

JEWISH COMMUNISTS IN INTER-WAR SALONIKA: BALANCING BETWEEN COMMUNISM AND NATIONALISM

7.1. Introduction

We are sending warm Bolshevik greeting to Avante, the militant instrument of the Jewish workers in Salonika, and of the entire country, which for twenty years has been standing unyielding amidst the revolutionary trenches of the struggle against the national oppression and the anti-Jewish pogroms, against the exploitation of Greek capitalism and Jewish high-bourgeois, [fighting] for the national liberation of Macedonia and the revolutionary proletarian education and the organisation of the Jewish workers and employees. We are confident that also in the future ... Avante will hold proudly the banner of the CI Communist International and of the KKE [Greek Communist Party] in the struggle against national oppression and fascist pogrom, in the struggle against the capitalist exploitation of the Greek and the Jewish pot-bellied [and we are confident that] the Greek proletariat and the working classes will stand by the Jewish workers who are the victims of Greek capitalism. Long live the class solidarity of the Jewish and Greek workers! Long live Avante, the Bolshevik instrument of struggle of the Jewish workers and of the Jewish poor! Down with bloody Greek chauvinism and fascism! Long live Soviet Greece!⁷⁵⁹

This was the greeting sent on 11 February 1933 by the Politburo of the Central Committee of the KKE to *Avante*, the official mouthpiece of the Jewish Communists in Salonika.⁷⁶⁰ Besides being the only evidence available proving the solidarity between Greek Communists and their Jewish counterparts in Salonika, this text was chosen for an additional reason. It touches upon two conceptual categories which constituted the backbone of Jewish communist discourse and shaped the course of Jewish communist politics during the inter-war years. On the one hand, the above quotation underlines the class dimension of Jewishness, thus creating an alliance between Jewish and non-Jewish workers fighting a common struggle against Jewish and non-Jewish bourgeoisie. On the

⁷⁵⁹KKE, *Episema Keimena* Vol. III (Athens: Sychrone Epoche, 1975), p. 501.

⁷⁶⁰Since the KKE, which was the party to which the Jewish Communists in Salonika paid allegiance, was established in 1924 this chapter will use the term 'Jewish Socialists' for the pre-1924 years and the term 'Jewish Communists' for the post-1924 years.

other hand, special emphasis is laid on the 'national question' which alludes to the Jews as a distinct national category enjoying minority status implying their differentiation from the ethnic majority of the Greeks and their ranking along with other national minorities. It is the merging of the two patterns that gave birth to an "ethno-ideological movement called 'Jewish communism'" which influenced profoundly the course of communal politics of Salonika Jews.⁷⁶¹

"What bourgeois liberalism achieved for the Jews in Western Europe", wrote Isaac Deutscher, "only Bolshevism was able to achieve for them in Eastern Europe."⁷⁶² And although the conventional interpretation of geography does not include Salonika in eastern Europe the case of the Jewish Communists in Salonika exhibits certain similarities as well as differences with the case of their fellow Jews in eastern Europe.

As Bauman has pointed out, when discussing 'roads in modern Jewish history' beside the paths of Jewish nationalism and assimilation there were two more paths opened for and by the Jews, those of universal and Jewish socialism respectively. With regard to the former, it was initially adopted in western Europe by the Jewish poor who, due to the class dimension of the assimilation project, were deprived of its 'redeeming' effect; in eastern Europe universal socialism was opted for by those who were denied the liberal offer of assimilation altogether. "Once inside the socialist movement, Jews immediately turned into 'men as such'", that is human beings set free from the 'messianic drive of Judaism' and Jewish distinctiveness. When now considering the path of Jewish socialism, Bauman continued, "... it was not a means of emancipation from Jewishness or an alternative version of assimilation, whose other variety failed or

⁷⁶¹This expression was used by Henry Felic Srebnik in his analysis of Jewish Communists in the East End in London. H. F. Srebnik, *London Jews and British Communism 1935-1945* (London: Valentine Mitchell, 1995), p. 4.

⁷⁶²I. Deutscher, *The non-Jewish Jew and Other Essays* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 87.

turned out to be impracticable. On the contrary, it was bent on redeeming the Jewish tradition by liberating it from the domination of class enemies” both Jewish and non-Jewish. As he wisely pointed out, not only did followers of Jewish socialism not attempt to suppress their Jewishness but found in it the quintessence of their ideology.⁷⁶³

The case of the Jewish Socialists in Salonika stood at the crossroads between universal and Jewish socialism. As it will be shown in the first part of this chapter, Jewish Socialists in the initial phase of their organised activity, namely from the foundation of the *Federacion Socialista Laboradera* (FSL) in 1909 until its incorporation into the KKE in 1920, opted for the road of ‘universal’, or to be more precise, ‘federal’ socialism. This path, which would lead to the formation of a socialist federation of all peoples living in the Ottoman Empire, would also allow its members to keep their distinctive ethnic identity. In other words, despite the numerical predominance of the Jews in the organisation and the ensuing efforts to support Jewish interests, Jewishness as such did not play any central role but was ‘one of many’ identities within the melting-pot of the would-be Socialist federation. On the contrary, during the inter-war years Jewish Communists, who were no longer members of a multi-ethnic *milieu* but citizens of a rather homogeneous nation-state, rediscovered their Jewishness, adopted the popular national-based discourse of the Zionists and adapted it to their own political programme. As the second part will argue, Jewish Communists dealt extensively with Jewish issues, namely the questions of Jewish assimilation, economic problems troubling Salonika Jews, antisemitism, emigration to Palestine, and so forth, thereby seeking to emancipate themselves from ‘Jewish and non-Jewish exploiters’.

Their transformation from ‘federal’ Socialists to ‘Jewish’ Communists allows in

⁷⁶³ Bauman 1988: p. 75.

many ways their comparison with the early Bundists.⁷⁶⁴ The latter were Russian speaking Marxist *intelligenti* who found themselves operating in a Yiddish-speaking milieu and who in the course of various development decided to commit themselves to the route of Jewish cultural nationalism, which insisted that Jews were a nation like others and which elevated Yiddish to a new level of dignity.⁷⁶⁵ The same process was witnessed among the Jewish Communists in Salonika, who turned to their fellow Jews out of their need to deal successfully with political considerations and pressing party interests. In other words, they used the popular 'Jewish national question' as an expedient of strengthening their position in the city and, in turn, promote the KKE's political goals.

It was the Bundist-like political line of the Jewish Socialists in inter-war Salonika that increased their popularity and guaranteed their stable presence in communal political life. Indeed, different electoral results from communal and national elections held during the inter-war years evince the ability of the Jewish Communists to attract a stable number of votes ranging from 15 to 18 per cent on average. In particular, in the 1926 national elections the Jewish Communists had their heyday and received 39,07 per cent.⁷⁶⁶ As a result, two of the ten deputies who represented the KKE in the Greek Parliament were Jacques Ventoura and David Ben Solan, both Jews from Salonika.⁷⁶⁷ Less impressive but still indicative of their popularity were the results of

⁷⁶⁴Members of the General Union of Jewish Workers in Lithuania, Poland and Russia founded in 1897 in Vilna and known in Yiddish as *Der Bund*. Ettinger 1994: p. 910.

⁷⁶⁵J. Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics. Socialism, Nationalism and the Russian Jews, 1862-1917* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 171-257, and Mendelsohn 1970: p. 29, p. 155.

⁷⁶⁶Amongst 10,081 Jews who voted in the elections on 7 November 1926 3,802 voted for the KKE. Bureau de Press (Salonika) to Bureau de Press of Greek Foreign Ministry, 20 July 1928, 1928 A. 21. IV., HAGFM.

⁷⁶⁷G. Katsoules, *Historia tou Kommounistikou Kommatos Helladas* Vol. III (Athens: Nea Synora, 1976), p. 184

the 1928 and 1932 elections, when the Jewish Communists in Salonika received 15.42⁷⁶⁸ and 21.73 per cent respectively.⁷⁶⁹ Turning now to communal politics in 1930 and 1934 the Jewish Communists received 16.37⁷⁷⁰ and 15.64 per cent respectively.⁷⁷¹ It can be safely argued that this standard electorate gave them a definite precedence over their Greek comrades in the rest of the country, who even at their best moments did not manage to attract more than 5 per cent of the overall votes.⁷⁷²

This comparative approach challenges the opinion of Ioannes Kakoulides, who has argued that the special contribution of the Jewish Communists to the movement of Greek socialism ended in 1924 with the creation of the KKE.⁷⁷³ It is the aim of this chapter to show that the stable political course of the Jewish Left in Salonika continued to exert a decisive influence on the political profile of the KKE, which could always count on a steady number of Jewish communist votes in the Salonika constituency. In order to do that it is important to analyse the reasons which made Jewish Communists in Salonika more popular than the KKE and which can be summarised as their ability to

⁷⁶⁸In the elections held on 19 August 1928 1465 Jews voted for David Ben Solan and Ovadia Ovadia who represented the Communists in the Jewish separate college. Bureau de Press (Salonika) to Bureau de Press of Greek Foreign Ministry, 23 August 1928, 1928 A. 21. IV. , HAGFM.

⁷⁶⁹Nehama to Bigart, 29 September 1932, Grèce III C55, AAIU. One of the ten deputies who represented the KKE in the Greek parliament was Michael Kazes, a Salonika Jew. Katsoules Vol. III 1976: pp. 187-188.

⁷⁷⁰Out of 6,201 Jews 1,015 voted for the communist party called the 'Popular Bloc' which thus received 11 out of 70 seats in the Communal Assembly. Konstantopoulou and Veremes 1998: p. 170.

⁷⁷¹Out of 7,070 votes the Popular Bloc of the Communists received 1,106 votes and got 8 out of 50 seats in the Communal Assembly. Konstantopoulou and Veremes 1998: p. 239.

⁷⁷²In the 1926 elections the Greek Communists received 4.38 per cent (41,982 votes) and sent 10 deputies to the Greek parliament. A. Solaro, *Historia tou Kommounistikou Kommatos Hellados* (Athens: Pleias, 1975), p. 62. In 1928 the KKE received only 1.41 per cent (14,325 votes) and failed to be represented in the Greek parliament. Solaro 1975: p. 67. In 1932 the KKE (United Front of Workers and Peasants) got 4.97 per cent (58,223 votes) and sent 10 deputies to the Greek parliament. Katsoules Vol. III 1976: p. 185.

⁷⁷³I. Kakoulides, "La contribution des Hébreux à l'histoire du parti socialiste-ouvrier de Grèce (1918-1924)", *Balkan Studies*, 32 /1 (1991), p. 69.

make their political programme conform with a set of social conditions and ideological tensions pertaining to the life of Salonika Jews at that time. Since the ideological profile of the Jewish Communists brought them into serious conflict with all other Jewish political parties thereby proving their important “blackmail potential” and thus forcing other parties to respond or contain the ‘communist threat’, this chapter will also challenge the opinion of Moïssis who suggested that the political role of the Jewish Communists was not important for communal developments.⁷⁷⁴

7.2. Pre-1923 Jewish Socialism: A case of federal socialism

Unlike Zionism, which largely developed after the Greek annexation of Salonika, the relationship between Jews and socialism had its peak before 1912. By the end of the nineteenth century 20,000 people of different ethnic origins were busy working in the industries of Salonika and together with some 500 transport employees formed a substantial proletariat whose working conditions were far from ideal. The three quarters of these workers were Sephardi Jews employed as tobacco workers, shop-assistants, carpenters, printers, soap-makers, etc.⁷⁷⁵ From 1904 onwards Salonika witnessed a period of social unrest as a result of a combined crisis of ideology and identity. Successive waves of national delirium, which had driven Greeks, Bulgarians and other ethnic groups to so many bloody escapades throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, were unable to respond to and assimilate in a permanent and organic way innovative westernised forms of social organisation. Consequently, social and economic problems continued ravaging the declining Ottoman Empire thereby exposing its

⁷⁷⁴Moïssis 1972: p. 372.

⁷⁷⁵A. Benaroglia, *He Prote Stadiodromia tou Hellenikou Proletariatou* (Athens: Kommouna, 1986), p. 43.

antiquated character.⁷⁷⁶ In 1904 250 tobacco workers went on strike following the examples of Kavalla and Monastir, while in 1905 and 1906 strikes became more frequent.⁷⁷⁷ The aforementioned social activities, which revealed the existence of a political and social consciousness amongst the working class stimulated by the early liberalism of the Young Turk's Revolution, was put under the experienced guidance of Abraham Benarogia,⁷⁷⁸ who, with the participation of other Socialists (Alberto Judas Arditti, David Recanati, Joseph Hazan, the Bulgarian A. Tomov and the Macedonian Dimitar Vlahof), created the *Federacion Socialista Laboradera* (FSL).⁷⁷⁹ In June 1909 FSL became a part of the Second International and gained the right of participating with a single vote in the International Socialist Bureau (ISB). Within one year it had managed to accomplish remarkable work: "it included ... fourteen syndicalist organisations, its sympathisers numbered some thousands, it possessed a newspaper [*Avante*] which during some months appeared in four languages⁷⁸⁰, the evening classes which had been set up were followed by a large number of regular students, [and] it

⁷⁷⁶S. Marketos, "He 'Fenderasion' kai he Hedraiose tou Hellenikou Sosialismou" in Etaireia Meletes Hellenikou Evraismou (ed.), *Oi Evraioi ston Elleniko Choro: Zetemata Istorias ste Makra Diarkeia* (Athens: Gavrielides, 1995), p. 155.

⁷⁷⁷K. Moskoff, *Eisagogika sten Historia tou Kinematos tes Ergatikes Taxes. H Diamorfose tes Ethnikes Syneideses sten Hellada* (Athens: Kastaniote, 3rd edition, 1988), p. 335.

⁷⁷⁸Abraham Benarogia was born in Bidini in Bulgaria in 1887. He was involved in the wing of the Bulgarian Socialist movement which later became the Bulgarian Social-democratic Party of Dimitar Blagoef. In the immediate aftermath of the Young Turks' Revolution Benarogia settled in Salonika in 1908 where he worked as a teacher and a printer of the Jewish community. In 1905 he founded *El Journal del Laborador* which was the first socialist newspaper published in the Ottoman Empire. His socialist activities established him as one of the most important figures of Balkan and Greek socialism. During the German occupation he was transported to a German concentration camp. Unlike the fate of most of his fellow Jews he survived and returned to Greece in 1945. In 1953 he repudiated his initial anti-Zionist fervour and emigrated to Israel where he died at an advanced age. Benaroya 1986: pp. 8-10.

⁷⁷⁹P. Dumont, "La Structure Sociale de la Communauté Juive de Salonique à la Fin du dix-neuvieme Siècle", *Revue Historique* 534, (April-June 1980), p. 383.

⁷⁸⁰The Judeo-Spanish title of the newspaper was *El Tzornal del Laborador*. Kandylakes 1994: p. 113. In the autumn of 1912 *Avante* was selling 5000 copies. Dumont 1980: p. 383.

finally hoped to be able to create in the short-run a network of co-operatives of consumption....”⁷⁸¹ By 1910 the *Federacion* was so successful that it created a branch for young Socialists as well, called the Socialist Youth.⁷⁸² Four years later the *Federacion* had its own drama group performing in Judeo-Spanish Molière’s comedy *Garonudo* and another comedy *El hastron*.⁷⁸³ The membership to the organisation cut across ethnic boundaries and religious difference and included Jews along with Bulgarians, Macedonians, Turks and even some Greeks, thus being a microcosm of the multi-ethnic profile of its birthplace.

Having said that it was no wonder that the Jewish members of the *Federacion* had the same numerical superiority which they had also been enjoying within the overall Salonika population at that time. However, this did not imply that the organisation was dealing only with Jewish issues. Of principal importance for its programme was the issue of the class struggle which embraced workers of different ethnic backgrounds. As Paul Dumont has argued, “the leaders of the socialist organisation had advocated in their majority a kind of moderate socialism which echoed the line of the right wing of Jauresian thought. Its members considered their organisation as an aggregation of all working organisations having set the defence of the latter’s interests as one of their principal goals.”⁷⁸⁴ At the same time they were concerned about the ‘national question’, that is the way in which the socialist movement should deal with the question of the different ethnicities residing either in nation-states or in multi-ethnic Empires. In this respect, they were influenced by the Austrian school of Marxist thought and its spokesmen, Karl Renner and Otto Bauer. While searching for

⁷⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸² Liakos 1988: p. 27.

⁷⁸³ Kerem 1996: p. 38.

⁷⁸⁴ Dumont 1980: p. 384.

a solution to the problem of ethnic identity within a multi-national *milieu*, Renner accepted the principle of “*personal autonomy*” according to which “the ethnic character of every citizen was a matter of personal choice”. What could protect this principle, Renner continued, was cultural self-governance, as had been the case in the Ottoman *millet*.⁷⁸⁵ Likewise, for the Salonika Socialists the solution was ‘federalism’, namely “‘a formation’ which all the nationalities could belong to without having to give up either their language or their culture.”⁷⁸⁶

Nevertheless, because of the numerical predominance of the Jews within the *Federacion*, it was inevitable that the line of the organisation would be influenced and occasionally dictated by the interests of the Jews. Hence until 1912 the line of the Salonika Socialists *vis-à-vis* the Macedonian question was in agreement with the beliefs of the majority of the Jews. Thus the Salonika Socialists supported the preservation of Ottoman rule in Macedonia and did not wish to see any of the competing Balkan countries annexing the area. However, once Salonika was officially annexed to the Greek state in 1913 the *Federacion* felt that it should give up its Ottoman profile and started to transform itself into a Greek organisation.⁷⁸⁷

The course of transformation was not unimpeded. The antisemitic atmosphere which reigned in Salonika in the aftermath of the entrance of the Greek troops into the city on 9 November 1912 perturbed Hazan, who undertook a long correspondence with the International Bureau in Brussels. In his letters he pointed to the antisemitic actions, and stated that the *Federacion* had never been on good terms with the Greeks, who as early as 1910 had expressed little support for its founding. What made things worse for

⁷⁸⁵A. Liakos, *H Sosialistike Ergatike Omospondia Thessalonikes (Federasion) kai he Sosialistike Neolaia. Ta Katastatika tous* (Thessalonike: Parateretes, 1985), p. 23. See also Marketos 1995: p. 162.

⁷⁸⁶Dumont 1980: p. 384

⁷⁸⁷*Ibid.*: pp. 384-385.

the Salonika Socialists was that they did not share the high nationalist feeling of the Greeks and thus risked being accused of anti-patriotic behaviour. Moreover, the socialist leader referred to the dreadful economic consequences which the Greek annexation had brought upon the city and sought the support of the Socialist International.⁷⁸⁸

Once the Greek annexation of the city was a *fait accompli* the reports sent to the Bureau in Brussels by the *Federacion* grew in numbers while their tone became increasingly alarming. *Inter alia* it was reported that some workers were arrested and imprisoned without trial, others were severely persecuted and a not inconsiderable number amongst them were beaten up by members of the Greek Gendarmerie. Not only did the *Federacion* find itself in a hostile and suspicious environment but it was also accused of working for the autonomy of Macedonia. “[With the new war] the situation of siege has become more fierce, the number of spies had increased and all our representations have been spied upon. What has happened additionally is that we have been suspected of working in favour of the autonomy of Macedonia. Thus we are being threatened with terrible reprisals.”⁷⁸⁹ Such an allegation placed the *Federacion* ‘on the razor’s edge’ of Greek nationalism with serious repercussions for the future of its members.

As Dumont has argued, whether such an accusation was reasonable and sound at that time has yet to be proved, for it was not until later that the Salonika Socialists adopted openly the idea of the autonomy of Macedonia.⁷⁹⁰ It was believed that the creation of an autonomous Macedonian state within a Balkan federation would spare the contested area from its economic decay, and at the same time guarantee the

⁷⁸⁸ *Ibid.*: p. 388.

⁷⁸⁹ As cited in *Ibid.*: p. 394.

⁷⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

independence of all confessional and ethnic minorities residing in the area.⁷⁹¹ For the sake of advancing their project, the Salonika Socialists put all their efforts into gaining the support of the International Bureau whose ideological basis at that time was friendly towards federal solutions.

After a short period of tranquillity the socialist scene in Salonika was radically changed and gave birth to new developments. The winter of 1914 which had witnessed a protracted mood of social unrest made the Greek authorities take a severe stance and harass the Socialists who were viewed as the instigators of the social agitation. After having been contacted by Hasan for some times, the Socialist International considered the time appropriate to take an active role and supported publicly the persecuted members of the *Federacion*.⁷⁹²

Camille Huysmans, the secretary of the Socialist Bureau in Brussels, took the lead in this intervention. Despite the active intervention of renowned Socialists and official agencies the Greek authorities did not relent. The list of arrests became longer and came to include names such as Arditti (1891-1943), one of the founding fathers of *Federacion*, responsible for the press and for dealing with the working corporations, Samuel Yona and Benarogia. The Salonika Socialists did not give up and insisted on trying to activate their comrades in Europe. At the same time the first signs of an incipient co-operation between Jewish and Greek Socialists became evident. On the occasion of the visit of Venizelos to Brussels in July 1914 Platon Drakoules, one of the principal leaders of Greek socialism, decided to stand publicly by his Salonika comrades and defy the high cost of his bold attitude, that is imminent arrest. The same stance was followed by other socialist organisations in the rest of the country. The drastic steps which had been taken by the International remained fruitless. The Greek

⁷⁹¹ *Ibid.*: p. 395.

⁷⁹² *Ibid.*: pp. 401-402.

Premier had to cancel his visit to Paris because of the unrest created between Serbia and Austro-Hungary.⁷⁹³ Immediately thereafter the clouds of war spread above Europe rendering all other issues of secondary importance.

Once the issue of Greece's entry into the Great War surfaced the *Federacion* interpreted it as an antagonism of imperialist powers which, instead of solving the national question in Europe, would aggravate the situation of minorities caught in the middle of the military embroilment. Consequently, the Salonika Socialists, together with the majority of their fellow Jews in Salonika but motivated by different reasons, adopted the minimalist national programme of the anti-Venizelists, who defended the idea of a "small but decent Greece", and advocated neutrality.⁷⁹⁴ In 1915 they voted against Venizelos and showed that *their* way to social emancipation was different from his 'ethnic-inspired social legislation', voted by his government in 1912 in an effort to "usurp [*Federacion's*] social space".⁷⁹⁵ This 'anti-nationalist' stance stained the profile of the *Federacion* in the eyes of the Venizelists, who, in the years to come, would strive to eliminate communist activities.

Before the Great War came to an end, thereby allowing for pre-war political developments to resume their importance, reference has to be made to the Great Fire of 1917 which was doomed to change for ever the life of all Salonika Jews, Jewish Socialists included. One of the most important aspects of the new city plan drawn in the aftermath of the Fire, was that "the poorest and mostly working-class part of the Jewish community, more than a third of the total, [...] moved to certain suburbs under miserable housing conditions." As Mavrogordatos has argued, "these ghetto-like peripheral settlements became both the strongholds of the Jewish Left and the target of local Greek

⁷⁹³*Ibid.*: pp. 402-405.

⁷⁹⁴Benarogia 1986: pp. 9-10.

⁷⁹⁵Marketos 1995: p. 159.

antisemitism.”⁷⁹⁶ Indeed, during the inter-war years in the lower class quarters of *Angelakes, Hirsch, Quartier Orient, Ténékémalé, Régie, Quarter 151* Associations were set up by the Jewish Socialists which organised general assemblies and came together in congresses where they dealt with issues, mainly of an economic nature, troubling the poor Jewish inhabitants of these quarters.⁷⁹⁷ Despite the lack of sufficient documentation, one could assume, that given the dominant presence of these leftist associations within the lower class quarters, these organisations also functioned as the mobilising forces on the eve of elections thereby succeeding in guaranteeing the stable presence of Jewish Communists in the communal assembly.

The acute accommodation problem bequeathed, especially, to the lower class Jewish inhabitants must have played an important role in the decision of the *Federacion* to overlook national differences and pursue a co-operation with their Greek counterparts, in order to strengthen their local social struggle.⁷⁹⁸ In 1918 the *Federacion* transferred its activities to the Greek socialist scene and became an integral part of the Socialist-Working Party of Greece (SEKE), established in November of that year. During the founding congress of the party the “*Federacion*, the biggest socialist organisation in Greece at that time (800 members altogether), sent 10 delegates.”⁷⁹⁹ Of particular importance was the presence of Jewish delegates who numbered seven out of thirty-four delegates. A. Pekhna was elected as the president of the congress. Other prominent Jewish leaders, such as Benarogia, Kouriel and Arditti, participated actively in the different committees, discussions and decisions. In 1919 the General

⁷⁹⁶Mavrogordatos 1983: p. 254. The very existence of lower class, middle class and upper middle class Jewish neighbourhoods within Salonika revealed the deep social conflict simmering amongst Salonika Jews. See K. Tomanas, *Oi Katoikoi tes Palias Thessalonikes* (Athens: Exantas, 1992), pp. 36-37.

⁷⁹⁷*Avante*, 23 November 1926. (As translated by Jacque Strumsa).

⁷⁹⁸Marketos 1995: 153.

⁷⁹⁹Kakoulides 1991: p. 60.

Confederation of Greek Workers (GSEE) was founded. The influence which the members of the *Federacion* succeeded in exerting was indisputable, since they managed to structure the organisation of the newly-born group according to the principal of the class struggle, which had always been the fundamental principal of the Salonika Socialists.⁸⁰⁰

According to Ioannes Kakoulides the general trend of the Jewish Socialists could be characterised as belonging to the central wing of the international working movement of the period (Second International) and had little to do with the principle of Bolshevism which was hardly known in Greece at that time. It was during the first national council of SEKE in May 1919 that the issue of the future ideological orientation of the party came to the surface, setting off a number of internal conflicts which destroyed the cohesion of the party for some years. Thus the members of the SEKE were confronted with the dilemma of whether their organisation should adhere to the Third International or follow an independent course. A strong dispute broke out among the Jewish Socialists (Benarogia, Pekhna and Arditti versus Kouriel), which resulted in 1924 in the expulsion of Benarogia and Pekhna from the party.⁸⁰¹

In April 1920 the SEKE joined the Communist International (CI), thus proving that the left faction of the organisation had predominated over the right wing. In 1921 the *Federacion* continued to be divided between those who thought that Greece should accept the twenty-one positions of the CI and those who believed that Greece had not yet achieved the required level of capitalist evolution and was thus immature to head for Bolshevism. The necessary turning point was the first Panhellenic Conference of the SEKE in February 1922, when it was decided *inter alia* that the party recognised the value of the decisions of the CI but that these communist provisions would be applied in

⁸⁰⁰ *Ibid.*: pp. 59-60.

⁸⁰¹ *Ibid.*: pp. 62-63.

Greece according to the particular conditions of the country. During the convention of the National Council of the SEKE in May 1923 it was further decided that the party should adapt itself to the decisions of the CI which had been taken during the IV Conference (1922-1923) and had produced the principle of the “United front” of the working class. The class question apart, it was the first time that the political agenda of the SEKE included the ‘national question’ and pledged itself to fight for the “right of the minorities for the free disposition of their fate ”.⁸⁰² Both questions merged one year later during the III Extraordinary Congress of the SEKE (2 November until 3 December 1924) when the organisation took the name KKE and became a section of the Communist International. One of the resolutions taken during this conference provided for the creation of a “united front of workers, peasants and oppressed ethnicities in the struggle against the oppressing bourgeoisie, for the sake of the right of the self-determination of the ethnicities in favour [of the inclusion] of the Balkan people in the Balkan Federation...”⁸⁰³ As was declared elsewhere, the right of self-determination could result in “the secession [of the Macedonian and Thracian people] from Greece and the creation ... of a united and independent state....”⁸⁰⁴

The importance of this decision was multi-fold. On the one hand, it helped the KKE increase its legitimacy abroad since it thereby proved its allegiance to the political atmosphere prevailing in Moscow and in other communist circles at that time. Indeed recent developments had highlighted the popularity of the ‘national’ issue and its importance for the manipulation of public opinion. A case in point was the Polish Communist Party whose indifference towards the national question had made Grigori Zinoviev, a representative of the Comintern, accuse the Polish Communists of ‘national

⁸⁰²Katsoules Vol. II 1976: pp. 32-37.

⁸⁰³*Ibid.*: pp. 128-129.

⁸⁰⁴*Ibid.*: p. 131.

nihilism', thereby pointing to their failure to incorporate in their agenda national issues which would appeal to national minorities (Ukrainian, Belorussian, Lithuanian, German and Jews) and bring them closer to the Party. According to the Comintern official the dominant internationalist discourse of the Communist Party should be held back and make room for the 'national issue' to appear on the scene. This issue was a potentially powerful political weapon which, if properly used, could bring substantial benefits for the Communists' struggle. As Zinoviev expressed it in eloquent terms, "... our main criterion should be the best way to attack the bourgeoisie, to grip the enemy by the throat."⁸⁰⁵

Similar developments in Balkan countries had encouraged the KKE to take up the 'national question'. The first, albeit abortive, attempt to discuss the issue of national oppression in the multi-ethnic region of Macedonia and propose as solution the creation of an independent Macedonia was made by Vassili Kolarof, the Bulgarian representative to the III Congress of the Communist International, in 1921. The issue was again discussed in 1922 during the IV Conference of the Balkan Communist *Federacion* but met the negative reaction of the Greek (Giannes Petsopoulos), Yugoslavian and Romanian representatives.⁸⁰⁶ Despite these failures, in the autumn of 1923 Kolarof and Georgi Dimitrof pressed again for the motto of an independent Macedonia, which, after having secured the support of Dimitri Manouilski, a Comintern specialist in Balkan issues, was adopted by the Executive Committee of the Balkan

⁸⁰⁵As cited in J. Brun-Zejmis, "National Self-denial and Marxist Ideology: The Origin of the Communist Movement in Poland and the Jewish question: 1918-1923", *Nationalities papers*, XXII /1 (1994), p. 40.

⁸⁰⁶He answered that the "communist parties of the other Balkan countries cannot adopt mottoes, which had been ushered and exploited by the Bulgarian bourgeois governments since the time of their defeat in 1913. [No more can these parties accept these mottoes in a period] when hundreds of gangs of *comitadjis* armed and financed by these very same governments, continue their action in the Greek and Serbian sections of Macedonia." As cited in D. Kousoulas *KKE. Ta Protota Trianta Chronia, 1918-1949* (Athens: Hellenike Evroekdotike, 1987), p. 87.

Communist Federation. The initial reluctance of the Greek side was overcome during the V Conference of the Third International in June 1924 when Seraphim Maximos accepted the suggestion made by Manouilski. The Greek representative made clear that the motto for an independent Macedonia should not only imply ethnic liberty but the end of bourgeois suppression as well.⁸⁰⁷

On the other hand, although the final acquiescence of the KKE to the political line shaped by Moscow *did* endow the newly founded party with certain benefits, it also placed high political costs upon the party's profile at home since, by appealing for the unification of all three parts of Macedonia (Greek, Yugoslav, Bulgarian) into a single autonomous state within the context of a Balkan Federation, it had been actually assenting to a dismemberment of Greek territory.⁸⁰⁸ This political line "emphatically confirmed existing suspicions about its anti-national character and provided the most virulent foundation for anti-Communism in Greece. It immediately provoked a wave of persecutions, which were to continue thereafter and which could now be based on the concept of treason."⁸⁰⁹

7.3. Bundist-like Communism in Inter-war Salonika

As far as the Jewish Communists in Salonika were concerned, one could argue that the decision of the III Congress of the KKE to fight for the creation of a united front between workers, proletarians and national minorities was bound to influence them decisively. The reason for that was that both the 'class' and 'national' issues of the KKE's political line bore direct relevance to the social diversity and ethnic

⁸⁰⁷*Ibid.*: pp. 77-82.

⁸⁰⁸KKE Vol. IV 1975: p. 157.

⁸⁰⁹Mavrogordatos 1983: p. 233.

heterogeneity of Salonika Jewry which the Jewish Communists aspired to represent at a local and national level.

Indeed, on the one hand, the multi-social profile of the Jewish community exposed many Jews to a variety of economic measures and social conditions, thus placing them on equal footing with other social classes who, irrespective of their ethnic origins, faced the same socio-political conditions. In other words, unlike Karl Marx's characterisation of the Jews as the "agents of market economy in non-capitalist societies"⁸¹⁰, being Jewish in Salonika could be a synonym for rich or poor, for 'exploiter' or 'exploited'. It was this intra-communal social cleavage that the communist press pointed to in December of 1932 by ironically referring to the Jewish bourgeois as 'our Jewish brothers' who, along with non-Jews, carried the same share of responsibility for the current plight of the community.⁸¹¹ Such an attitude echoed Karl Kautsky's completion of the Marxist exposition which had recognised the existence of class division amongst the Jews and had concluded "that development of capitalism transformed part of the Jewish population into the working class opposed to the Jewish bourgeoisie."⁸¹²

But if the class dimension was only too evident for the discourse of a Communist Party, the endorsement of the 'national question' proved more problematic

⁸¹⁰Marx's essay "On the Jewish Question", written in 1844, had attempted a macro-economic analysis of the social presence of the Jews in the historical course of "Western civilisation". In his effort to account for the "historical survival of the Jewish national identity", he pointed to "their devotion to the Jewish faith and attachment to their national idea". When coupled with their specific economic function in non-capitalists societies as traders and money-lenders, Marx continued, "Jews' nationality was solely defined on the basis of their social and economic functions... and the essence of Judaism, stripped of the superstructure of both nationality and religion, was reduced to a purely capitalistic function." Brun-Zejmis 1994: pp. 32-33.

⁸¹¹*Avante*, 10 December 1932. (French translation, Bulletin de la Press Israélilte à Salonique, File 39, Archive of Filippos Dragoumes).

⁸¹²Brun-Zejmis 1994: p. 34

since it was at first sight incompatible with the internationalist discourse of the Jewish socialist movement before 1924. However, the Jewish Communists in Salonika succeeded in bridging the gap between the two patterns by proposing an ‘international’ definition of the ‘national’ question. Namely while, on the one hand, Jews were assigned the characterisation of an ethnically distinct group, they were at the same time an ‘ethnic group among many’, that is, among other national minorities living on Greek soil and facing the same kind of official Greek behaviour. As the third chapter has shown, it is true that until 1924 Salonika Jews had not reached any high degree of linguistic, political and social assimilation within the wider Greek society. The community had thus preserved its closed autarkic common life and intensified the feeling of ‘otherness’ amongst many of its members. Similar was the situation of the Slavomacedonians, the Vlachs and other national minorities residing in northern Greece who, having only recently been incorporated into the Greek state, had achieved only a very low level of integration and were thus constantly aware of their status as ‘others’.⁸¹³

It was exactly the motto ‘otherness versus Greekness’ that the Jewish Communists referred to during the inter-war years in order to show that the status of ‘other’ was not a ‘Jewish privilege’ but was shared by other national minorities whose distinctive ethnic profile had rendered them, along with the Salonika Jews, off key to Greek nationalism. For the Jewish Communists, the self-awareness as ‘others’ was the vehicle that could potentially unite the Salonika Jews with other national groups in their struggle for national independence, the sole guarantee of which was the creation of an independent Macedonia.

To sum up, one could argue that Salonika Jews represented an important point

⁸¹³Carabot 1997: pp. 242-245.

of reference for communist politics since, as Vladimir Lenin had argued in 1924 in relation to Russian Jews, “the Jewish workers are suffering under a double yoke, both as workers and as Jews.”⁸¹⁴ Thus Salonika Jewry, because of its double status as social actors or/and as non-assimilated citizens, had a special mission to play in the implementation of communist politics throughout the inter-war years. In order to be able to assess the relatively high influence of Jewish Communists in Salonika it is important to see the way in which they tried to legitimate their double role and to prove its complementary character.

It has become obvious in this chapter that Jewishness held a conspicuous position in inter-war communist discourse and for this reason it had to be maintained at all costs. On the other hand, Jewish Communists did not wish to conduct exclusively Jewish politics but saw themselves as agents of the ideological programme of the KKE. Their loyalty to the party dictated that they should use Jewishness as a means to implement the KKE’s programme, that is, to use Jewish identity as a political weapon to intensify the feeling of solidarity between Jews and non-Jews, which was essential for the creation of an independent Macedonia. What made this combination possible was the way in which Jewish Communists dealt with the convoluted issue of Jewish identity. Thus, unlike the rest of the political groups which had referred to the Jews as a compact national group bound together more or less by a common religion and a common history, the Jewish Communists came up with their own interpretation of Jewishness, the main characteristic of which was its geographic dimension. In particular, Jewish Communists did not pretend to speak on behalf of the ‘imagined Jewish community’ scattered all over the Jewish Diaspora, but saw their role only in relation to Salonika Jewry. By stressing the local dimension of Jewish identity Jewish Communists could

⁸¹⁴As cited in Brun-Zejmis 1994: p. 34.

easily point to other ethnic groups which lived in the same area and shared the same regional history.⁸¹⁵

In particular, the first pillar of the communist version of Jewish identity was the cultural distinctiveness of Salonika Jewry. Although this was an idea widely shared by all political groups within the community, the Jewish Communists were the only ones to choose the Judeo-Spanish language as the characteristic *par excellence* of this cultural particularity. As they themselves admitted, Salonika Jews were considered as a 'national minority'⁸¹⁶ with Judeo-Spanish being their national language, which should never be abandoned.⁸¹⁷ Indeed, both *Avante* and *El Jiovenno*, the latter issued by the Federation of Greek Communist Youths (OKNE) and addressed to the Jewish youth in Salonika, were published in Judeo-Spanish.⁸¹⁸ And although *Ladino* was not a monopoly of the communist press there was a qualitative difference between communist and non-communist use of the language. Thus, while for both political worlds Judeo-Spanish was essential if they were to increase their readership, the Jewish Communists chose this language because they also wanted to show that they supported the language of the people, which was taught at home and spoken in the lower class neighbourhoods by ordinary individuals. The selection of Judeo-Spanish from within the linguistic melting pot of Salonika Jews was a political choice - as it has been for the Bundist Jews

⁸¹⁵The local dimension of a particular form of identity propounded by the Jewish Socialists has been also emphasised by E. Abdela in her analysis of the strike of the tobacco workers in Salonika in 1914. E. Abdela, "Thessaloniki: O Sosialismos ton Allon", *Ta Historica*, 18/19 (June-December 1993), p. 202.

⁸¹⁶*Avante*, 22 December 1927. (Greek translation sent by Bureau de Press (Salonika) to Greek Foreign Ministry, 1928 A. 21. IV. , HAGFM).

⁸¹⁷*Avante*, 24 February 1929. (French translation sent by Bureau de Press (Salonika) to Greek Foreign Ministry, 1929 A. 21. IV. , HAGFM).

⁸¹⁸Katsoules Vol. II 1976: p. 219.

in the choice of Yiddish⁸¹⁹ - and aimed at showing that the Jewish Communists had nothing in common with the Jewish middle class who despised the language of the people as being “miserable” and “mean” and who, more often than not, chose to communicate in French and Italian, the languages of the ‘aristocracy’.⁸²⁰ No less was the contempt of the Jewish Communists for Hebrew and Greek, which had no roots within the popular cultural legacy but were connected with the “anti-democratic” Zionist politics and the oppressive Greek laws respectively.

The establishment of the importance which Jewish Communists placed on the preservation of Jewish cultural particularity is also important if one wishes to explain what seems at first sight to be inexplicable, namely the struggle waged by the Jewish Communists in 1925 against the passing of the law which violated the Jewish Sabbath and imposed Sunday as the obligatory Closing Day in Salonika. It was clear that this attitude was by no means a proof of religiosity or acceptance of an individual aspect of the Jewish religion for at different occasions, before and after the imposition of Sunday Closing Day, the Jewish Communists had lived by the communist principle of irreligiosity.⁸²¹ Thus, according to the communist press, what warranted the non-participation of the Jewish Communists in the communal elections held in 1920 was their assumption that the elected bodies would deal with religious issues which did not matter to them at all.⁸²² At another occasion they questioned the *raison d'être* of the

⁸¹⁹During the eighth conference of the Bund held in Lvov in 1910 the demand was voiced that Yiddish become “the language of the Jews”. Ettinger 1994: p. 911.

⁸²⁰As cited in Rodrigue 1990: p. 85.

⁸²¹An indication of the anti-religious feeling of Jewish Communists was given by Lauer-Brand in Poland who argued that “[the demand for the Jewish Sabbath] goes against the interests of the Jewish worker ... Religious belief separates him from the Polish proletariat. Thus we should fight against such nationalist Jewish demands.” As cited in Brun-Zejmis 1994: p. 44.

⁸²²*Avante*, 23 December 1927. (Greek translation sent by Bureau de Press (Salonika) to Greek Foreign Ministry, 1928 A. 21. IV. , HAGFM).

Chief Rabbi whose maintenance in office (350,000 Drachmas annually) was too heavy a burden for the communal budget.⁸²³ Finally in 1934, three years after the Campbell riots, *Avante* took pity on all those Jews who had asked for God's help to save them from the antisemitic attack.⁸²⁴ However, the issue of Sunday Closing Day was slightly different for it was not only a religious issue but combined social and economic considerations affecting all Jews irrespective of their degree of religious affiliation. Thus the Jewish Communists seized the chance and supported this highly popular issue which could enable them to widen their political appeal and thus strengthen the position of the Communist Party in Salonika. Once again they concurred with the Bundists who for the sake of succeeding in transforming Russia into a national federation, where each nation would enjoy its own national autonomy and territorial independence, had asked the Russian government in 1910 to "grant the population the right to choose their own day of rest (Friday for Moslems, Saturday for Jews, Sundays for Christians)."⁸²⁵ Driven by similar considerations the Jewish Communists in Salonika decided to organise a demonstration and protest against the new measure⁸²⁶; in this way not only did they not deviate from the secular communist ideology but proved the high degree of their commitment to the political lines of the KKE which had given them the green light to make use of all measures able to advance the communist struggle.

Cultural distinctiveness apart, Jewish Communists placed extra emphasis on the second pillar of Jewish collectivity which referred to communal institutions. The latter included the communal assembly and the communal council which were established in 1920 and whose functions were regulated by the memorandum voted the same year. For

⁸²³*Avante*, 30 June 1934. (As translated by Jacob Strumsa).

⁸²⁴*Ibid.*

⁸²⁵Ettinger 1994: p. 911.

⁸²⁶I. Skourtes, "Oi Evraioi tes Thessalonikes kai he Kathierose tes Kyriakes Argias (1924-1925)", in *XII Panellenio Istoriko Synedrio May 1991* (Praktika Thessalonike: 1992), pp. 393-394.

the Jewish Communists the two institutions represented the nominal guarantors of communal autonomy since “the Jewish community came to form a kind of an autonomous small state with its own parliament - the communal assembly - its own ministry - communal council - chosen with the proportional system by the whole Jewish population irrespective of class and nationality.”⁸²⁷ Additionally, the Jewish Communists placed extra value on this administrative frame for it allowed the community to preserve a semi-independent political profile which was of the utmost importance, should the community be able to oppose assimilationist trends and preserve its ethnic identity.⁸²⁸ It is important to note that by paying attention to this propitious legislative context the Jewish Communists did not wish to emphasise the tolerance of the Greek State and thus risk losing voters who might prefer to support Greek bourgeois politics. According to them, the 1923 memorandum was far from being a conscientious gesture of good will on behalf of the Greeks; it was rather “a blessing from Heaven” deriving from the desire of the Greek government to relieve itself from the control of the League of Nations as far as the issue of the handling of Macedonian minorities was concerned.⁸²⁹

In short, one could argue that according to the Jewish Communists, the Salonika Jews were perceived as a minority carrying a secularised form of ethnic identity, the principal characteristics of which were linguistic diversity and a status of semi-autonomous communal life. Since the existence of both features were unique to the Jews of Salonika the Jewish Communists tried to emphasise the inextricable ties

⁸²⁷ *Avante*, 23 December 1927.

⁸²⁸ According to them the *very* fact that the Greek government considered that it was appropriate to forbid the formation of a council of all Jewish communities was indicative of the fact that the Greek authorities understood the importance of the weapon delivered to the Jews of Salonika in the time of their insecurity. *Ibid.*

⁸²⁹ *Avante*, 22 December 1927.

between the very existence of Salonika Jews and their immediate local environment. This geographically defined role of Salonika Jews placed them in the centre of local politics which also included the presence of other ethnically distinct groups. Thus, as had been the case with Russian Jews, the emphasis on the national question should not be mistaken for Bundism that is the advocating of national-cultural autonomy, but should be viewed as an agent of communist tactics which sought to create solidarity between Jews and other national minorities living in northern Greece. It certainly bore great similarities to the way in which Maksimilian Horwitz-Henrky Walecki had chosen to approach the Jewish question in Poland. His efforts to find a 'Marxist solution to the Jewish question' "distinguished a special category of 'cultural nationality', which would fit the description of the Jewish minority, as opposed to 'political nationality' that was the Zionist movement."⁸³⁰

Indeed, it was the fight of Jewish Communists against Zionism which encapsulated their overall political line. Anti-Zionist allegations included the mishandling of communal affairs which were to a large extent the responsibility of a pro-Zionist communal council. Thus in December 1927, amidst the political tension triggered off by the issue of state-subvention to communal schools, the communist press seized the chance and attacked Zionist politics for having fragmented the community and weakened its unity. The Zionists were described as a "filthy clan of gangsters" whose administration of communal affairs "had destroyed the memorandum of 1923, ... the very spirit of the community, the ideal of uniting all Jews in order to be ruled by the Jews and for the benefit of the Jews."⁸³¹

⁸³⁰Brun-Zejmis 1994: p. 38

⁸³¹Particularly harsh were the comments against the Zionist leader, Mentech Bessantchi, who was called "the step-father of Jewish division". *Avante*, 22 December 1927.

Moreover, *Avante* held the communal assembly responsible for having stayed in power illegally and disdaining the popular call for the holding of new communal elections. The motive which, according to the Communists, accounted for the council's anti-democratic behaviour, blemished the council's profile even worse. According to the communist mouthpiece - information confirmed by Greek sources as well- the communal assembly, which had risen to power in 1921 and which did not include any communist members because of the abstention of the Communists from the elections, did not surrender its power before making sure that the right to vote would be confined exclusively to the Jews paying the communal tax.⁸³² At the same time *Avante* accused the Zionists of having bought off the votes of the poor, by distributing free electoral booklets to the residents of the Regie lower class quarter.⁸³³ One of the immediate consequences of this openly anti-democratic measure was that almost one third of Salonika Jews, who were unable to support themselves let alone pay the communal tax, did not vote in the communal elections of 1925. Thus a great many Jews were deprived of the right of influencing the communal decision-making and had to face decisions taken for them but not by them.

Social exclusion apart, the communal assembly of 1925 was accused - with the exemption of the Communists - of having mishandled financial affairs, conspiring behind the Communists' back and spending money on issues which did not enjoy their

⁸³²*Avante*, 25 December 1927. (Greek translation sent by Bureau de Press (Salonika) to Greek Foreign Ministry, 1928, A. 21. IV. , HAGFM). The same piece of information is given by the Director of the Bureau de Press in Salonika. Thus, although it was known that Law 2456 regulating the status and operation of Jewish communities in Greece provided for universal suffrage, the special law concerning Salonika and validated during Pangalos's short dictatorship included a new provision which confined the right to vote only to those Jews who paid the communal tax. Bureau de Press (Salonika) to Bureau de Press of Greek Foreign Ministry, 28 August 1928, 1928 A. 21. IV. , HAGFM.

⁸³³It was estimated that around 25,000 Drachmas were spent on this occasion. *Avante*, 25 December 1927. (Greek translation sent by Bureau de Press (Salonika) to Greek Foreign Ministry, 1928 A. 21. IV. , HAGFM).

approval. The Communists believed that, instead of selling communal real estate without having the assembly's permission and using the money for the creation of a Greco-Jewish secondary school, this money should have been spent on urgent communal needs, e.g. accommodation issues and elementary education.⁸³⁴ Finally in 1934 the Jewish Communists did not hesitate to call the Zionist group of Macabees "Jewish fascists" and asked that the Jewish inhabitants of the lower class quarters to jeer at their forthcoming parade along the streets of Salonika.⁸³⁵

In parallel to accusations over the mishandling of communal affairs at home, Jewish Communists attacked Zionists for their work in Palestine. Since it was only in the early 1930s that Salonika Zionists adopted emigration as part of their Zionist programme, it was the case of Polish Zionists and their migratory schemes to the Holy Land which attracted *Avante's* attention as early as 1926. Thus unlike the Polish Zionist leaders, who had encouraged emigration as a measure able to heal the difficult situation of the Jews in the Diaspora, the communist newspaper published a fierce article entitled "No man, no smile for the Palestinian adventure" in which three basic reasons were given for the failure of the Zionist movement. For one, the massive emigration of Salonika Jews to America at the beginning of the twentieth century had placed Palestine second in the preference list of the emigrants, while, on the other hand, fresh hopes had arisen for the Jews with the implementation of the Russian Revolution which had given "a radical and fair solution to the Jewish question".⁸³⁶ Last but not least came the bad economic situation in Palestine⁸³⁷ which had affected many local industries and had triggered off a fierce problem of unemployment. At the same time the financial situation

⁸³⁴ *Avante*, 26 December 1927. (Greek translation sent by Bureau de Press (Salonika) to Greek Foreign Ministry, 1928, A. 21. IV. , HAGFM).

⁸³⁵ *Avante*, 30 June 1934.

⁸³⁶ *Avante*, 23 November 1926.

⁸³⁷ *Ibid.*

of the Executive Committee of the World Zionist Organisation was too meagre to support sufficiently the life of the newcomers and, as it was eloquently put, “the sums of money which reached the Executive with great difficulty were devoured by the thousands of emigrants in whose eyes Palestine had been presented as a rich [country] where milk and honey flow[ed].” In order to corroborate its anti-Zionist mood the communist mouthpiece published the comments of Hon Halon, a Polish emigrant who had returned to Warsaw after having failed to settle in Palestine. Mr Halon, along with other disappointed Polish emigrants, referred to Palestine as “exile” and not, as the Zionist leaders might have wished, “Jewish land” and once back in Poland, tried to develop a counter-migratory movement by discouraging other Polish Jews from leaving for Palestine. According to the communist mouthpiece this campaign was so strong that it risked “sinking totally the Polish Zionist movement” and raised the concerns of Zionist leaders who, as a countermeasure, organised a meeting and called as speakers other emigrants who had only positive things to say about Palestine.

And that [was] how Zionism aspired at solving the thorny Jewish question, [by] recruiting *Halutzim* for a country which produced nothing, increasing the blood of the dissatisfied and the poor, making them believe that Zionism was not responsible [for their misfortunes] and canalising [their] discontent towards the Muslim element, [sometimes] even towards England....⁸³⁸

Six years later it was the turn of Salonika Zionists to face the communist allegations over their politics in Palestine. As early as 1928 *Avante* had disapproved of the emigration of Salonika Jews to France because it enfeebled the social struggle in Salonika.⁸³⁹ In the summer of 1933 the tightening up of emigration control through the restriction of the ‘tourist’ emigrants had resulted in many Salonika Jews being left

⁸³⁸ *Avante*, 23 November 1926.

⁸³⁹ Skourtes 1992: p. 238.

stranded in different shores of the Middle East. With a vehement article titled “Criminal politics”, *Avante* put the blame for the plight of these ‘wandering Jews’, deprived of their fortune at home and unable to continue their lives abroad, exclusively on the negligent and careless politics of Salonika Zionists. The latter had triggered off the idea of emigration to Palestine, which had subsequently overwhelmed many Salonika Jews, but had failed to provide them with the necessary qualifications. The results of this hazardous work were utterly destructive for the masses who were left destitute with no hope and no work.

The first signs of the criminal policy of Zionism become visible. A large section of indigenous Jews have lost their minds because of the terrible emigration propaganda waged by the newspapers, have liquidated their accommodation and even their clothing and brought themselves to Palestine. Many letters sent by emigrants from the coffee shops in Tel Aviv refer with bitterness to their situation and unveil the criminal politics of Zionism. They anathematise those responsible for having made their position much worse. And we are just at the beginning. In the near future the consequences of the criminal politics of Zionism will be worse. The emigrants, who clustered in the streets of Tel Aviv and whose life is terribly lamentable, once their savings are used up will have to come back. It is impossible to be otherwise..... The Jewish worker of Salonika, desperate, economically and politically suppressed by antisemitism and having lost all his hope for a better future, is more vulnerable to exploitation by the worst vagabonds, by different kings of “ideologists” of Zionism, by the “defenders” of the Jewish nation. By reinforcing the wave of emigration the vagabond Zionism is trying to apply a point of its programme, that is to settle Palestine with Jews without caring if Palestine could guarantee the maintenance of the emigrant. Furthermore emigration is being used as a source of income to all the Zionist organisations who as a band of *simmorites*⁸⁴⁰ who peel off all Jews interested in emigrating.⁸⁴¹

Moreover, Salonika Zionists were accused of corruption and bribery when allocating the emigration permits granted to them by the Palestinian Bureau. A case in point was recorded in August 1933 when an emigration permit destined for a cart-driver

⁸⁴⁰ A derisive term used to characterise members of a gang.

⁸⁴¹ *Avante*, 22 July 1933. (French translation Bulletin de la Presse Israélite à Salonique, File 39, Archive of Filippos Dragoumes).

named Saltiel from the Regie Quarter was given instead to Dr Jacques Allalouf for the sum of 12,000 Drachmas.⁸⁴²

However, if Jewish Communists rejected Zionism, which was the Jewish answer *par excellence* to the Jewish Question, they did not assess any more favourably the path of assimilation which encouraged Salonika Jews to overlook their distinctive ethnic identity and seek integration in their surroundings. As has already been argued, it was the intention of the Jewish Communists to fight for the preservation of the ethnic particularity of the Salonika Jews which was the *sine qua non* in order that they become aware of their status as 'others' and seek co-operation with other national minorities living on the fringes of Greek society. Additionally, Jewish Communists rejected assimilation as an effective weapon against antisemitism and supported their argument by referring to two exceptionally dramatic events which had sealed the history of Greek Jews. First and foremost was the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492 which had resulted in the uprooting of almost 250,000 Jewish people from the Iberian Peninsula, and second was the fierce antisemitic pogrom waged against the Corfiote Jewry in 1897 who had been accused of blood libel. In both cases Jews were the victims of fierce antisemitic attacks which were not prevented by the high degree of Jewish assimilation in their surrounding societies.

The balloon of assimilation is already deflated....The movement in favour of the buried assimilation is not a reason to abandon the struggle against the ideology of assimilation. On the contrary, we have to learn how to know closely this form of defeatism which disorganises the front of the national minorities, weakens them, renders them unable to organise their self-defence against the exploitation of the dominant class. This is a truth which shines even in the eyes of a blind man.... This is a proof that assimilation of the language and the customs of the dominant nation will not put an end to the competition amongst the people. We have it in front of us: it is the

⁸⁴²*Avante*, 12 August 1933. (Greek translation sent by Bureau de Press (Salonika) to Greek Foreign Ministry, 1933 A. 21. IV. , HAGFM).

history of our people of the Jews of Spain. We have become so deeply assimilated, in the Spanish culture that even five hundred years after our exile from Spain, Spanish remains our mother language. And it is because of that that we had been persecuted and exiled from Spain. In a recent past.... the Corfiote Jews, assimilated to the extent of speaking no other language but Greek, suffered pogroms. Here, in Salonika, the conflict between Greeks and Jews has not entered its most acute phase. But as soon as the Jewish minority begins to speak Greek and the Jew starts being a concurrent for the lawyer and the Greek functionary, we will see.⁸⁴³

The ascertainment of the Jewish Communists that neither a 'pro-Jewish' nor a 'pro-Greek' solution could save Salonika Jews from their current plight showed that, unlike the rest of political parties within the community, their *Weltanschauung* did not evolve within the traditional frame of Greco-Jewish relations but rather contained this bipolar set within the wider context of relations between the Greek government and national minorities. In other words, while the newly proposed scheme did not affect the class solidarity between Jews and other economically and socially oppressed non-Jews, at the same time, it created an ethnic alliance between Jewish and other national minorities. As had happened with the "most politically active East End Jews in the period between 1918-1939, who had rejected "'Jewish solutions' which implied their 'political separatism' from the rest of non-Jewish society and espoused with great fervour issues which appealed to non-Jews as well",⁸⁴⁴ Jewish Communists in Salonika used 'Jewish issues' to point to the more general economic and social context which characterised the lives of other destitute individuals and oppressed minorities as well.

A case in point was the assumption of the Jewish Communists that many of the measures espoused by the Greek state and aimed at altering the status quo of the Jewish

⁸⁴³ *Avante*, 24 February 1929.

⁸⁴⁴ E. Smith, "Class, ethnicity and politics in the Jewish East End, 1918.1939", in *Jewish historical Studies, Transactions of the Jewish historical society of England*, Volume XXXII, 1990-1992, pp. 358-359.

community were a proof of its coercive attitude towards minorities. In 1928 the communist mouthpiece protested vehemently against the refusal of the government of Michalakopoulos to increase the state subvention to the Jewish communal schools and thereby help the community preserve its distinct identity. As it was eloquently put by the communist journalist, the government had “a programme of extermination of the Jewish communal work” while at the same time the note of warning was sounded for the Turkish and Armenian minorities who would, sooner or later, suffer the consequences of the same intolerant policies.⁸⁴⁵

Even antisemitism, the Jewish issue *par excellence*, was not seen as a specifically Jewish problem but as a typical case of national oppression. According to the inter-war communist discourse the national minorities living in the Balkans were compact and ethnically distinctive populations suffering the tragic consequences of competing Balkan nationalisms.⁸⁴⁶ This was the result of the emergence of nation-states whose borders were delineated according to political considerations without taking into account the ethnic composition of the said areas. As a result, ethnic groups were found living in two or even three different states which more often than not showed little tolerance for the preservation of the groups’ distinct cultural identities and aspired at assimilating them into the dominant national culture. In particular, during periods of nationalist outburst these groups were chosen as scapegoats and blamed for anti-patriotic behaviour. It is against the background of minority oppression and not of pure antisemitism that Jewish Communists evoked the Campbell riots and other incidents of national oppression committed against the Vlach and Macedonian peasants in

⁸⁴⁵*Avante*, 2 April 1928. (French translation sent by Bureau de Press (Salonika) to Greek Foreign Ministry, 1928 A. 21. IV. , HAGFM).

⁸⁴⁶*Avante*, 10 December 1932. (French translation Bulletin de la Press Israélite à Salonique, File 39, Archive of Filippos Dragoumes).

Macedonia.⁸⁴⁷ According to the Jewish Communists the only effective struggle against antisemitism, and in turn against anti-minority behaviour, must be waged along the lines of the Communist Party which had proved with deeds its sensitivity to all ‘national questions’. Starting with the communist press, the Communists exemplified their pluralistic attitude, which, unlike the rest of the bourgeois newspapers, was the only one which had not had participated in the “game of mutually annihilating nationalisms in the Balkans.”⁸⁴⁸ Moreover, communist parliamentarians, who had been alarmed by the latest antisemitic writings of certain Greek newspapers in December 1932, tried to warn the government of Tsaldares against the danger of imminent pogroms and promised to start in the short run a campaign against the oppression of national minorities and of the Jews in particular.⁸⁴⁹ Finally the Communist Party had supported three Slavomacedonians from Florina who were tried in December 1932 on the charge of anti-Greek behaviour.⁸⁵⁰ Official communist policies apart, *Avante* used antisemitism along with other expressions of ethnic suppression in order to foster feelings of solidarity between Greek workers and Jews. In particular, it was reported that Greek workers had warned the poor Jewish inhabitants of the Campbell area that fascist members of the EEE organisation were approaching their neighbourhood with

⁸⁴⁷*Avante*, 17 December 1932. (French translation Bulletin de la Press Israélite à Salonique, File 39, Archive of Filippos Dragoumes).

⁸⁴⁸This article was written to corroborate the comments of Niko Fardes in *Le Progrès* where he had referred to the nefarious role of the press against the sincere collaboration of the Balkan people. “The Balkan press had no morality but represented a commercial enterprise like all the rest in the bourgeois regime. All the time that capitalism will govern the states and the peninsula and [that] the Balkan states will be dependent on the big capitalist states, the press will always be in the service of ... the international exploiters of the people’s ignorance.” *Avante*, 23 November 1926.

⁸⁴⁹*Avante*, 31 December 1932. (French translation Bulletin de la Press Israélite à Salonique, File 39, Archive of Filippos Dragoumes).

⁸⁵⁰*Avante*, 17 December 1932.

unfriendly intentions.⁸⁵¹ The philo-minority stance of the Communists and the workers gained further momentum when compared with the nonchalant attitude of the Tsaldares government in 1932 which was reported to have shown little interest in national issues.⁸⁵²

If parliamentary action was used to bring Jews and other national minorities closer to the Communist Party, it was the very ideological programme of the KKE which aspired to save the Jews, along with other national minorities, from their miserable plight and to help them maintain their distinctive cultural image. The KKE's motto for the creation of a free and independent Macedonia would distance the minorities of northern Greece from the oppressive politics of the Greek state and render them citizens of a multi-cultural federal state. As the Jewish communist deputy Michael Kazes put it in December 1932,

... the Communists fight against the national oppression of the Macedonians, the Vlachs, the Jews etc.... [they fight] for the immediate vindication [of the national minorities] such as the question of the schools, the recognition of their language, their culture, etc. and this can be achieved exclusively via their struggle under the flag of their party, the Communist Party, leading even to a free Macedonia.⁸⁵³

In order to allay the fears of those who argued that an independent Macedonia would be put under Bulgarian control and be manipulated by the Bulgarian *comitadjis*, Kazes reassured them that the Greek Communist Party had no sympathy for the cause of Bulgarian *comitadjis* who were accused of having massacred more than 30,000 Macedonians in Bulgaria.⁸⁵⁴ Moreover, he stated that the KKE "was against the

⁸⁵¹ *Avante*, 30 June 1934.

⁸⁵² *Avante*, 23 December 1932.

⁸⁵³ *Avante*, 10 December 1932.

⁸⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

autonomy of Macedonia which is being propagated by the Bulgarian *comitadjis*, and which would serve only Italian and Bulgarian interests. The autonomy of Macedonia does not signify its forced annexation by the Bulgarian imperialism. [This is something which is] opposed by Bulgarian Communists as Greek Communists oppose the annexation of Bulgarian Macedonia by Greece.”⁸⁵⁵

Ethnic oppression apart, Jewish Communists pointed also to the issues of class inequality and social repression which had taken a heavy toll on Salonika Jews. Once again, by campaigning against anti-working measures, unemployment, high rents and ‘slum-housing’ conditions, which affected Jews and non-Jews alike, the Jewish communist discourse in Salonika served not only Jewish local politics but appealed to non-Jews as well. At different occasions the communist mouthpiece expressed its solidarity with the struggle waged by all workers irrespective of their religious affiliation or ethnic origins. Being the bulwark of the Greek working class, the Salonika tobacco workers of the tobacco factories of Greogoriades and Kostatzoglou received in 1926 the warm support of the Jewish Communists who made an appeal and called all workers to participate in a meeting organised by the committee of the tobacco strikers.⁸⁵⁶

Towards the end of the 1920s the social and economic situation of the workers was further aggravated by the international crisis. To make matters worse, the tough social and political atmosphere initiated by the Venizelos government of 1928-1932 showed no tolerance towards expressions of social discontent while the voting in of the notorious anti-communist *Idionymon* law on 19 June 1929 intensified the atmosphere of social terror. The succeeding of Venizelos by Tsaldares in September 1932 did not make the situation any better and the economic problems continued to intensify.

⁸⁵⁵*Avante*, 17 December 1932.

⁸⁵⁶*Avante*, 23 November 1926.

According to a report from the Working Help of Greece, for the period spanning July 1929 to 31 December 1932, “12,000 arrests took place, and 2,203 sentences with a total of 1,936 years imprisonment and 785 years of exile were imposed. Around 120 left-wing soldiers were exiled to Kalpaki. 1,355 workers and peasants had been wounded and beaten up by the police and the gendarmes. 8 were murdered. Three were sentenced to death and executed.”⁸⁵⁷ In Salonika, in particular, *Avante* reported in 1934 the beating of Abraham Ezrati because of selling the communist mouthpiece.⁸⁵⁸ The Salonika Communists defied the climate of political terror and adopted the heroic and optimistic pattern of their Greek comrades, thereby stating that these measures would not cause the fighting spirit of the workers to buckle. “The imprisonment and the exile, the assassinations and the oppressive measures, the defamation against our party and its members, have no other effect but to increase its influence among the ranks of the working masses, and contribute to their persuasion about the politics of the party.”⁸⁵⁹

Additionally, the Jewish communist press castigated the anti-working policies of the governments which had induced the high rate of unemployment and poor living conditions. In December 1932 *Avante* reckoned the number of unemployed workers to be some tens of thousands, which was quite a high number in relation to the relatively small population of 6 million. According to the same article the situation appeared to be particularly critical in Salonika, for there were more than 10,000 unemployed, if taking into consideration “the 3500 tobacco workers, 2000 metallurgists, 4000 builders, 1000 shoemakers, and 1000 employees.”⁸⁶⁰ Two years later the Jewish Communists expressed their support for the Jewish workers working in the printing houses of the

⁸⁵⁷As cited in Solaro 1975: pp. 78-79.

⁸⁵⁸*Avante*, 30 June 1934.

⁸⁵⁹*Avante*, 10 December 1932.

⁸⁶⁰*Avante*, 17 December 1932.

Jewish dailies *Action* and *La Volonté*, who were reassured that their 'class brothers', the Greek printers and the Bourse of United Workers, supported their strike unanimously.⁸⁶¹

Moving away from the specific problems of the working class the Jewish Communists dealt extensively with the problems of accommodation which tormented the Jewish inhabitants of the lower class quarters. According to the communist mouthpiece the former had been repeatedly deluded by the hollow words of different governments, who had promised them to see to their plight and ameliorate their standards of living. When in December 1932 representatives of the Tsaldares government visited the wretched lower class quarters and reflected on measures likely to improve their situation the communist mouthpiece regarded this gesture as a sly measure of political opportunism. In this way the Jewish Communists differentiated themselves from the rest of the Jews, who attributed to this gesture a philo-Semitic character. The Communists believed that by throwing some 'crumbs' of happiness and political equality to the Jews - these were economic aid in the lower class quarters and suppression of the separate electoral college - the Popular Party was aiming to attract Jewish voters and thereby help to consolidate its precarious political position in the district of Salonika.

We have had enough with promises. The experience of promises is too great among the workers of the quarters. And as we have cited in our columns, the position of the Popular Party towards the masses is dictated by the interest of Mr. Tsaldares. He wants to win for the profit of his party the trust of the Jewish masses and we do not exclude that he might even throw us some crumbs. We had explained that with the promise of the suppression of the separate electoral college the Jewish bourgeois press had tried to present Tsaldares' party as the party the most loyal to the Jews. But until now we had seen nothing but promises.⁸⁶²

⁸⁶¹ *Avante*, 30 June 1934.

⁸⁶² *Avante*, 17 December 1932.

For the Jewish Communists the fact that the accommodation problem was persisting as late as 1934 lent itself not only as an additional proof of the purely rhetorical philo-Semitic policy of Tsaldares but of the negligence of communal authorities towards all 'real problems' troubling Salonika Jews. Instead of taking action and compensating for their 'criminal inactivity', the so called 'small emperors' preferred to deal with their petty affairs. The situation became really explosive in August 1934, when 60 huts in the neighbourhood of *Ténékémalé* were about to be demolished while dozens of inhabitants of Regie were threatened with eviction.⁸⁶³

Although unemployment and lack of proper accommodation were beyond any dispute the most acute economic problems faced by the Jewish masses during the inter-war years, they were not the only issues which attracted the attention of the Jewish Communists. The latter included in their political agenda the thorny issue of military exemption of the Jews, whereas in 1934, in particular, they used it to discredit the Tsaldares government and to expose once again the indifference of the Jewish communal authorities. As *Avante* wrote, although one of the pre-electoral promises of Tsaldares was the annulment of *Bedel* (payment in order not to serve in the army), his promise remained a dead letter after the elections. No more consistent was the attitude of the communal council which had refused to accept the commission of *Bediglis* with the excuse that this was not an exclusively Jewish issue. "The small emperors have declared cynically, via the mouth of Moissis, that the question of *Bedel*, where hundreds of fathers with families will be enrolled in the army for not having paid the tax and will [have to] abandon their families, is not their work because there were also *Bedelgis* Greeks."⁸⁶⁴

⁸⁶³*Avante*, 30 June 1934.

⁸⁶⁴*Ibid.*

An indicative proof of the ethno-social discourse of Jewish Communists discourse can be found in an article published in *Avante* on 11 January 1933, which by exemplifying the political programme of the KKE attempted to foster strong bonds between national minorities and the lower social classes.

Comrades, brothers, We, the workers of the minority of Verria, who had not realised unfortunately until now the role which the bourgeois class had been playing to the detriment of the national minorities, who had been following blindly the bourgeois parties and particularly the Popular Party, headed in our district by the Vlach deputy Chatzinotaw, we underlined to you, that after having suffered so many oppressive measures, the only party which is genuinely interested in us is the communist party. That is proved by its work and daily struggles in favour of the national minorities. We hold the opinion that our position as poor, as national minorities, dictates our union with all the exploited and oppressed of the country, Greeks, Jews, Macedonians and Vlachs, etc. Our position should be under the communist flag and in the struggle in favour of our issues, against the national exploitation and oppression, for the bread, for work and for freedom, in order to work for the overthrow of hunger and calamity, for the sake of establishing the regime of workers and peasants and of the communist Federation of the Balkans. Long live the united front of all the oppressed and exploited! Long live the Communist Party!

Another issue which was included in the inter-war political agenda of Jewish Communists and which appealed to Jews and non-Jews alike was a strong anti-war attitude. The pacifist attitude of the Jewish left in Salonika evolved in parallel with the anti-war campaign waged by the KKE, which as early as 1924 had declared its position “against the bourgeois militarism, against the revisionist plans, [in favour] of the disarmament of the bourgeoisie and of the fascists lobbies, for the dissolution of the permanent army....”⁸⁶⁵ This attitude surfaced with greater tension in the summer of 1929 when the Comintern had started an international anti-war campaign and the Central Committee of the KKE decided to “fight against the military preparation of the Greek

⁸⁶⁵As cited in KKE, Vol. II: p. 124.

bourgeoisie and of the imperialists, to defend the Socialist homeland and to transform the imperialist war into a civil war [aiming at] the establishment of a government of workers and peasants.”⁸⁶⁶ During the same period an article of anti-war content was published in *Avante* proving - *inter alia* - the identical political line between Jewish and Greek Communists. The article carried the title “War against the War” and declared the following:

Here, especially in Salonika among the Jewish minority, which can not even tolerate the fire of powder, the protest of the first of August will definitely have an imposing character. The times have gone when they were extolling the love for peace and singing the four-verses of the Marselleise. Today we have to oppose the most solid forces against those, who want to strangle us, in order to satisfy the imperialism of the foreigners. We have to know how to fight in order to defend our peace and our skin.⁸⁶⁷

Apart from being ideologically committed to preserving peace the Jewish Communists by the end of the 1930s tried to show that arms build-ups and an armaments race would lead to a new military conflict which would be to the utter detriment of the unemployed, the workers and the poor who should instead be the principal recipients of the exorbitant amounts of money being spent on weapons. This allegation was directed in December 1932 against the Tsaldares government while, two years later, the anti-war attitude of Jewish Communists went beyond the Greek borders and dealt with the intense military efforts of other Balkan countries such as Serbia, Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey.⁸⁶⁸

However, in their traditional efforts to make their programme appealing to Greeks and Jews alike, the anti-military stance of Jewish Communists was connected

⁸⁶⁶As cited in Kousoulas 1987: p. 2.

⁸⁶⁷*Avante*, 19 June 1929. (Greek translation sent by Bureau de Press (Salonika) to Greek Foreign Ministry, 1929 A. 21. IV. , HAGFM).

⁸⁶⁸*Avante*, 30 June 1934.

with the cruel life of Jews in the Greek army who suffered under their double quality as soldiers and as Jews. Indeed an article published in *Avante* claimed that the soldiers were forced to lead a difficult life, deprived of good nutrition and politically suppressed, unable to read a newspaper and discuss political issues. The anti-military stance of the Jewish Communists was intimately connected with the cruel sporadic appearance of antisemitic incidents in the Greek army. On 10 May 1930 *Avante* described in utterly dark colours the life of the Jewish soldiers who were “imprisoned for no reason, insulted and bitten for not having paid enough attention to theoretical lessons.” Moreover, Greek military officials were accused of exploiting every possibility in order to spread amongst non-Jewish soldiers their antisemitic propaganda. This included all negative images of the evil Jews, that is the Jews “ ‘as the wicked Jewish race, as the ones with no country, the Bolsheviks, the ones who want to dominate the world and kill the Christians in Russia’, the Christian killers.”⁸⁶⁹

With the rise of an openly fascist regime in Germany on 30 January 1933 the possibility of a world conflict alarmed the communist parties in different European countries and on 4 March 1933 the Communist International published an appeal calling for all workers to unite in the struggle against fascism and in support of the German proletariat.⁸⁷⁰ In October of the same year Hitler declared that Germany was no longer a member of the League of Nations and withdrew its membership from the Disarmament Conference. In Greece the parade of the fascists of the EEE in Athens intensified the communist anti-fascist mood and in March 1934 during the V Conference of the KKE it was decided that “‘fascism and war become every day a more tense threat and reality’ and [it is] the central duty of the KKE to create an anti-fascist front of struggle which

⁸⁶⁹Greek translation found in Konstantopoulou and Veremes 1998: p. 157.

⁸⁷⁰KKE, Vol. III: p. 642.

will block the road to fascism.”⁸⁷¹ Following this decision the KKE along with prominent Greek intellectuals in April 1934 launched a campaign for the convening of the Panhellenic Anti-fascist Congress.⁸⁷² Police forces intervened and cancelled the congress which took place as the Panhellenic Anti-fascist Conference later, on 5 June 1934.⁸⁷³

During this period, the Jewish press adopted the anti-fascist motto with great fervour. Fascism was accused of “stifling the Soviet revolutionary movement; filling even more the glasses of the capitalists.... and of the foreigners... of preparing the new massacre [and of helping] capitalism exit from the crisis.”⁸⁷⁴ According to the communist mouthpiece, the only way to fight effectively against fascism was the alliance with the Communist Party whose militant spirit was not decreased by terror and whose heroic attitude was continuing without break. One expression of the Jewish Communists’ anti-fascist struggle was their support for Demetre Partsalides, the communist mayor of Kavalla,⁸⁷⁵ who stood trial on the charge of “having transformed the town hall into a communist centre.”⁸⁷⁶ *Avante* invited the Jewish workers to support the communist Mayor, the so-called “guardian of the interests of the working class”:

The workers had to react in view of what was being done by the “tsiflico⁸⁷⁷ capitalist” government of Tsaldares who was about to expel the communist mayor of Kavalla, the comrade Patsalides, who had been loyal to the

⁸⁷¹KKE, Vol. IV: p. 508.

⁸⁷²Some of these intellectuals were Demetres Gleno, Kostas Varnales, Nikos Karvounes, Galatia Kazantzake, Elle Allexiou. KKE, *Syntome Historia tou KKE, Schedio*, Vol. 1 1918-1949 (Athens: Sychrone Epoche, 1988), p. 105.

⁸⁷³Ibid.

⁸⁷⁴*Avante*, 30 June 1934.

⁸⁷⁵He was elected mayor of Kavalla during the municipal election held in Kavalla on 11 February 1934. KKE, *Syntome Historia tou KKE, Schedio*, Vol. II 1918-1949 (Athens: Sychrone Epoche, 1988), p. 106.

⁸⁷⁶KKE, Vol. IV: p. 510.

⁸⁷⁷Derisive term used to characterise the owners of large property during the Ottoman period.

working masses and his party, and who during the duration of his office has followed a policy of relief - to the degree that it was possible - [aiming at improving the] miserable situation of the workers in Kavalla. In particular he had given 150,000 Drachmas at the occasion of Easter, 200,000 for all the unemployed... and ... 25,000 for the families without support. [This socially sensitive policy was in direct opposition to the bourgeois politics] followed by [the Salonika Mayors] Manos, Vamvakas and Mercouri who had let the workers starve. The Jewish workers should organise reunions and demand the annulment of the condemnation of Partsalides.⁸⁷⁸

Even more fierce were the Jewish communist attacks against German fascism. In the summer of 1934 Hitler's regime was buffeted by internal conflicts which were due to the economic crisis in industry, commerce and the German monetary system. Again, a policy described as the only way out was offered by the Communist Party:

Interior commerce is losing ground; unemployment hits the people; there are strikes ... [But] neither the numerous arrests nor the numerous death sentences could stop the revolutionary movement... the Communist Party mobilises in an illegal and systematic way the working class and others [in a struggle] against bloody fascism and [in favour] of the Soviet regime. And as von Papen's speech against Hitler indicated, it is the rising influence of the Communist Party which stimulates the increase in the discontented. But [we should be careful] not to deflect this discontent wrongly, but only within the Communist Party [fighting] for the victory of Soviet Germany.⁸⁷⁹

The publication of such texts in the communist press sought to establish a parallel between Greek and German fascism. Thus it is no wonder that all sorts of coercive anti-working measures espoused and applied by the Greek government were characterised as 'Hitlerian'. Given the strong antisemitic character of the Nazi dictatorship, this comparison could mobilise Jewish support for the KKE and strengthen its struggle against domestic fascism.

⁸⁷⁸ *Avante*, 30 June 1934.

⁸⁷⁹ *Avante*, 30 June 1934.

There was no day going by without the organisations of the working being humiliated, the working press being pulled in front of the tribunals, dozens of fighters of the working class being imprisoned or exiled for many years, without their advisors being persecuted and arrested and the conscientious intellectual being threatened with the loss of their work.... These are daily words of the international bourgeois, as well as of the bourgeoisie at home, waiting for the integral restoration of the Hitlerian regime with the establishment of a military-fascist dictatorship. ... But the working class... would not tolerate [all that] without resisting the installation of the Hitlerian hell. They are convinced, by their experience and fight against fascism, that despite its degree of barbarism and tyranny, it was not unbeatable. The working class is persuaded that fascism can be eliminated only by the united front of struggle comprising workers, villagers, working suppressed masses, moderately poor masses, honest intellectuals.... There is no doubt [that the plebiscite published in *Rizospastes*⁸⁸⁰] will be warmly received and that the Popular Bloc, the militant organism of the Jewish suffering masses, will greet enthusiastically the plebiscite [organised] against antisemitic fascism,.... exploitation, oppression, ... and pogroms.⁸⁸¹

7.4. Conclusion

As this chapter has shown, Jewish Communists in Salonika adopted a radical ideological programme which allowed them to hold a strong political position within the community, differentiating thus their political performance from that of their Greek comrades whose popular appeal remained rather low. By consistently defending both national *and* class interests of the Salonika Jews, the Jewish Communists achieved a double goal. On the one hand, they maintained their status as legitimate representatives of Jewish politics and, on the other hand, they proved their class comradeship with the CP thereby being able to appeal to non-Jews as well. What made this combination possible was the belief that the ethnic profile and the social status of Salonika Jews were inextricably associated with the very city which they had been inhabiting for longer than four centuries. The sense of belonging in Salonika was the catalyst which placed the Jewish minority next to other minorities residing in the area, advancing thus the KKE's

⁸⁸⁰The official mouthpiece of the KKE.

⁸⁸¹*Avante*, 30 June 1934.

motto which advocated the creation of the 'United front of workers, peasants and national minorities'.

Moreover, the considerable electoral success of the Jewish Communists in Salonika made them a point of political reference for the other political parties. Their fierce struggle against Zionism alarmed the Zionists who took measures to advance the national feeling of the Jews - namely the belonging of the Jews to a wider Jewish Diaspora - and thus contain the communist danger. No less worried were the assimilationist Jews who tried with charitable activities to improve the standard of living of many Jews and thus prevent them from joining the CP. What united the Jewish anti-communist opposition was their belief that Communism was the least appropriate guarantee for peaceful co-existence with the Greeks. Finally, the fierce anti-communist mood of the inter-war years rendered Communism the vehicle for the deterioration of Greco-Jewish relations and occasionally for outbreaks of antisemitism.