



THE ADVENTURES OF MARX IN GREECE

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After the outbreak of the contemporary economic crisis and especially after the bailouts of the troika (IMF, ECB and EU) Karl Marx's *Capital* is gaining popularity among Greek readers. This caused several reprints of an older translation, and, as we are about to see the fifth (!) translation within 80 years.

It is already supposed to be the most ambitious publishing projects of the last years. Thanasis Giouras is translating and the editing is done by Dionisis Gravaris and Thomas Noutsopoulos.¹ The edition is expected to have all of the Engels' interference in the appendix and will be based on the final German edition of the "Marx - Engels Gesamtausgabe" institute. This project actually is the last one among many others; most of them failed and few had some success. As expected the translating history of *Capital* is a deeply controversial and political one.

A short translating history of *Capital* in Greek

It might sound as a paradox, but the first that rushed to accent the *Capital* of Karl Marx in Greece were not the Marxists of the left. On the contrary, they were scholars, politicians and editors hostile to the left. They intended to twist, or at least, devaluate the theoretical thesis of Marx. In order to do so, many "synopsis" of the *Capital* were written, in those synopses only few quotations were translated and were interpreted in several ways.

Back in the 40's in one of the issues of the "Communist Review" Journal, which is the official ideological instrument of the Communist Party of Greece (CPG) there is a relevant article by G. D. Zioutos^{2 3}. The causation for Zioutos article was the recent publication of one more "synopsis" of the *Capital* by Dimosthenis Kousis, a PhD student. According to Zioutos, Kousis was an advocate of the fascist regime of I. Metaxas and a Nazi.⁴

Marx's "Das Kapital" has been partially translated in Greek at least four times until now; the first attempt was made back in 1927 by P. Pouliopoulos and G. Doumas. Pouliopoulos was the first general secretary of the CPG. He was expelled that same year from his own party because he supported Trotsky against Stalin in their dispute. Finally, Pouliopoulos was arrested by the Metaxas regime, and then executed in 1943 by Italian soldiers during the occupation of Greece in the WW2. The attempts of Giannis Kordatos and D. Pournaras were also never completed.

The first complete publication of "Das Kapital" was made by the lawyer Giannis Skouriotis in the 50's. Skouriotis translated the text straight from the German prototype (East Berlin, 1953) that was a reprint of the 1932 edition of the Institute Marx-Engels-Lenin of Moscow. He also took into consideration three more translations, two of them in French, the other one being an English translation (which was) reviewed by Engels himself. Skouriotis' translation was a very good one but full of linguistic obsessions, which makes it quite difficult for the contemporary reader to understand. The linguistic

1 All three of them are professors in the University of Crete

2 His actual name was Zoitopoulos, and he was one of the most important scholars of his time

3 Zioutos, G.D., 1945. The tampering of Marxism and the adventures of *Capital* in Greece.

Kommounistiki Epitheorisi, 42(26/4/1945)

4 The Metaxas' regime was a typical fascist regime of its time, it was established in 1936 and lasted until 1939



style of Skouriotis is called “psiharism” and we will analyze it a bit later. His translation was published in several issues at his own expenses between 1954 and 1960.

The complete translation that can be found in the market today was made by Panagiotis Mavromatis, a delegate of CPG. The first two volumes were published abroad, because the CPG was outlawed until the mid-70. The complete edition was made after the collapse of the military junta in 1974. In the following decade the Capital was printed in four volumes (including “surplus value theories”) by Sinhroni Epohi, the publishing company of the CPG. From 1978 until 2009 the first volume sold over 23.000 copies, the second 15.000, the third 12.000 and the fourth 8.000. It was, beyond any doubt, a very important work, it is not only a complete edition and but also has less linguistic problems than Skouriotis’s one. The linguistic problem in Mavromatis’ translation is not “psiharism” on the contrary it is a kind of “Soviet slang”. By this, we mean that in the text, there are phrases and expressions that were actually used almost only between left wing people, in most of the cases the words are Russian or German that were written with Greek characters or even combined with a Greek ending instead of being translated. This “Soviet slang” seems to be used in the majority of the texts of the CPG especially until the 80’s and in some cases even until now. Mavromatis’s translation in general is quite satisfying with the majority of the Marxian ideas attributed quite well in Greek, with few exceptions, for example in the part where Marx discusses “The Working Day”, its limitations and the struggle between capitalists and workers:

There is here therefore an antinomy, of right against right, both equally bearing the seal of the law of exchange. Between equal rights, force decides.⁶

The word that is attributed as “force” in the English version is “Gewalt” in German and it is quite ambiguous. There are two possible translations, none of them is even close to “force”. The first is “power” and the second is “violence”. It might seem as a tiny difference, but if we take into account the influence that Marx had and still has on politics it actually is a big deal. Nonetheless, in the translation made by Mavromatis “Gewalt” is translated into “violence”.⁷

To conclude, we can mention that Marx’s method and ideas were introduced for the first time in Greek universities only in 1936. For the first time a thesis with a Marxian method is defended in the University of Athens by Ahileas Grigorogianis under the title “Foreign Capital in Underdeveloped Countries”. Although the thesis was accepted, there is the following note in the first page “The approval of this thesis under the law school of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens does not indicate acceptance of the writer’s notion”. The approval of a Marxian thesis was considered to be an “accident” and did not happen again for more than a decade.

“Psiharism” and the linguistic disputes in Greece

The linguistic dispute in Greece, consisted in whether modern Greeks should go back to the use of the ancient Greek language or develop a written language that would correspond to the spoken language of common people, the so called Romaic. Over that dispute many confrontations occurred and in some cases even clashes between the opposite sides in crucial moments of Greek history, even before the establishment of the Greek state. A common and unified language was a necessity for the establishment of national education. On the other hand the rise of new social forces that preferred the use of the spoken language, caused contradictions that in some cases led even into clashes in the

5 In the April of 1967 colonels of the Greek army enforced martial law and established a military junta that collapsed in 1974

6 Marx, K., 1976 (print.). Capital: Volume I. Chapter 10: The Working Day. London: Penguin

7 Marx, K., 1996 (print.). To Kefalaio. Kritiki tis politikis oikonomias: to protses paragogis tou kefalaiou. Athens: Sinhroni Epohi, p.146. Translated by Panagiotis Mavromatis.



streets of Athens. For many years before the establishment of the Greek state there was an open debate between the scholars of the time. One side was consisted of bourgeois scholars from Istanbul connected with the patriarchate, they were advocates of the archaic, and the other side was consisted of scholars like Rigas Fereos with more radical opinions who were in favor of the spoken language. From the conflict between those two opposing sides new compromise was created, proposed by Adamadios Corais. That compromise can be summed up into rough points, the cultivation of the spoken language and at the same time the “purification” from the impurities caused by the Ottoman factor.

The establishment of the Greek state shifted the balance of power in favor of the conservative side, because the official documents of the state were written in archaic language and it was also decided that the grammar of the ancient Greek language was the one to be taught in schools.

During the last twenty years of the 19th century, the debate over the linguistic dispute was fired up once more. The side that was in favor of the Romaic for the first time acquired theoretical and linguistic foundations and ideological weaponry, based on the work of an extremely militant scholar named Gianis Psiharis (Essays of the historical modern Greek grammar, 1884-1886, My voyage, 1888). Those elements will allow to the advocates of Romaic to gather followers and turn them to a militant movement.

So, in the dawn of the 20th century the so called Romaic movement carried a mood for modernization that goes beyond the limits of language, the Romaic language was used as a symbol for pushing for deeper changes in the Greek society. At the same time, the introduction of socialist ideas and the creation of the first socialist groups in Greece, triggered the first diversifications among the advocates of Romaic. Many among the socialists thought of the Romaic as a weapon of the working class and not just as a popular language or as a proof of national succession.

In 1929, the liberal Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos reformed the educational system under a social and political frame that was influenced by the movement of the working class and the CPG. The Romaic as a symbol of revolutionary speech is from that point used as an idiom of the CPG, the conservatives persecuted anyone that used Romaic, even granted professors, like Ioannis Kakridis. In 1964 a new reform for the establishment of the Romaic takes place but it gets canceled by the military junta just three years later.

Finally the linguistic dispute was resolved by the 1974 Constitution, and a series of laws voted in 1976 by Kostantinos Karamanlis and 1982 by Antreas Papandreou.