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The political Tsirkas. Counter arguments to his views on the Little Man character in the *Drifted Cities*.

The purpose of this study is not to evaluate and analyze the literary characteristics of Tsirkas' work. Instead, it focuses on the historical approach of Tsirkas as a political subject; specifically, one facet of the spectrum of the political Tsirkas, that is his enlistment in the radical social movement.

Tsirkas wrote his trilogy in the sixties; significant sociological and political changes since then mean that we are sufficiently distanced from them in time to take an historical perspective when examining this work. Attempts to describe the political Tsirkas and his involvement in the social movement are not histoire immediate; qualitative changes guarantee the objectivity.

Therefore, we believe that it is not too soon to approach this subject historically, since we have the benefit of primary sources and our study is based on them.

The questions that may be tackled include: the conditions of development of the social movement in Egypt; Tsirkas' own contribution to its structure and ethos; Tsirkas' change in attitude before and after his expulsion from the organised movement; and, finally, the criticism directed at Tsirkas by the radical movement. It should be also noted that a research hypothesis, helpful for the comprehension of the political Tsirkas, is one that could evaluate under what circumstances he was disengaged from the established order of the organized radical movement.

We believe that the critical assessment of the political Tsirkas must not be examined as a projection of the present to the past; that is, using contemporary data, to make inferences on the rise and fall of the radical social movement. Studying Tsirkas' political position, we are trying to evaluate his ideological and political preference by regarding all the factors, both objective and subjective, that had contributed to the formation of his attitude towards the movement. In this paper, also, an attempt was made to touch the substance of Tsirkas' political arguments.

The author chose to make this study because he has long been interested in the historical research of the greek social movement, with the use of oral evidence, along with the other sources. This, combined with the fact that he is of Alexandrian descent, has meant that he had access to oral and other sources of information which stimulated him to embark on this work.

The above research method was completed by a questionnaire and a series of personal interviews with the surviving members of the Greek community in Egypt, who were socially active before and after the 2nd World War. The questions of the questionnaire were pre-tested. Two persons were used for "double reading" of the answers' content. To assure the reliability of their analysis, they were sensitized to the nature and the framework of the study by the principal researcher. The inter-reliability of their "reading" was approximately 83%.

This field-work uncovered abundant material referring to Tsirkas.

It is important for the analysis to mention certain elements about the progressive movement of the Greek diaspora in Egypt. They will facilitate, also, the understanding of Tsirkas' views. During the period that Tsirkas was in charge of the organization Antifascist Vanguard [AV] -until 1952, the year he was expelled by Pangalos from the leadership of the organization-, the members never exceeded the number of 80. They were divided in 2 districts, with activities mainly in Cairo and Alexandria. Each district was composed of 5 groups, each group consisting of 5 members. The top level of the pyramid was a 7-member central committee, with its secretary. All members were Greeks, from different social strata, such as workers, bourgeois and intellectuals.

The AV's ideology, undoubtedly shared by all members, was historical materialism. The vision of the organization was the overthrow of the existing social order and the creation of a new perfect society. Its political framework was antifascism. After the 2nd World War, it reorientated

its activities towards the class struggle. Organizationally, it was a branch of the radical movement of Greece, and operated with the system of democratic centralism.

The ideology of AV was not equally developed in each district. The Cairo group appeared as the most "dogmatic", steadily supporting classical revolutionary principles. The Alexandria group, on the other hand, was characterized by an ideological flexibility and moderation. The sociopolitical conditions offer one possible explanation for this difference. The members of the Cairo district developed their characteristics over a long period of time. They were influenced by the environment in which they lived. They were isolated in a limited national minority, in contact with people of a completely different tradition and culture. Alexandria had the privilege of the large Greek community and the bourgeois-democratic tradition of the French culture.

In spite of the small size of AV, it was very active within the popular movement of the Greek community, and made enough noise to keep the authorities constantly busy.

In this framework we should examine Tsirkas' personality. All interviewees agree that Tsirkas was an exceptionally charismatic man, keen and intuitive. At the same time, he was a difficult person to communicate with, obstinate and egocentric.

Tsirkas' merits helped him to develop a high degree of self-confidence. The son of a barber, he managed to become detached from the petty bourgeois class and climbed through the managerial ranks of the Greek business circles in Egypt. His self-confidence made him arrogant.

His attitude to those "lower" than himself was condescending. He was hostile towards non-intellectuals and looked down on illiterate or uneducated members of the working class. In examining his work we should consider whether he is criticizing the failings of the bourgeoisie or attempting to recreate the atmosphere of his own personal experiences and to describe his own desires.

We tend to think it was impossible, within the political milieu of his era, to improve these sides of his personality. The reason can be traced in the ethics of the movement, which offered a fertile soil for the appearance of Tsirkas' dogmatism, on political and ideological questions. According to the data, when he became the general secretary of AV after the 2nd World War, he organised things in an autocratic way, with a strong emphasis on centralization of control. This was especially manifested by a certain nepotism, particularly harmful in a small and illegal organization such as the AV then was. He was bad mannered and behaved unacceptably to the rank and file members of the organization. Eventually, he became obsessed by a need for admiration.

He bore grudges and was vindictive towards the "commissars". It seems that this attitude was a transformation of an old and bad habit, of bitterly resenting people with whom he happened to desagree, even with the smallest cause. These bitter feelings used to appear in the profile of the characters in his early works and, especially, in the trilogy. It is true, of course, that the "commissars" sometimes insisted on obviously wrong decisions.

It was a natural situation. The condition of passion and fanaticism that the defense of the vision was producing, led to extremely acute emotional reactions.

The conspiratorial conditions of underground action and its illegality required, at that time, an organizational structure with groups strictly separated one from the other, as a prerequisite for the survival of the movement. Such a function, mandatory for all members, imposed the lack of horizontal communication, the proliferation of views and ideas within only the suffocating space of the group, and their advance, vertically, to the top only through the hierarchy. This situation assisted, here as well, the reproduction of the movement's monolithic political line, already shaped in the past and in other geographical areas: with the never-wrong attitude of the dominant group, the arrogance and autocracy, the lack of democracy in the proceeding of decisions. The roots of the problem, of course, must be searched for everywhere, in the organizational principles of democratic centralism, as well.

Tsirkas, in reproducing and being victim of these rules, was distressing his comrades and ruining himself. The vision of the social emancipation was overshadowing all problems and evils. Then, the era of doubt and dispute came. It came gradually and slowly, as Tsirkas got older; as a result of the events of the 50's, he ceased to be so inflexible politically.

Tsirkas, as one of the leaders, had only contact with and could publicize his views only to upper grade members. It was fatal; in the leading circles, the democracy suffered one more restraint, between men that were expressing their views with care, in a state of suspicion and mutual mistrust. The roots can be found elsewhere, in the suppressing mechanism which maintained the permanent phobia of ideological deviation among members of the movement.

After the War came the critical point of Tsirkas' political evolution, the arrival in Egypt of the new organizer, Filippas Pangalos.

Pangalos was acquainted with the social movement in Egypt, as he had served in this country when in the navy during the 2nd World War and had been among the leaders of the Middle East Navy's Antifascist Organization. He was an extremely able man, self-educated and blindly committed to the movement; but he was dogmatic in his thinking, in fact dogmatic in his approach to everything, something that was common in the movement at that time. Even though Tsirkas did not admit it, details from the trilogy show that Pangalos was indeed the Little Man character. Pangalos' bigotry, however, did not prevent him from being aware of weaknesses in the movement or from showing a breadth of vision; indeed his dogmatism abated during events of the 50's - he openly opposed the abuse of power by the cliques within the international and Greek movement, and the oppression of those members who resisted.

In Egypt, Pangalos reorganized the movement and reshaped the hierarchy by putting aside the intellectuals and promoting the proletarians, according to the "recipe" for organization at that time. Tsirkas was left aside in 1952 and somebody else, a simple worker of no special skills, assumed the responsibilities of the secretary.

Tsirkas could not forgive Pangalos for his authority and strength of character, qualities which had resulted in his deprivation of power and prestige, and he could not forgive Pangalos his humble origins either. This all came to a head in 1957 when Pangalos and Tsirkas locked in a bitter confrontation at the AV congress. In discussion about the past and future of the Greek community in Egypt, Tsirkas took his usual stance about the political Cavafy and about the community's attitude to colonialism. His views were challenged by Pangalos, who supported his challenge with concrete facts. Tsirkas was also stunned by Pangalos' attempts to smooth over his personal confrontation with the writers Malanos and Yalourakis on the question of the political Cavafy, as the dispute was harming the movement. From this incident, we believe, the seed of the Little Man's idea was planted in his mind.

We believe that there is a lack of objectivity in the approach of the political Tsirkas and of the political views expressed in his works. We met with completely negative reactions from hardliners on one hand, and with equally unbalanced tendency to admire everything from the free-thinking intellectuals on the other.

Noone brings any doubt to bear on his literary talent, nor on his importance to greek letters. What could be called in to question, however, is his work in the field of literary criticism, especially Kavafy and His Time, which work is seriously flawed by dogmatism and unwarranted generalizations of the Cavafy phenomenon. Hyperbole and extremism are not always avoided.

Tsirkas' ability to convey a vivid impression of the dogmatic leader and the machine like acceptance of his influence by the members of the organization, the "severed heads", must be acknowledged. In addition, his condemnation of the inner clique, whose existence undermined while it dominated the progressive movement, cannot be ignored. Tsirkas' comrades have many theories about his change of direction. In our view, the one that comes closest to the historical truth is that which takes a balanced view of his strengths and weaknesses. Tsirkas believed in the movement he joined in 1930. He showed some independent spirit when he abandoned his post and tried to join up as a volunteer and fight in the Greek civil war; they send him back. Probably

his hatred of dogmatism originated from his contact with the European intellectual movement and its doubts. Finally, his personal experiences of the structure of the authority, his bitterness at being rejected as a volunteer and his humiliation at being sidelined, acted as a catalyst. He therefore chose to expand on this subject; dogmatism is permanently criticized in his books. Tsirkas had personal knowledge of the effects of an excessive dogmatism through his acquaintanceship with Pangalos and through being a dogmatist himself.

The above conclusions of Tsirkas' fellows as to the cause of the changes in him ignore the perspicacity of the intellectual and his ability to feel the new messages. The fact that there was extensive criticism of the international and Greek radical movement's leading group, after the confrontation of the 50's in the upper echelons of the hierarchy, is also ignored; finally, the fact that he was a spiritual child of Alexandria and bore all its ideological characteristics.

Tsirkas' attack on the leadership's dogmatism is particularly caustic in the first book of the trilogy, The Club. Here he attacks the leadership, and Pangalos personally, rather than describing the Middle East, the social movement, the efforts of its members, their commitment and the sacrifices they were prepared to make. The book was not at all well received by his comrades who took it as a provocation and as being destructive to the unity of the greek community, at a time when unity was of paramount importance, because the affairs of the community were in extreme disarray prior to its actual disintegration. It was for this reason, as well, that the book was disliked, and not only that the critics resented the attack on the leading group, or were themselves defending the ideological integrity of the movement.

In the other two books, *Ariagni* and *The Bat*, Tsirkas' critical eye is less penetrating, a sign that his views had become moderate. He is more concerned to show movement, people, the Middle East. It seems he had been influenced by the criticism made of the *Club* and by the hostile reaction he had received, because of his portrayal of Pangalos as the negative character of the Little Man. He was also influenced by his expulsion from the organization -after the ordinary tactic of the exaggerations: "either you denounce your book or you are out"-, which was equal with his own classification as a possible suspect. It would not be an opinion claiming any originality that would point out the methods of the ideological extermination of any creator that would deviate from the official views, an issue "...that poses a question of morals and rules of the critique and of the intellectual life in general."

It is rather peculiar in this case that both Tsirkas' criticism of the movement and the movement's reaction against his views have the same victim, Pangalos. Tsirkas attacked the system of leadership by embodying an abstraction -the "leadership" in the person of his Little Man. Though the Little Man had much in common with Pangalos, Pangalos was not a Little Man; and indeed Tsirkas ignored the real Pangalos. Besides, the radical movement responded to the attack on the Little Man and to the satirization of the leadership as if this character was the real Pangalos, which he was not. The leader Pangalos participated in the radical social movement faithfully, but developing, at the same time, an ideologically critical position in relation to the movement's dominant trend and its dogmatism. Tsirkas' pen succeeded in presenting him as the historical stereotype of the dogmatic leader who lacked new thought and imagination. Pangalos' bad reputation was worsened by the reaction of the movement in defending the structure of the authority, in general, thus identifying him as a part of the mechanism which perpetuated this system.

In conclusion, aspects about Tsirkas generally accepted by all his fellows have been discussed. One such aspect is that the movement did not face the questions, that Tsirkas had posed, calmly or in a spirit of democracy. On the contrary, the establishment's culture forced a confrontation with the man and his art. Without doubt, historical facts justify Tsirkas' change of politicoideological views. They have also justified his dispute -as it emerges from the trilogy- against the ideological and organizational preferences of the radical movement at that time. Tsirkas' desagreement underlined his demand for a new conception of the movement's institutions. On the other hand, the explanation of the movement's framework of action and

behavior, at Tsirkas' time, rehabilitates the leading figure of Pangalos in its true dimension in history, as a member of the radical social movement who, like all other members, like the whole of the working class, paid the cost of the leadership's mistakes, without being in any way to blame for them.