

**Kostis Karpozilos, University of Crete, Rethymno (Greece):
Labor Unions, Radicalism and the Communist Left in the Greek-American
Communities (1920-1950). PhD Project.¹**

The aim of my dissertation is the presentation of the activities of the Greek-American left focusing mainly on the 1930s, when they reached their peak due to a series of factors such as the new line of the Communist International, the New Deal, the Spanish Civil War and the emergence of the dictatorship of Metaxas in Greece. More particularly, I intend to demonstrate that the communist left arose as a considerable force within the Greek-American communities proposing a distinct cultural and political program that combined class-consciousness with the process of Americanization. This research sheds light onto a neglected aspect of the history of the Greek presence in the United States since it reveals considerable transformations and changes of allegiances within the communities. Even though the communist left was in no way the hegemonic force among Greek-Americans, a series of sources indicate that it enjoyed considerable support.

My research is based mainly on primary sources of the Greek-American left, the newspapers *Organosis* (Organization), *Fone tou Ergatou* (Voice of the Worker), *Empros* (Forward) and *Ellinoamerikaniko Vema* (Greek-American Tribune), the journal *Protoporos* (Pioneer), the publications (books and pamphlets) of various parties and organizations in Greece and the archival collection of the Communist Party of the United States. Moreover, I have worked on files of the Greek embassy and consulates in the United States, which are now held in the archives of the Greek Foreign Ministry, while scattered documents of interest have been located in various other institutions in Greece. Finally, collections deposited in the Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, such as the John Poulos Collection and the Vassos Vlavianos Papers (Special Collections of the California State University of Sacramento) contribute mainly in associating Greek-American trends with developments in the United States.

Persistent evidence shows the existence of Greek-American radical organizations, from the publication of the Greek newspaper *Organosis* in 1916, until the closure of the *Greek-American Tribune* in the years of McCarthyism. A Greek section of the Communist Party existed from the first days of the latter, while at various points small groups of Greek-Americans were active in other radical organizations, like the Socialist Party, the Socialist Labor Party and the Lovestone group in the early 30s. This evidence is useful to an extent in the documentation of the Greek-Americans history, while it is of interest for the interrelation between the American left and immigrant communities. Moreover, though, there is a more interesting aspect in this. The history of Greek-American radicalism depicts the interaction of immigration and class, the inner transformations of the communities and their association with the general developments and ideological trends of the American society.

This has to do with the overall transformation of the Greek presence in the United States, the gradual involvement of the communities in the political and economical life of the country and the emergence of a 'progressive bloc' during the New Deal years. In this context, my research does not focus exclusively on the activities of the Greek-American left, but it tries to show that Greek-American communities witnessed a notable transition during the two interwar decades. A keynote example concerns the active involvement in the labor

¹ Supervisor: Prof. Christos Hadziiossif.

movement during the New Deal years responding to the organizational drives of the C.I.O. More particularly, I examine three industries, where Greek-Americans were mainly concentrated: the Fur workers of New York, the Hotel and Restaurant workers and finally the Steel workers, especially in West Virginia and Ohio. The publications and hearings of the National Labor Relations Board provide valuable information concerning these matters. Involvement in labor unions went hand in hand with the widespread support for the New Deal in Greek-American communities, a milestone in their history, since it initiated their active involvement in American politics.

The result was the emergence of a Greek-American popular front during the 1930s, due to a series of factors such as the political line of the Communist International, the tension of class struggle in the United States, the Spanish Civil War and the emergence of the dictatorship of Metaxas back in Greece. In this regard, the 'Greek bureau' of the Communist Party initiated an approach with radicalized sectors of the New Deal supporters, and this process resulted in the formation of the Greek-American Democratic Committee. Demetrius Christoforides, a journalist and editor of the republican *Ethnikos Kirix*, was appointed head of the *Empros*, which was hence transformed into the official organ of the new organization and enjoyed considerable circulation. At the same time, the Greek-American left went through a transformation process in order to meet the terms of the alliance – the unity of the progressive elements of society were to be the main priority, and in this context the notions of class struggle were somewhat suppressed.

This process was combined with the involvement in local and national politics, the support for New Deal candidates and the participation in the formation of the American Labor Party. In 1942, Dean Alfange, a progressive Greek-American, ran for Governor of New York on the Labor Party ticket, while committees for the support of the Greek resistance movement (EAM-ELAS) during the war obtained considerable support. The Cold War signified the decline of the Greek-American left. In Greece, during the Civil War the left was engaged in a military confrontation with the United States. At the same time, in the States the Committee on Un-American Activities inquired the activities of Greek-Americans, a process that led to the deportation of a small number of activists.