



Safeguarding through stability: British constitutional proposals in post-war Cyprus

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Abstract: ‘Constitution’ is often defined as a set of fundamental principles or established precedents according to which a state or other organisation is acknowledged to be governed. In the case of colonial Cyprus, Britain always aimed to safeguard possession of this strategically located island, with a minimum of cost and involvement in its internal affairs. This paper aims to report the efforts of the British to grant the Cypriots a constitution and legislature following World War II. Both the voices within Britain that protested over human rights’ violations in Cyprus and Cypriots’ ever-growing demand for self-determination and the Union of Cyprus with Greece (*enosis*), forced the British to move on with this process, which was not sufficient, however, to convince all representatives of the Cypriot population to pursue an agreement.

Keywords: post-war Cyprus, Britain, constitution, colonialism, civil/political rights

Introduction

It was four years after the British took over the administration of Cyprus from the Ottoman Turks that Cyprus’ first constitution was adopted in 1882. In doing so, the British set the context in which they were to wield their power and authority on the island. This action, although important, was not the definitive factor in shaping the island’s history or political system; it was in fact the social, political and ethnic contradictions – a characteristic of Cyprus’ tumultuous history – that moulded the colony’s legal and administrative structure and, consequently, its constitution.¹

Britain’s main objective was to secure its possession of colonial Cyprus, an island having a key location in the region, with the least amount of involvement in its affairs. The High Commissioner was bestowed executive authority, governing assisted by an executive council comprised of top British officials. To a degree, Cypriots were permitted to take part in the handling of their internal affairs, mainly through the legislative council, along with the rural and municipal councils. The population of the communities usually determined the number of Greek and Turkish members elected to the respective bodies. Turks, however, remained distrustful of the democratic process, particularly because they only comprised one-fifth of the populace, and sought protection against the Greeks by aligning themselves with the colonial administration. The British Empire, multinational as it was, and accustomed to this kind of dispute, employed it in order to minimise Greek influence in the legislative council. In order to do so, the council’s members, presided over by the governor, would include designated British officials of a sufficient number to allow the British and Turkish votes to equal those of the Greeks. The governor would then utilise his casting vote to ensure British interests would prevail. If the Turkish support was not guaranteed, the legislation would simply be imposed from London by Order in Council.²

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1 Evanthis Hatzivassiliou, *The Cyprus Question, 1878–1960: The Constitutional Aspect* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

2 Robert Holland, *The British and the Hellenes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 168.

Although this system was loathed by Greeks, political elite and commoners equally, another form of discrimination began to rise with the colony's institutions of representation – one based on class. The legislative council was mainly run by merchant and money-lending interests, founded on the basis of property occupation and stability of domicile, thus ostracising the majority of sharecroppers and wage-earners. The small holding peasantry, who comprised the majority of those with a right to vote, were for the most part indebted to moneylenders, and so forced to do their masters' bidding. Lastly, the lower classes were kept in a state of constant helplessness, within a seemingly unalterable world. In 1926, the Communist Party of Cyprus was founded, but it was unable to uproot the established political classes that employed Greek nationalism and the threat of godless Bolshevism to maintain their ideological superiority.³

It was neither the Greek nationalists nor the Marxists, but the Turkish Cypriots, who eventually jeopardised the political system's stability, by ceasing to emphatically support the British Colonial policies. This was due to the Turkish Cypriot community having embraced the ideas of Kemalism, following the establishment of the Turkish Republic. The island's political balance was overturned when, during the elections of 1930, the legislative council's Turkish Cypriot members – all three of them – expressed a desire for autonomy from the colonial administration. The latter was then forced to seek the aid of London to impose legislation, since it no longer had the support of the Turkish Cypriots. In October 1931 the Greeks led an island-wide revolt, following the introduction by council order of a tax law that the legislative council had already rejected. The British easily suppressed the revolt, abolished the constitution and established a dictatorship on the island.⁴

Governor Richmond Palmer – whose name would later be synonymous with the regime – would rule from 1933–9, using not only force, but also the aid of a bi-communal, pro-government body of opinion, in which leading members of the establishment sought a nomination for the Cypriot posts. In doing so, they attempted to retain their influence within the community. A limited number of intellectuals and clergy formed a small-scale opposition, led by the Bishop of Pafos, Leontios, *Locum Tenens* to the Archiepiscopal Throne. However, the only organised opposition to the regime with anti-government activity was the covert Communist party which mainly focused on establishing a bi-communal trade union movement.⁵

Post-war developments

With World War II impending, the dictatorship neared its end. By April 1941 restrictive legislations had been relaxed, leading to the founding of the Progressive Party of Working People (AKEL), which constituted a front for the Communist party. After the working class gained voting rights, following the passing of a new electoral law that essentially provided universal suffrage to male Cypriots, the Left saw a rapid growth of its influence. This was demonstrated in the municipal elections of March 1943, with the towns of Limassol and Famagusta gaining communist mayors. In June 1943 the Cypriot National Party (KEK) was founded by the Right, as a counter-reaction. It comprised conservatives who had been collaborating with the Palmer administration as well as nationalists that had opposed it. The Turkish side was similarly concerned; the conservative elite was disturbed at the expansion of a bi-communal movement, seeing the working class develop aspirations above its place, along with a higher tolerance towards Greek national sediments, all of which led, by 1944, to the founding of Turkish parties and Turkish labour and rural unions.⁶ Nevertheless, the colony's regime was not influenced by this multitude of political transitions, but remained an autocracy, with decisions made by the British authorities or the municipal administrations. The demand for political liberties, however, took second place behind the demand for *enosis*, as the growing sentiment for union with Greece grew exponentially after the war; though this sentiment conflicted with Greek foreign policy. The Greek government, a coalition of monarchists and right-wing republicans, a large number of whom had allied with the Nazis in an effort to eradicate the Greek communists (EAM, aka National Liberal Front), now made an alliance with the British for the same reasons. The official Greek state policy was an *enosis* within the context of Greek-British friendship and cooperation, with the *enosis* movement placing it in an awkward position. The only Greek Party supporting the movement was the communist one – beginning the Left's long-term tradition of upholding the Cypriot cause in Greece.⁷

Back in Cyprus, the ethnarchy council, whose members were nominated by the Archbishop, ordered the alignment of all Greek Cypriots with the Greek government. The AKEL on the other hand, whose militant colonial agitation was unmatched, demanded a council led by the Archbishop but elected by the Greek population, something that the Right

3 Yiannis Lefkis, *Οι Ρίζες (The roots)* (Limassol: [n.pub.], 1984), 58–9.

4 George Georghallides, *Cyprus and the Governorship of Sir Ronald Storrs* (Nicosia: Cyprus Research Centre, 1985), 695–708.

5 Rolandos Katsiaounis, *Η Διασκέπτική 1946–1948 (The Consultative Assembly 1946–1948)* (Nicosia: Cyprus Research Centre, 2000), 38–63.

6 Kiamil Tuntzel, *Στο ίδιο μετερίζι (In the same bastion)* (Nicosia: [n.pub.], 2004), 26–7.

7 Rolandos Katsiaounis, 'Οι ελληνοβρετανικές σχέσεις, ο Αρχιεπίσκοπος Δαμασκηνός και η Κύπρος' (Greco-British relations, Archbishop Damaskinos and Cyprus)', *Epeteris of the Cyprus Research Centre*, XIX (1992): 449–514.

found unacceptable, as it would imply a Left leadership within the national movement. Thus a struggle formed within Greek Cypriot ranks for political supremacy among the anti-colonial turmoil.⁸

The democratic political changes brought about by the war stipulated the replacement of the empire's old administrative system, which was by then considered antiquated. The advent of the Labour party which took power in 1945 did not bring any significant change in Colonial Office policies. However, a thinktank within its ranks, called the Fabian Society, proposed the shift to a socialist commonwealth, with the preservation of the British Empire.⁹ Colonies, naturally were not to be given independence, especially those with strategic value. The British Prime Minister Clement Attlee preferred to relinquish the colonies, eschewing Britain's role as a world power, but imperialist tradition was so deeply ingrained within the Labour party that the Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, managed to preserve the colonies.¹⁰ Cyprus' ceding to Greece was therefore out of the question as it was of vital strategic importance to the British Empire.¹¹

The Constitutional Assembly

On 23 October 1946 the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Arthur Creech Jones, declared his plans to summon a Consultative Assembly of distinguished Cypriot society members in order to submit proposals for the adoption of a constitution and central legislature.¹² This declaration convinced the Cypriot Right's moderate members that Britain did not intend to cede Cyprus to Greece, while the Left had for a long time been pressing for a delegation in order to promote the *enosis* issue. Responses were therefore diversified. Leontios, Bishop of Paphos and *Locum Tenens* of the Archbishopal Throne, led the delegation that was eventually formed. Forty days after their request for an interview, the Greek Secretary of State finally saw them, significantly after the Greek government had already given them a lukewarm reception. The delegation's demands were rejected, with the Secretary reminding them that Greece had not in fact asked Cyprus to join it.¹³

Baron Winster, the new governor, took office on 27 March 1947 after the delegation to Cyprus had returned empty-handed. He was a personal friend of Creech Jones, and thus a political appointment rather than a career colonial administrator. The Colonial Office and the island's top officials had been deliberating over the Consultative Assembly proposal for almost two years, when on 9 July 1947 Winster announced further details. It was to be comprised of delegates of the island's major associations and interests, and not an elected body. The Assembly's terms of reference were left intentionally vague: 'To make recommendations to His Majesty's Government on the form of constitution to be established in order to secure participation by the people of Cyprus in the direction of the internal affairs of the Island, due regard being paid to the interests of minorities'.¹⁴

The Assembly's selection process guaranteed the invitation of organisations and figures encompassing the entire political spectrum, including the Turkish Cypriots,¹⁵ while at the same time excluded the Church and the political parties, as the Colonial Office had stigmatised them for their previous thoughts of *enosis*.

Leontios, along with the ethnarchy council, were cautiously optimistic on the future of Cyprus, foreseeing a promising case for *enosis*, mainly due to their liaisons with a number of contacts in Greece and Britain. Leontios in particular, was not in favour of the constitution concession plan, in the light of his meetings with the Greek Archbishop Damaskinos and the Greek Consul Kountouriotis, and proceeded to propagate assurances he had received concerning the existence of a document jointly signed by Damaskinos himself and the British Prime Minister Ernest Bevin. From this information it became apparent that the *enosis* issue would in fact be favourably settled within the context of Greek-British cooperation.¹⁶ Thus, on 3 July, just four days after the announcement of the British proposals, Leontios addressed the people with a proclamation, its main message being 'Long live the *enosis* and only the *enosis*', essentially rejecting any discussion on the constitutional proposals.¹⁷

The National Cooperation Wing (PES) and AKEL, upon examining the circumstances prevailing both internationally and in Greece, came to the conclusion that the struggle for Union could not have a positive outcome:

8 'Η εθναρχία εις το ύψος της' (The ethnarchy should not yield), *Neos Kypriakos Phylax*, 2 June 1946.

9 David K. Fieldhouse, 'The Labour government and the Empire-Commonwealth, 1945-51', in *The Foreign Policy of the British Labour Governments, 1945-1951*, ed. Ritchie Ovendale (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1984), 104-5.

10 Bernard Porter, *The Lion's Share* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 1996), 321.

11 'Strategic colonies and their future' (paper prepared for Fabian Colonial Bureau, 1945, London), 35.

12 *The Times*, 24 Oct. 1946.

13 FO 371/67081, 'Note of a meeting on 7 February 1947'.

14 *The Cyprus Mail*, 10 July 1947.

15 CO 537/1876, 'Secretary of State for the Colonies to Governor of Cyprus' (30 Nov. 1946).

16 Rolandos Katsiaounis, *Η Διασκεπτική 1946-1948 (The Consultative Assembly 1946-1948)* (Nicosia: Cyprus Research Centre, 2000), 243.

17 'Διάγγελμα της Α.Μ. του Αρχιεπισκόπου προς τον Ελληνικόν Κυπριακόν Λαόν (Message of Archbishop to the Greek-Cypriots)', *Ethnos*, 14 July 1947.

Everything, whether objectively or subjectively, promoted and supported these here findings: that, in a Cypriot, Greek and international – political and military – manner, the solution to the problem of Cyprus is difficult, and the struggle rough and lengthy. This ascertainment marks the beginning of our primary position on the proposed constitutional freedoms on the part of the British Government. A position favourable to the participation in a progressive constitution and the transformation of this constitution from a weapon of imperialistic mitigation of the national-liberation struggle to an instrument of the people and a new pedestal for the development of the struggle for union against foreign domination, exposing the inconsistency and betrayal of the class of the bourgeoisie-squires, and, to the extent possible, the advocacy and solution of certain financial problems of workers and employees, within the period of the economic crisis that has spread the plebeian impoverishment.¹⁸

Of course, AKEL proclaimed that, despite the aforementioned declarations, it was ready to dismiss the British proposals if the Right and the ethnarchy agreed on a common struggle. Its proposal included in particular, the founding of a national-liberation organisation with the participation of all factions, under the auspices of the ethnarchy, the resignation of all Greek Cypriots appointed under the British government and the ‘enshrined abstention’ from any cooperation with the colonial regime. If the Right and the ethnarchy did not agree, then the National Cooperation Wing would respond positively to the invitation for participation in the Assembly.¹⁹

The Right responded negatively to AKEL’s proposal. The obsessive adherence to the motto ‘Union and only Union’ was a one-way path for Cypriot nationalists, seeing as, on the one hand, the Greek Cypriots that, according to AKEL’s proposal were about to be called to resign, were derived in their entirety from the conservative faction. On the other, the introduction of parliamentary life and electoral processes resulting from constitutional regulations would be beneficial to the Left, which had already shown increased levels of organisation and rallying.

Following the Left faction’s resolution that an *enosis* was highly unlikely in the foreseeable future, AKEL and a host of prominent centre-left figures decided to take part in the Assembly, utilising the ‘Self Government – *Enosis*’ motto. The line of reasoning behind this decision was that a constitution providing self-government could become a facilitating factor on the road to *enosis*. The Right, adhering to their own motto, ‘*Enosis* and only *Enosis*’, considered the constitutional path an admission of defeat in the quest for union with Greece. Despite a strong feeling of Greek patriotism within the clergy and intellectuals, it was the predominant balance within the community that dictated the policy of the main right-wing corpus. As a result, if the Assembly proved to be a success, the Left would dominate any coming elections, and parliamentary institutions would be granted.²⁰

In May 1946 municipal elections were held, and the results for the Right were devastating: only the small municipalities of Paphos and Kyrenia remained in their control; AKEL, in collaboration with distinguished centre-left figures, prevailed in all major town elections: Morphou, Larnaca, Famagusta, Limassol and even the capital Nicosia. A year later, in May 1947, the Archbishopal elections saw the triumph of the *Locum Tenens*, Bishop Leontios – who was hugely popular and supported by the Left – over Bishop Porphyrios of Sinai, who had the support of the Right, the Patriarchates and the Greek government.²¹ It was a victory that provoked an even harder opposition by the Right against the Assembly.

On 27 August 1947 Georghios Chrysafinis, a member of the executive council and head of Cyprus’ most prominent law firm, sent a memorandum to the governor, in which he set out the way Athens had intervened and eventually sealed the Assembly’s fate. Apparently, the Greek MP Demetrios Sfaelos and the mayor of Paphos, Christodoulos Galatopoulos, had been involved in the dissemination of the Greek government’s views to distinguished Greek Cypriots, including those invited to the Assembly. The government’s message – one even broadcast by Radio Athens – was clear: its efforts for *enosis* were nearing completion and the Assembly constituted a hindrance to these plans. Hence, after the union with Cyprus, those participating in the Assembly were guilty of treason for undermining the national cause and their punishment would be appropriate – following that union.²²

Athens was unnerved at the thought of the Cypriot left wing possibly acquiring legitimate power within the Cypriot civil society, as AKEL would then intensify its struggle for *enosis*, leading to a chasm in Greek-British relations that could disturb Greece’s political stability. Thus, Greek leaders, in aiming to convince Greek Cypriots that establishing the Assembly was ill-advised, chastised all attempts to do so, utilising nationalistic terms and Britain’s assurances that it was only a step away from conforming to Panhellenic aspirations. At the same time, Athens, when conversing with the British, only requested more aid in their civil war, without ever referring to the Cyprus issue. In Chrysafinis’

18 ASKI, Box 371, File 20/21/14.

19 ‘Συνταγματικά μεταρρυθμίσεις και η πολιτική του ΑΚΕΛ-Ανακοίνωσις ΑΚΕΛ’ (Constitutional Reforms and AKEL’s position), *Democrates*, 14 March 1947.

20 CO 67/341/7, ‘Political situation in Cyprus during April 1947’.

21 *Eleftheria*, 5 May 1947.

22 CO 537/2484, ‘Memorandum on the present political situation’.

memorandum to the governor he describes the degree to which the public had been convinced of the coming *enosis* during the summer of 1947, pointing out: 'If I did not already possess confidential information as a member of the Executive Council, I would have succumbed to this expectation myself'.²³

Even Leontios, the newly-elected Archbishop, had been convinced, denouncing, on 13 July 1947, the efforts made towards forming an Assembly and dissociating himself from the political factions that had helped him be elected. In the meantime, he continued to push for representation on an ethnarchy council covering the entire political spectrum. His efforts would be short-lived, however, as he was to pass away on 16 July. His illness was so brief that it was considered suspicious, particularly since his successor, Bishop Makarios of Kyrenia, was a known anti-communist and supporter of the Greek government.²⁴ Consequently, right-wing organisations refused to participate in the Assembly, leaving only representatives from left-wing organisations, along with Turkish Cypriots, who, of course, were not willing to leave the negotiations of the legislative process solely to the Greek Cypriots.

The Assembly, eventually convening on 6 November 1947, was chaired by President of the Supreme Court of Cyprus and esteemed lawyer, Sir Edward Jackson. The Mayors of Nicosia, Limassol, Famagusta, Larnaca and Morphou, as well as two delegates from the trade unions, represented the Greek Left. The Turkish Cypriots were represented by the Mayor of Lefka, an important Turkish town, a representative of Turkish municipal councillors, and the secretaries of the Turkish labour and farmers' unions. The British had also invited the Cooperative Central Bank's five-member board, who were all appointed by the government. This particular invitation was in fact the result of a British promise in favour of the strong anti-usury rural sentiment. Two Turkish members and one of the three Greek members – with moderate right-wing tendencies – accepted. A number of distinguished community figures were invited, including two Greek Cypriots, involved with conservative right-wing politics, one lawyer of Maronite extraction, representing the smaller minorities, and one Turkish Cypriot lawyer. All of them accepted.²⁵

On 6 November 1947, the very first day of the Assembly's deliberations, disagreements materialised, mainly related to its terms of reference. The Left was under constant pressure from the Right, as they had entered negotiations which did not include an *enosis*. Their claim that self-government was to them a facilitating factor for *enosis* could only be valid if they actually managed to achieve self-government. A deadlock was reached following the president's inauguration speech, in which he highlighted the items limiting the Assembly's terms of reference. The Left protested, claiming that their participation depended on believing that the terms of reference would permit the establishment of a self-government constitution. This was opposed by the Maronite delegate and all of the Turkish Cypriots, who supported Sir Edward Jackson's interpretation of the terms of reference. The next day (7 November) the president attempted to prevent the Assembly's collapse, and submitted the framework of a proposed constitution. The proposal included a new legislative council, with Greek and Turkish representation in accordance with their respective populations. Additionally, there would also be certain officially nominated members, but not enough to allow them to overrule the Greek majority. There would also be an executive council, comprised of senior civil servants and Cypriot members of the dominant party in the legislative council. These Cypriots could not be called ministers, as that would require self-government, so they would be 'associated' with the relevant government departments. The governor would retain supreme executive authority, having the power to enact into law bills previously rejected by the legislative council, or to veto bills previously approved by it.²⁶

The Left made significant efforts to ease the 'Turks' concerns, without whom they realised they had no hope of attaining self-government. So their press emphasised the fact that, despite Greek majority rule within self-government, the institutional arrangements would guarantee the rights of the community. To this end, on 16 November, left-wing Assembly members held a meeting with their Turkish counterparts, in order to propose a self-governing colony that would include a Turkish affairs ministry, headed by a Turk, as well as two other ministries with Turkish deputy ministers. In spite of all these suggested measures, the Turkish members still remained indifferent to the proposal.

The Turks were keen to see a system in which they would have control of their internal affairs, but with the British administration having supreme political authority. They supported the president in his appeal to move ahead with the constitution. Left-wing members thus found themselves in an extremely difficult position, having first agreed – as a tactical move – to pursue self-government instead of *enosis*, and now effectively being asked to abandon any thoughts of self-government whatsoever. This led to a memorandum being sent to the Secretary of State for the Colonies in London, on 24 November 1947, in which the Assembly's seven Greek left-wing members requested self-government for Cyprus. They noted that his reply would determine their subsequent approach towards the Assembly.²⁷

23 Ibid.

24 'Κύπριοι ιατροί αμφισβητούν την ορθότητα της διαγνώσεως και θεραπείας του Μακαριωτ' (Cypriot doctors question the diagnosis and treatment of the Archbishop's disease), *Democrates*, 30 July 1947.

25 *Cyprus Mail*, 7 Nov. 1947.

26 Secretariat Archives-SA1, File 15/47, 'Minutes of the closed session on 7 November 1947'.

27 'Αι γενικαί γραμμάι του συντάγματος αυτοκυβέρνησης' (General guidelines for a constitution of self-government), *Democrates*, 25 Nov. 1947.

This had not been anticipated by the Colonial Office, as they were prepared for a protracted process that would place the Cypriots' internal problems before the issue of *enosis*. In fact, the election of Makarios II to the position of Archbishop, gave rise to these theories, as he was a known anti-communist and his victory was also a triumph for the Right. Hence, the British optimism concerning Cypriots' acceptance of a constitution that fell short of self-government. When the rest of the Church's top positions were taken up by bishops whose views were similar to those of Makarios II, the intense ideological battle of the Church against the Left was set in motion. The ruthless political conflict even forced the Greek community's cultural and educational institutions to take sides. On 4 December 1947, after a meeting of the Colonial Secretary in Nicosia with the President of the Cyprus National Party, Secretary Dr Themistoklis Dervis forwarded a report to the Secretary of State stating that he:

- a. Admitted that *enosis* was unrealistic and undesirable at that time
- b. Preferred to see the collapse of the Assembly, if it would mean the preservation of the present administrative system, Would be inclined to partake in the Assembly if it continued, although found its declared abstention policy difficult to reverse in a public manner
- c. Would nevertheless take part in future elections
- d. The opposition to Communism now dictated all its policies²⁸

On 17 December 1947 Creech Jones proposed that the Cabinet's Commonwealth Affairs Committee reject the Greek members' demand, and instead formally acknowledge the Cypriots' aspiration for self-government and agree on a constitution review after a period of five years.²⁹ This proposal adhered to the Colonial Office's optimism that the shift of the Right's position might lead to Cypriot public opinion's acceptance of an offer falling short of self-government. However, the Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, dismissed it on the basis that the Left's demand for self-government was simply a scheme to acquire power before the forthcoming fall of Greece under Soviet influence. Besides, the deterioration of Britain's strategic interests in the Middle East – in particular the loss of Palestine – made the preservation of a foothold in Cyprus imperative. The inherent diarchy in the constitution, along with 'vague phrases such as the association of councillors with certain subjects' were strongly criticised by Attlee, who concluded:

If we are to take action on the subject, I would rather be steadfast in my view that we intend to retain full control of Foreign Policy and Defence, while relinquishing a fully responsible government with all fundamental safeguards for minorities. Britain's objective must be to urge Cypriots to form their own parties founded on internal socio-economic policies, and thus removing any thoughts of Greek nationalism.³⁰

Cyprus, however, was considered too important to be given self-government – in fact even Winster's outline for a constitution was regarded as being too liberal by Bevin and his like-minded allies in the Ministry of Defence and the Imperial Staff. Thus, Attlee's recommendations were met with apprehension and the Committee decided to postpone any resolution on the subject, while in the meantime requesting the consideration of Winster, the Governor of Cyprus. They were in fact asking for the view of Creech Jones who was a close associate of Winster. The latter dismissed self-government. In addition, if Attlee insisted on his notion, then the secretary of state knew he could depend on the judgement of the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defence. Creech Jones submitted his proposal on 19 January 1948, recommending a constitution be granted to Cyprus without however allocating self-government to the island. He deemed a constitution to be acceptable:

- a. By the Left, if their request for complete self-government was met with a moderate undertaking
- b. By the Right, if they were confident that self-government would not materialise swiftly enough to empower extreme elements
- c. By the Turkish minority, if the constitution guaranteed their safety

28 CO 537/2478, 'Acting Governor to the Secretary of State 4 December 1947'.

29 Prime Minister's Office Archive-PREM 8/740, 'Memorandum by the Secretary of State, 17 December 1947'.

30 CO 537/2478, 'Memorandum by the Prime Minister, 22 December 1947'.

The colonial administration had perceived a breach in AKEL's leadership, a fact evident in the aforementioned recommendation, which for the first time encompassed the prospect of the Cypriot Left accepting something less than complete self-government.³¹ The Commonwealth Affairs Committee proceeded to advise the Assembly to cease the formulation of constitutional proposals, and to accept and work on an outline constitution that the Colonial Office would submit. The four months it took for the outline to be drawn up saw an inflammation of the political balance in Cyprus, with an unprecedented wave of strikes in the mining and construction sector.³² These circumstances consolidated the Right's decisiveness against self-government. The Church, now supervised by the caucus of Kyrenia, dismissed all forms of constitutional liberalisation, and requested that the Governor outlaw AKEL on the assumption that communism would expand rapidly if Britain weakened its hold on the island. AKEL maintained that social afflictions could be mitigated with a self-governing constitution, inducing strikes that involved unions and villages of Greeks and Turks alike, something that daunted Turkish Cypriot leaders, such as Dr Kuchuk, leader of the Turkish National Party, who was forced to visit mining villages and argue against self-government.³³

The British constitutional proposal, announced on 13 May 1948, was very much the same as the one outlined by Jackson in November 1947, but in some ways even more restrictive. This was in part a consequence of the looming Arab-Israeli conflict, which left Cyprus as Britain's only stable foothold in the region. The executive council would include members of the majority party in the legislative council, but only in an advisory status, associated with certain departments of the government, albeit of minor significance – as had already been decided – such as those of transport and electricity supply. The governor would retain overall executive authority, including, of course, the departments of defence, internal security and foreign policy, but he would also be able to veto bills already passed by the legislative council and enact into law bills which the council had dismissed.³⁴ In other words, the new constitution granted the governor more authority than that held by his predecessors under the previous constitution of 1882.

On 21 and 22 May the debate was held for the proposals: the Turkish Cypriots accepted them, considering the restrictions on elected bodies constituted a guarantee for the minority. Two of the three Right members along with the Maronite member also voted in favour of the proposals. The same went for the third Right member who had previously expressed his favour of the proposals, but who happened to be abroad at the time. The Left, however, voted against them, noting that they would vote for nothing short of self-government.³⁵ This turn of events in effect brought the Assembly to its end.

The left-wing representatives withdrew after voting, leaving behind a ruptured Assembly. The right-wing parties contemplated accepting the proposals and taking part in the Assembly's proceedings, but ultimately rejected them, adhering to the directives of the Greek government and Kyrenian circles.³⁶ The proposals were therefore shelved, with Britain declaring that it was willing to reintroduce them if an influential body representing public opinion requested it. In the meantime, Britain focused its efforts on bolstering the Turkish community's political institutions and its loyal conservative leadership.

The AKEL remained a mass organisation supported by non-parliamentary and quasi-political bodies, trade unions and rural associations, but had no administrative or legislative authorities. The British and the Greek conservative nationalists were not prepared to form a political system granting representation to the Left. The colonial administration had in fact been laying the groundwork for constitutional instruments that would outlaw opponents of the constitution, namely AKEL, leaving room for moderate politicians to come forward. This merely led to the hardening of AKEL's policy that by 1949 had returned to its line of 'Enosis and only Enosis', following internal criticism for having considered self-government in the first place. Greece was at the same time undergoing the Truman doctrine with Athens and dealing with the Cypriot Right becoming less flexible. By the turn of the decade there appeared to be no constitutional solution for what was later called 'the Cyprus problem'.

The British position in essence indicated that they were not inclined to abandon Cyprus any time in the foreseeable future. That British strategic interests both in Egypt and Palestine were under pressure, dramatically increased the island's importance for the faltering empire, thus removing all hope for *enosis*. The Assembly was an event of paramount importance for the island's political life. The Greek community was divided and the Turkish community appeared united for the first time, officially confirming that the island's two communities were indeed heading in opposite directions.

31 CO 537/2478, 27 Nov. 1947.

32 Andreas Phandis, *To 1948, Χρόνος οξύτατης ταξικής αναμέτρησης (1948, a year of intense class confrontation)* (Nicosia: [n.pub.], 1979).

33 Nicosia Pantelis Varnavas, *Ένας μεταλλωρύχος θυμάται (A miner's reminiscences)* (Nicosia: [n.pub.], 1986), 76–7.

34 *Cyprus Mail*, 14 May 1948.

35 CO 537/4036, 'Governor of Cyprus to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 23 May 1948'.

36 *Ibid.*