying to affirm its financial independence per se, but was responding to the EDA.

The PPSP self-identified as ‘anti-imperialist’. Discussion of issues from Cyprus to Vietnam and anti-US imperialism, and a critique of the American way of life, are strongly present in its magazine. Equally dominant are articles regarding the academic context of studies in a variety of schools where the PPSP was present, as well as the studying and living conditions of university students. According to the PPSP, in order to ‘construct a mass student movement’ there was a need to build a ‘struggle over immediate student concerns – pedagogical issues and living conditions, as well as academic freedom’. The PPSP argued that these were inextricably linked to more ‘general issues of living conditions, work, democracy and national liberation’: the former should serve the latter, and the latter should advance the former. The group also attacked the DNL for collaborating with the centre instead of committing to the left-wing cause as the PPSP had done.<sup>62</sup> The slogans ‘long live the student anti-imperialist, antirevisionist, democratic struggle’ and ‘long live the anti-imperialist, anti-fascist, democratic student struggle’, heard at the PPSP’s first congress, continued to encapsulate its entire logic.<sup>63</sup>

## **Greek Marxist-Leninist warnings of a coup and the failure to confront it**

Both *Anayénnisi* and *Spoudastikós Kósmos*, as well as the PPSP, warned of an imminent coup as early as 1966.<sup>64</sup> Nevertheless, during 1967 some of the organisations within the collective engaged in tasks other than preparing for a coup. More specifically, the collective decided to focus on publishing the weekly newspaper *Laikós Drómos* (*People’s Road*), an effort that took up a lot of the group’s resources.

The first issue of the paper appeared on 29 January 1967. Even more significant was the meeting of cadres – primarily the former political exiles’ collective, with the addition of PPSP members – which took

place in April 1967. That meeting, held just a couple of weeks before the 21 April coup, decided to establish a lawful political group, *Sinepís Politikí Aristerí Kínisi* (Consistent Political Left Movement or SPAK).<sup>65</sup> The meeting had been delayed due to an internal struggle. The majority faction wanted to proceed with forming a political group; but the minority group of former political exiles, while critical of the EDA, sought to avoid an overall rupture. This minority perceived the task of the Marxists-Leninists as putting pressure on the EDA to 'correct' its political line, through putting forward arguments and trying to build on the influence of EDA members who were also against its 'revisionist' line. This minority left the collective upon the formation of SPAK. But SPAK still did not make preparations for a potential coup. Instead, it launched another internecine debate on whether it would participate in the elections scheduled for May 1967.<sup>66</sup>

The coup found SPAK and its front organisations – the SPSP and the PPSP – unorganised. One of the two leaders, Iordanídis, as well as a number of its members, primarily non-students and those living in small towns, were arrested and exiled. Many other members lost contact with the organisation. This led to the formation of other Marxist-Leninist groups and splits within SPAK. Then, in 1968, SPAK itself was renamed (read: reorganised) into the OMLE, under the leadership of Khontzéas.

## Concluding remarks

The Greek Marxist-Leninist movement traced its roots to dissident groups within the KKE and the EDA that arose from the mid-1950s both inside and outside Greece. These groups gradually formed Marxist-Leninist cores in Greece and abroad. Although these cores knew of each other, they failed to establish direct contacts before the 21 April military coup. The group inside Greece engaged in publishing activity, setting up the publishing house *Istorikés Ekdóseis* in 1963, the monthly review *Anayénnisi* in 1964, and the weekly newspaper *Laiós Drómos* in 1967. This publishing activity was, in fact, a form of covert political activity.

A third element would subsequently be added to the group of former exiles inside and outside Greece as a constituency within the Marxist-



Leninist movement. This third element was the student youth, which had far fewer links to the glorious but defeated past of the Greek Left than the other two groups. The students engaged in their own political and publishing activity, founding the student union organisation PPSP and reviving the monthly student magazine *Spoudastikós Kósmos*. Their activity differed in some ways from that of the 'old timers'. Students focused less on the Sino-Soviet split and more on the situation in Greece and their schools.

Even though both the students and the former exiles were concerned about the potential for military intervention, they did not take any actual organisational measures to prepare themselves against this threat. On the contrary, the newly formed lawful political group SPAK consumed precious energy in an internal debate over whether it would participate in the upcoming elections instead of preparing for a potential coup. Thus, when the coup actually took place, they found themselves unorganised and vulnerable, and a number of their members were arrested and exiled.

The first period of the Marxist-Leninist movement of Greece was characterised by a coming together of the old left 'pro-Stalinist' dissidents and militant students. While the movement soon changed from being a publishing collective, to become an underground political collective with overground trade union and student activity, the reluctance of some of its 'old-timers' to make a complete break with EDA meant that the movement could not properly organise itself until it was very late in the day; and the inconsistency between theory, i.e. warning of an upcoming coup, and practice, actually preparing for the coup, led some of its younger members to gradually distance themselves from OMLE. Thus the majority of the new underground Marxist Leninist groups that formed during the military dictatorship originated from people who had initially been affiliated, or in touch with, PPSP, SPAK or OMLE. But that is another (hi)story to tell.

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## Notes

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- 2 Communist Party of China, *A Proposal Concerning the General Line of the International Communist Movement*, Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1963, pp54-6.
- 3 Christos Mais, ‘Maoism, Nationalism, and Anti-Colonialism’, in I. Nessand Z. Cope (eds), *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Imperialism and Anti-Imperialism*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020, p2. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-91206-6\\_242-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-91206-6_242-1)
- 4 Julia Lovell, *Maoism: A Global History*, London: The Bodley Head, 2019, ebook.
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- 8 On the Greek Civil War (1946-1949) see: David H. Close, *The Origins of the Greek Civil War*, London New York: Routledge, 1995; Lars Bærentzen, John O. Iatrides, Ole Langwitz Smith (eds), *Studies in the History of the Greek Civil War, 1945-1949*, Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, University of Copenhagen, 1987; Thanasis D. Sfikas and Philip Carabott (eds), *The Greek Civil War: Essays on a Conflict of Exceptionalism and Silences*, London New York: Routledge, 2004.
- 9 Christos Mais, ‘Exiles in Exile: the Case of the Greek “Marxist-Leninist” Political Refugees in the Eastern Bloc in their Own Words’,

- in Ursula Langkau-Alex (ed), *Momentaufnahme der Exilforschung/ Proceedings of Exile Studies* 2012, p27. <https://bit.ly/33Ja2wR> (accessed 13 May 2021).
- 10 On the settlement of Greek political refugees in Uzbekistan see Kostis Karpozilos, 'The Defeated of the Greek Civil War: From Fighters to Political Refugees in the Cold War', *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol 16 No 3, 2004, pp62-87.
  - 11 Mais, 'Exiles in Exile'.
  - 12 Polídoros Daniilídís, *O Polídoros Thimátai* (Polídoros Remembers), Athens: Istorikés Ekdóseis, 1990, pp281-296.
  - 13 Yiánnis Khontzéas, himself exiled and later on leader of the Greek Marxist-Leninist movement, presents the viewpoint of the Marxist-Leninist movement. [Yiánnis Khontzéas] in respect to the debate that took place in Ái Strátis. 'Ap' aphormí tis simplírosis 20 khrónon apó tin "6i Olomélia": I Epíthesi tou revizionismoú ston Ái-Stráti' (On the occasion of the 20th Anniversary of the '6th Plenum': the Attack on Revisionism at Ái Strátis), *Laiós Drómos*, 17 April 1976, 5, 24 April 1976, 5; 30 April 1976, 5; Stéphanos Stephánou, also exiled in Ái Strátis, who aligned with the pro-Soviet current, and later on with the eurocommunist current, provided his own assessment. Stéphanos Stephánou, 'I tris "phraxionismí" tou Ái Stráti' (The three 'factionisms' of Ái Strátis), *Archeiotaksio*, 4, May 2002, pp147-155.
  - 14 Daniilídís, *Polídoros Remembers*, pp294-5; Yiánnis Khontzéas, *Yia to Kommounistikó Kinima tis Elládas* (On the Communist Movement of Greece), Athens: A/synechia, 2004, p321.
  - 15 'China's Great Cultural Revolution Will Decide the Future of the World: Article in the Greek Journal *Rebirth*', *Peking Review*, 50, 9 December 1966, pp17-18; 'China's Great Cultural Revolution Scars Imperialism and Revisionism to Death: Letter of the Greek Marxist-Leninist Group', *Peking Review*, 50, 9 December 1966, p18.
  - 16 For an exhaustive assessment of *Istorikés Ekdóseis* see Christos Mais, 'The Greek Political Publishing Field During the Long Sixties; exemplified by the Case of *Istorikes Ekdoseis*, 1963-1981', Leiden University, 2020. Unpublished PhD Dissertation.
  - 17 Isaák Iordanídis, 'Yia ton Yiánni Khotzéa' (For Yiánnis Khontzéas), *Proletariakí Simaía*, 12 November 1994: [https://antigeitonies.blogspot.gr/2016/05/blog-post\\_77.html](https://antigeitonies.blogspot.gr/2016/05/blog-post_77.html) (accessed 15 May 2021).
  - 18 This is a reference to the so-called 'Great Debate', the exchange of letters between the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the CPSU.
  - 19 Khontzéas is referring to the CPSU.

- 20 Yiánnis Khontzéas, *To 'télōs' tou kommounismou* (The 'End' of Communism), Athens: A/synechia, 1993, p322.
- 21 Meeting with Isaák Iordanídis in Drapetsona, Athens, 19 June 2009; Isaák Iordanídis interview with the author, Drapetsona, 23 February 2012; 28 September 2012; Yióryis Proveléngios, interview with the author, Athens, 10 October 2012.
- 22 The second visit of the League to China was led by Yeóryios Mávros, one of the main political figures of the period. He was considered, politically-speaking, to be on the centre-left of the political spectrum. Dimítiris Kitsíkis, email correspondence with the author, 30 November 2014. Beáta Kitsíki-led delegations must have been considered important since she even met Mao Zedong. 'Chairman Mao Receives Greek Guest', *Peking Review*, 4, 24 January 1964, p11.
- 23 Periklís Theokháris, 'Dio lóyia' (Two words), in Beáta Kitsíki, *Gnórisa tous Kókkinouss Phrouroús* (I Met the Red Guards), Kedros, 1982, pp3-5..
- 24 Archives of Contemporary Social History (ASKI), EDA Archive, Box 483, Folder 7.
- 25 I assume that the note was sent after the launch of *Anayénnisi* when the Marxist-Leninist collective had a more organised presence in Athens and Thessaloniki.
- 26 Isaák Iordanídis interview with the author.
- 27 Mais, 'The Greek Political Publishing Field', p204.
- 28 'Chairman Mao's Works Published Abroad', *Peking Review*, 9, 24 February 1967, p16.
- 29 Meeting with Isaák Iordanídis.
- 30 'Yia tin pragmatikí enótita kai próodo tou kinímatos' (For the Real Unity and Progress of the Movement), *Anayénnisi*, 2, November 1964, p17.
- 31 "'Sotíres" kai "Ananeotés"' ('Saviours' and 'Renewers'), *Anayénnisi*, 2, November 1964, p25; 'I oportounistikí iyiesía tis EDA antimetopízi me "diagraphés" tous sinepís agonistés-méli kai stelékhi tis EDA' (The opportunist leadership of EDA faces the consistently militant members and cadres of EDA with 'expulsions'), *Anayénnisi*, 3-4, December 1964-January 1965, pp60-66; 'I oportounistikí iyiesía tis EDA antimetopízi me "diagraphés" tous sinepís agonistés-méli kai stelékhi tis EDA' (The opportunist leadership of EDA faces the consistent militants members and cadres of EDA with 'expulsions'), *Anayénnisi*, 5, February 1965, pp29-32; 'I agonistés katangélloun tin oportounistikí politikí tis iyiesías tis EDA kai diakhorízoun ti thési tous' (Militants report the

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- 32 'To Ergatikó Sindikalistikó Kínima se Krísimi Kampí' (The Labour Trade Union Movement at a Critical Turning Point), *Anayénnisi*, 15-16, December 1965-January 1966, p13.
- 33 ASKI, EDA Archive, Box 370.
- 34 'Epistolí Servitórou Sindikalistí' (Letter from a Trade Unionist Waiter), *Anayénnisi*, 15-16, December 1965-January 1966, pp14-5.
- 35 Yiánnis Bítsikas interview with the author, Athens, 11 February 2012; Dimitra Lampropoulou, *Ikodómi. I ánthropi pou ékhtisan tin Athína, 1950-1967* (Construction Workers. The People who Built Athens, 1950-1967), Athens, Themelio 2009; Ilías Stáveris, *Ikodómi: Iroiki agónes mias 7etias, 1960-1967* [Construction Workers: Heroic Struggles of Seven years 1960-1967], Athens, Paraskinio 2003.
- 36 ASKI, EDA Archive, Box 483, Folder 5.
- 37 ASKI, EDA Archive, Box 483, Folder 5; Polídoros Daniilídís, *O Polídoros Thimátai*, p294; Stéphanos Rizákis, *Odiporikó: Anadromí sti zí kai drási ton politikón prospígon* (Travelogue: Retrospect of the life and action of political refugees), Athens: n.p., 1994, p170.
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- 39 Stéryios Katsarós, *Egó o Provokátoras, o Tromokrátis. I Yitia tis Vias* (I the Provocateur, the Terrorist. The Charm of Violence), Athens: Mávri Lísta, 1999, pp21-84; Yiánnis Bítsikas interview with the author.
- 40 Yiánnis Khatzís interview with the author, Thessaloniki, 19 March 2013; Vasílis Samarás, interview with the author, Thessaloniki, 22 August 2014; Loukás Axelós, interview with the author, Athens, 8 March 2013; Yiórgos Khatzópoulos, interview with the author, Athens, 29 November 2012; Yióryis Proveléngios, interview with the author, Athens, 10 October 2012; Yiórgos Karampelías, interview with the author, Athens, 29 September 2012; Pantelís Makrís, interview with the author, Thessaloniki, 1 August 2011; Áyis Tsáras, interview with the author, Thessaloniki, 29 August 2011, 18 July 2013; Kostís Papaíoánnou interview with the author, Thessaloniki, 8 June 2009. Also see 'I spoudázousa neolaía spázi ta phrágmata ton Papandreikón apagoréfseon kai tou oportounismou' (The studying youth breaks the

- barriers of Papandreou's prohibitions and opportunisms) *Anayénnisi* 6, March 1965, pp3; Nikolaos Papadogiannis, *Militant Around the Clock? Left-Wing Youth Politics, Leisure, and Sexuality in Post-Dictatorship Greece, 1974-1981*, New York Oxford: Berghahn, 2015, pp31-38.
- 41 See 'I politikí tis sinergasías ton táxeon' (The Policy of Class Collaboration), *Anayénnisi*, 3-4, December 1964-January 1965, pp17-9; 'Sinergasia ton táxeon kai dilósis ipotayís' (Class Collaboration and Declarations of Subordination), *Anayénnisi*, 5, February 1965, pp19-21; 'I singéntrosi tis 6is Aprilíou kai i politikí tis sinergasías ton táxeon' (The April 6 Rally and the Politics of Class Cooperation), *Anayénnisi*, 6, March 1965, pp11-5.
- 42 'I sinépis aristerí phitités kharázoun nées katefthínsis sto phititikó kínima' (Consistent Left-Wing Students Chart New Directions in the Student Movement).
- 43 See 'I opörtounistikí iyesiá tis EDA ... (The opportunist leadership of EDA faces ...), *Anayénnisi*, 3-4; 'I opörtounistikí iyesiá tis EDA ... (The opportunist leadership of EDA), *Anayénnisi*, 5.
- 44 Róza Ikonómou, interview with the author, Athens, 16 February 2012.
- 45 *Anayénnisi*, 1, October 1964, pp50-5.]
- 46 *Anayénnisi*, 2, November 1964, pp30-8.
- 47 'Yia tin anángi kathorismoú mias agonistikís porías tou spoudastikoú kinímatos' (On the need to define a militant course for the student movement), *Anayénnisi* 3-4, December 1964-January 1965, pp26-7; 'Merikés sképsis yíro apó to spoudastikó kínima' (Some Thoughts on the Student Movement), 5 February 1965, pp22-8; 'To sinédrio tis "Dimokratikís Neolaías Lampráki": Mia síntomi episkópisi' (The congress of the "Lambrakis Democratic Youth": a brief overview), pp16-21; 'To B' Sinédrio tis EFEE' (The Second Congress of EFEE), 7-8, April-May 1965, pp19-20; 'I "Eléfhtheres Sizitísis" kai i Iyesiá tis Neolaías Lampráki' ('Open Debates' and the Leadership of Lambrakis Youth), *Anayénnisi* 2, November 1964, pp8-9.
- 48 'I "Eléfhtheres Sizitísis" kai i Iyesiá, *Anayénnisi*, 2.
- 49 'I agonistés katangélloun tin opörtounistikí politikí tis iyesiás tis EDA kai diakhorízoun ti thési tous' (Militants report the opportunist policy of EDA's leadership and separate their position), *Anayénnisi*, 9 June 1965, pp12-5.
- 50 'Níki ton Sinepón Aristerón Spoudastón sto Parísí' (Victory of the Consistent Students in Paris), *Spoudastikós Kósmos*, 13-14, February-March 1967, p52.
- 51 PPSP, 'Diakírixi' (Declaration), 11 April 1966. Author's Personal Archive.

- 52 <http://62.103.28.111/askijpg/329/005.09.035.297.00028-4.jpg> (last accessed 21 May 2021).
- 53 *Spoudastikí Sképsi*, 5, March-April 1967, p5: <http://62.103.28.111/askijpg/458/16919.00005-5.jpg> (last accessed 21 May 2021).
- 54 The number is cited in an undated two-page, post-election flyer.
- 55 *Spoudastikí Sképsi*, 5, March-April 1967, p7 (see note 42).
- 56 ASKI, EDA Archive, Box 295, Folder 5.
- 57 ‘The Third Congress of EFEE’ (To 3o Sinédrio tis EPHEE), *Spoudastikós Kósmos*, special issue, June 1966, p9.
- 58 Kóstas Bakirtzis, ‘Politekhnikí’ (Engineering), *Spoudastikós Kósmos*, 12, January 1967, p17.
- 59 ‘Politekhnikí’ (Engineering), *Spoudastikós Kósmos*, 13-14, February-March 1967, p41. At the time, the Faculty of Engineering included the Schools of Architecture, Civil Engineering, and Rural and Survey Engineering.
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- 61 ‘Dio lóγια’ (Two Words), *Spoudastikós Kósmos*, 7 [March 1966], n.p.
- 62 ‘Skhetiká me to “Skhéδιο Prográmmatos” tis PPSP’ (About the PPSP’s ‘Programme Plan’), *Spoudastikós Kósmos*, 11 (December 1966), 3; PPSP, ‘Diakírixi’ (Declaration), 11 April 1966. Author’s Personal Archive.
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- 64 See flyer dated 14 November 1966, *Spoudastikós Kósmos*, 11 (January 1967), back cover; ‘I epíthesi tou imperialismoú kai tis antídrasi tha sintrivi’ (The attack of imperialism and reaction will be crushed), *Anayénnisi*, 24-25, September-October 1966, pp1-4; ‘Emprós! Na apotrépsoume to praxikópima’ (Come On! Let’s Prevent the Coup), *Spoudastikós Kósmos*, 13-14, February-March 1967, n.p.
- 65 Yiánnis Khontzéas, *Yia to kommounistikó kínima tis Elládas* (For the Communist Movement of Greece), Athens: A/synechia, 2004, p324-5.
- 66 Op cit.