

CHAPTER 05

Cyprus under the British, 1878-1945

A n a s t a s i a Y i a n g o u

Introduction

This chapter, which explores the history of the island from the onset of British rule in 1878 to the end of the Second World War in 1945, is divided into three units. Unit one (covering the period from 1878 to the onset of the World War in 1914) initially examines the British decision to acquire Cyprus from the Ottoman Empire in 1878. It then discusses the main issues which preoccupied the British (and locals) on the island during the first decades of British rule. Without a doubt, the most important question the British faced was the demand of the Greek Cypriot majority for the union of the island with Greece (*Enosis*), and unit one sets this question in its appropriate context. The first unit also pays attention to matters of economy; the *Tribute*, it will be shown, formed one of the major grievances in Anglo-Cypriot relations until the late 1920s. The unit also examines the role of the Orthodox Church of Cyprus and the challenges it faced during its transition from Ottoman to British rule, as well as constitutional and educational matters.

Unit two examines the history of the island between the two world wars. It discusses how and in what ways *Enosis* politics were influenced by developments, both inside and outside Cyprus. Also central to the account is an examination of social, economic and educational developments as these were accelerated at the aftermath of World War I. By examining the above, attention is given to how each of these factors brought friction to relations between the locals and the colonial authority and how such a tense relationship finally led to the outbreak of the 1931 revolt, the first instance of open defiance against the British. The unit examines the consequences the revolt and its suppression had on the daily life of Cypriots. Particular focus is given to the period of the Governorship of Richmond Palmer.

The final unit examines the fundamental changes Cyprus witnessed during the Second World War. This unit explains how the Cypriot contribution to the Allied war effort forced the British to allow at least a partial disengagement from the post-1931 regime. This resulted in the remaking of the political scene of the island and the emergence of new parties. The unit examines the British attitude toward war developments, including the revival of *Enosis* after Greece's entry in the war and the growth of a labour movement facilitated by the war. Emphasis is given to how the war experience paved the way for future developments.

Aims

This section examines the first decades following the British acquisition of Cyprus to the onset of the First World War (1878-1914). The section begins with a discussion of the reasons which led the British Empire to occupy Cyprus. It then analyses the main issues (administration, society, economy, politics and education) which chiefly occupied both the colonial authorities and the local population on the island during the period under examination and how these issues affected future developments.

Following the study of this section, students will be able to:

- Understand the reasons which led the British to acquire Cyprus from the Ottoman Empire.
- Understand the nature and development of the *Enosis* movement during its early phase.
- Discuss the main challenges the Orthodox Church of Cyprus faced during the transition from Ottoman to British rule.
- Evaluate the role of the Orthodox Church of Cyprus in relation to the *Enosis* movement and education.
- Discuss how grievances concerning economy and politics formed the basis for future relations between the British and Greek Cypriots, and between Greek and Turkish Cypriots themselves.
- Evaluate the British attitude toward education during 1878-1914.

Keywords

- Cyprus Convention
- High Commissioner
- Legislative Council
- Enosis movement
- Tribute
- Education

The acquisition of Cyprus by the British (1878)

The British decision to acquire Cyprus was inextricably tied to diplomatic fluctuations in Europe and with the British desire to maintain the *status quo* in the Ottoman Empire as a prerequisite for European stability. In this respect, the reopening of the Eastern Question with the Russo-Turkish War of 1877, which saw Russia advance as far as the gates of Constantinople, posed a serious challenge to the British. It is against this background that the acquisition of Cyprus in 1878 must be examined.

The British Prime Minister, Benjamin Disraeli, sought to occupy a base in the Eastern Mediterranean which would check Russian expansion and at the same time reconfigure Asia Minor under British protection. Cyprus was identified by Disraeli as the base which would serve commercial, political, military and naval interests; it would provide the 'key of Western Asia'. As a result, at the works of the Berlin Congress (June 1878), which ended the Russo-Turkish War, Britain concluded a secret "treaty of defensive alliance" with the Ottoman Empire. Under the Cyprus Convention, the British assumed responsibility for the administration of the island from the Ottomans while sovereignty remained vested to the Sultan.

The Cyprus Convention was criticized by many circles in London, including William Gladstone, who characterized the agreement as 'an insane covenant'. Even the first High Commissioner appointed on the island, Sir Garnet Wolseley, privately expressed his reservations about the wisdom of the decision. Disraeli, however, insisted that "in taking Cyprus the movement was not Mediterranean but Indian". Possession of the island would also allow the British to respond effectively to any crisis concerning the Ottoman Empire. On 10 July 1878, the British arrived on Cyprus.

Source 1.1: Benjamin Disraeli to Queen Victoria, 5 May 1878: "...If Cyprus be conceded to your Majesty by the Porte, and England, at the same time, enters into a defensive alliance with Turkey, guaranteeing Asiatic Turkey from Russian invasion, the power of England in the Mediterranean will be absolutely increased in that region, and your Majesty's Indian Empire immensely strengthened. Cyprus is the key of Western Asia. Such an arrangement would also greatly strengthen Turkey in Europe, and altogether she would be a stronger barrier against Russia than she was before the war."

Cited in: *W.F. Moneypenny, G. E. Buckle, vol.2, London: Murray, 1929, p. 1163.*



Raising the British Flag in Nicosia, Cyprus, *Illustrated London News*, 10 August 1878.

Society and administration during the early years of British rule

According to the first census to be taken during British rule, in 1881, the population of the island numbered 186,173 souls; Greek Cypriots were 73 percent of the population while Turkish Cypriots accounted for 25 percent. The rest were mainly fragments of Latins, Armenians and Maronites. The majority of Greek Cypriots lived in the countryside – testimony to the fact that the island was indeed a predominantly rural society. By 1911, assisted by the betterment of living conditions, population increased to 273,000 inhabitants; Greek Cypriots experienced a much higher growth rate than Turkish Cypriots.

Source 1.2: Population Figures in Cyprus 1881 – 1911

	Census of 1881	Census of 1891	Census of 1901	Census of 1911
Total Population of Cyprus	186,173	209,286	237,022	273,964

Languages	1891	1901	1911	Percentage in 1911
Greek	106,541	185,796	216,310	78.9
Turkish	46,449	48,864	55,213	20.1
Arabic	1,313	1,131	1,036	0.4
Armenian	216	505	551	0.2
English	273	292	490	0.2

Cited in: Luke, 1920, p. 34

Administration on the island significantly improved after 1878 and followed a path towards westernization. The British divided the island into six districts (Nicosia, Famagusta, Kyrenia, Limassol, Larnaca and Paphos) - each of which was run by a District Commissioner. The central administrative department responsible for coordinating the whole work of the Government was the Secretariat. At the head of the colonial government was the High Commissioner, who was appointed to his position directly by London. In the first half of the 1880s, the British introduced legislation establishing elected municipal councils in the six main towns of the island (Nicosia, Limassol, Famagusta, Kyrenia, Larnaca and Paphos) and to some of the larger villages of the island. Smaller villages were run by the village authorities presided by a Mukhtar and a council of elders (*azas*).

A significant success of British rule was the elimination of corruption from all branches of the island's government. Such a task was achieved mainly by the employment of British officials in the leading administrative, financial and judicial posts; they brought order and efficiency to the conduct of public business. The British further exemplified a modernizing spirit in the reform of the island's legal and judicial system. In 1882, a Supreme Court was established in Nicosia, along with six District Courts presided over by the District Commissioner – Ottoman law continued to apply until it was gradually superseded by English law. Judicial reforms are indeed acknowledged as one of the major initiatives of the British on the island.

Source 1.3

The November 30, 1882, Cyprus Court of Justice Order-in Council **put an end** to the faulty and corrupt organization of the Ottoman courts. It paved the way for the use of the superior British rules of court and civil and criminal procedures, and, as it vastly improved the operations of one of the most vital public services, it probably gave more **general satisfaction** to the inhabitants of Cyprus than any other comparable British reform.

Cited in: Georghallides, 1979, p.40.

The Question of *Enosis*

One of the main challenges the British had to face, even at the outset of their administration of Cyprus was the demand of the Greek Cypriot population for their political union with Greece (*Enosis*). According to Cypriot folk tradition, the first High Commissioner to be appointed in Cyprus, Sir Garnet Wolseley, was welcomed by the Bishop of Kitium with a direct plea to Britain to cede Cyprus to Greece. Greek Cypriots truly hoped that Britain, a liberal and Christian power, would demonstrate the Philhellenism it did in 1864, when it ceded the Ionian Islands to Greece. However, it is important to note that during the early years of British rule, the *Enosis* movement existed in a present their comparatively quieter form as compared to its later incarnation. Greek Cypriots often promoted their national demands concurrently with requests for the amelioration of the economic and social conditions on the island. Such requests took the form of memorandums submitted to the colonial authorities, while a number of formal delegations often visited London to petitions to the Colonial Office.

Source 1.4: An example of memoranda submitted to the High Commissioner by the Greek members of the Legislative Council, 1 December 1911, in which they express both the wish for *Enosis* and for the abolition of the Tribute.

“Forming as we do, Your Excellency, an inseparable portion of the Greek race, it is natural that we should feel in a strong and unsubduable manner the desire that **our Fatherland should be annexed to the Hellenic Kingdom**; the fulfillment of this our aspiration we expect from the strength of our rights and the magnanimity of the English nation.

...The country claims ... that it should be granted such **financial emancipation** as befits itself and is also consonant with the principles of justice and the people’s liberties and that it should **be left free to effect**, in the Legislative Council, such (financial) reforms and alterations...”

Cited in: Papadopoulos, 2009, pp. 36-37.

Enthusiasm for **Greek Cypriot volunteering** to fight in the Greco-Turkish War of 1897 and in the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913 understandably played an important role in shaping the *Enosis* movement. Greek victories in the Balkan Wars turned Athens into the main decision-making centre of Hellenism. Despite increasing hopes, however, the British were unwilling to satisfy Greek Cypriot national demands. Up until November 1914, when the entry of the Ottoman Empire in the First World War, on the side of Germany and its allies, brought about the cancellation of the Cyprus Convention and the formal annexation of Cyprus by Britain, the British usually replied that they did not possess sovereignty over the island (the Sultan did) and were therefore not in the position to discuss any alteration of the island’s status. For their part, Turkish Cypriots were also unsettled by the prospect of *Enosis*; they believed that should Britain withdraw from the island, Cyprus should be returned to the Ottoman Empire. The gap between Greek and Turkish Cypriots widened, as the former came to advocate *Enosis* more openly. Indeed, during the Balkan War of 1912, the first large-scale physical confrontation between Greek and Turkish Cypriots took place, resulting in the death of five persons. The onset of the First World War was to have a significant impact on the *Enosis* question.

The Orthodox Church of Cyprus

During British rule, the Church continued to play a dominant part in Cypriot life. Indeed, the role of the Archbishop, as the protector and leader of the nation (*Ethnarch*), had been shaped by the various occupations the island had endured over the centuries. The hanging of Archbishop Kyprianos on 9 July 1821, along with many other members of the island’s Greek Christian intelligentsia and clergy (on the pretext of an intention to join the revolution then sweeping other Greek parts in the Ottoman Empire), gave the Archbishop’s role an iconic significance for Greek Cypriots. This role continued to evolve during British rule.

For the Church, however, the transition from Ottoman occupation to British rule posed potential challenges because the British refused to recognize the Church’s involvement the civil affairs it enjoyed during the Ottoman rule – for example, the Church lost the right to collect taxes. The Archbishop was

no longer considered to be the sole representative of Greek Cypriots, and the British restricted his responsibilities to spiritual matters. Despite this, in the following years, assisted by greater freedom in civil life under the new dispensation, the Church naturally consolidated its place as the second power on the island. Characteristically, the Archbishop was at the head of all the *Enosis* delegations sent to the Colonial Office in London.

Following the death of Archbishop Sophronios, in 1900, the Orthodox Church experienced turbulence in its circles. The Bishop of Paphos died in 1899, but his successor had not been elected by the time Sophronios passed away. This left only two Bishops in Cyprus, namely the Bishop of Kitium, Cyril Papadopoulos, and the Bishop of Kyrenia, Cyril Vasiliou, who both presented themselves as candidates for the archiepiscopal throne, and their rivalry for the archiepiscopacy dragged on for years. The ecclesiastical question had a political impact on the island; it has been suggested that the rivalry between the two Bishops reflected two different attitudes towards *Enosis*. Indeed, the Bishop of Kitium was a militant prelate and a staunch supporter of the *Enosis* movement, while the Bishop of Kyrenia was a scholarly and mild figure who represented a more moderate policy towards the British. Their antagonism split Greek Cypriot politics and society into the supporters of the “Kitium Party” (the intransigent *Enosists*) and the supporters of the “Kyrenia Party” (moderate *Enosists*). It must be noted, however, that at this point, neither side favored open confrontation with the British. Instead, both sides adopted the ‘Ionian’ pattern, a pacifist approach towards the fulfillment of their national aspirations. The archiepiscopal question ended in 1910, when the Bishop of Kitium was finally elected to the throne. Following his death in 1916, he was succeeded by his rival, Cyril, the Bishop of Kyrenia.

The Constitutional Question

At the beginning of British rule in Cyprus, administrative authority was vested in the High Commissioner, who governed the island assisted by a Legislative and an Executive Council – both were appointed by the High Commissioner and their role was purely advisory. Four years later, in 1882, the British, now under the Liberal government of William Gladstone, granted Cypriots a constitution. According to this constitutional arrangement, a new Legislative Council was formed comprising by eighteen members. The Council’s synthesis would be as follows: six members would be British officials – all appointed by the High Commissioner, who would always be a member of the Council; nine would be elected by Greek Cypriots, and three would be elected by Turkish Cypriots. The election of Greek and Turkish Cypriots to Legislative Council was made on separate electoral rolls, and the right to vote was granted to all males over the age of twenty-one who paid certain taxes. Although this was an important step towards the development of constitutional life in Cyprus, in reality the Legislative Council had no real decision-making power, since the High Commissioner had the right to annul its voted decisions.

Furthermore, Greek Cypriots soon found that their proposals could be blocked should the three Turkish Cypriot members cooperate with the six British official members: in the case of a tie, the High Commissioner had the casting vote. Indeed, over time, the British came to lean for support on Turkish

Cypriots. This frustrated Greek Cypriots, who formed the majority of the island but could hardly pass a law in the Legislative Council. The Executive Council was maintained as an advisory body.

Source 1.5.:

“Although there were cases in which Greek and Turkish Cypriot deputies did cooperate as late as 1912 – mostly against the economic policy of the colonial government – the distribution of seats in the Legislative Council tended to intensify **the antagonism** of the two communities”.

Cited in: Hatzivassiliou, 2002, p.27.

The Economic situation

The British were greeted by the locals with unmistakable enthusiasm and high hopes for the amelioration of the economic situation on the island; however, a number of factors blocked the way towards economic advance. The first and foremost factor was the so called *Tribute*. This concerned the sum of £92,000 (the annual budget of surplus of revenue over expenditure for the five years prior to 1878) which was agreed under the Cyprus Convention of 1878 to be paid every year to the Ottoman Empire. The money, however, never went to the sultan because his government had defaulted on servicing the 1855 Crimean War loan. Instead, this amount was siphoned off by the British to their own bondholders. Cypriots therefore found themselves paying a debt to which they had no connection and which further impoverished the state of their economy. To meet the needs of Tribute, heavy taxation continued to be imposed on Cypriots, including the tithe (ten percent taxation on agricultural production). The tax system was a huge burden for the peasantry, which was often exploited by usurers. Overall, the *Tribute* became a major issue in Cypriot politics – at times perhaps more dominant than *Enosis* itself; it was a serious grievance and burden for the population until its abolishment in 1927.

Another factor which barred the way to economic advancement was the British occupation of Egypt, in 1882, which undermined the strategic position of Cyprus for the British. Indeed, Egypt, not Cyprus became the centre of British activity in the Middle East. Cyprus therefore never became the *place d’arms* it was initially intended to be. This development, combined with the ambiguity of the status of the island (that sovereignty was still vested with the sultan), meant little money was spent on Cyprus’s internal progress. Nonetheless, despite their reluctance to invest money in Cyprus, the British did provide the island with an adequate infrastructure and a communications system. Cable and postal communications were developed during the early phase of British rule.

Source 1.6: Acknowledgement of the unfairness of the arrangement of the Tribute often came from British circles too. Winston Churchill visited Cyprus in 1907 as the Under Secretary of State for the Colonies. He later reported to London:

“We have **no right whatever**, except by *force majeure*, to take a penny of the Cyprus tribute to relieve us from our own just obligations, however unfortunately contracted. There is scarcely any **spectacle more detestable** than the oppression of a small community by a great Power for the purpose of pecuniary profit; and that is, in fact, the spectacle which our own financial treatment of Cyprus at this moment indisputably presents. It is in my opinion quite **unworthy of Great Britain** and altogether out of accordance with the whole principle of our colonial policy in every part of the world.”

Cited in: Hill, 2010, vol. 4, p.468.

Education and the British

At the beginning of British rule, Greek schools depended exclusively on subscriptions, fees paid by students, as well as on annual donations from the Orthodox Church, which continued to enjoy control over education during the early years of British rule. Under Church control, schools were considered the safeguard of the Greek language and Greek traditions, and they served to promote the *Enosis* ideal. This was quickly grasped by the British, who sought to minimize the interaction of education with political affairs. Robert Biddulph, who succeeded Garnet Wolseley as High Commissioner in 1879, had strongly advocated that the main language of instruction at schools would be English. Such a proposal was dismissed by the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Lord Kimberley, who wanted neither to discontent the majority of the population nor to disrupt existing patterns of education. Matters of education were shared and settled by local School Committees, District Committees and the Board of Education (of which the Archbishop and three Greek members of the legislative Council were always members); Greek and Turkish Cypriots largely followed the educational policies of Greek and Ottoman education, respectively. In 1893, the Pancyprian Gymnasium was founded. It was destined to exert great influence on the island’s educational, cultural and political life thereafter. While in 1882 there were 71 Greek primary schools, by 1913 these increased to 406 and illiteracy, which was widespread in 1878, was steadily reduced.

The British grew more apprehensive about and suspicious of the role of Greek Cypriot education in reinforcing *Enosis* aspirations. In 1913, two British experts on education, J.E. Talbot and F.W. Cape, visited the island and suggested that the British should assume a significant part in the financial support of the schools (provided the communal school managers surrendered some of their powers). This proposal reflected a significant change in policy on the part of the British regarding education on the island, but the onset of the First World War halted any initiatives. Efforts for the centralization of the control of education in Cyprus were to be forcefully expressed by the British after the end of the hostilities; however, by that time education would become a crucial question in Anglo-Cypriot relations.



The High Commissioner Garnet Wolseley receives a representation of Turkish Cypriots on the occasion of the Bairam Day, *Illustrated London News*, 1879.

From World War I to World War II

Aims

This unit examines developments in Cyprus during the interval period from the onset of the First World War to the beginning of the Second World War (1914-1939). This is an important period in Cypriot colonial history because *inter alia* it witnessed – after decades of peaceful Greek Cypriot agitation – the first open revolt against the British, in 1931. Firstly, the unit examines the major developments in politics, society, economy and education and sketches the background and the main reasons which led to the revolt. Secondly, following the examination of the events of 1931, the unit focuses on the repercussions the revolt had on Cypriot life; this includes an examination of the period of oppressive rule which was established on the island after 1931. Finally, this unit delineates both the traditional and the new forces that became prominent on the island once conditions allowed.

After studying this unit, students should be in a position to:

- Follow developments concerning the Enosis movement up until 1939.
- Evaluate the impact of the First World War on Cypriot society and economy.
- Evaluate the British attitude toward education.
- Discuss how developments concerning Enosis, economy and education brought about the 1931 revolt.
- Follow events concerning the 1931 revolt.
- Discuss the British attitude towards Cypriots during the 1930s.

Keywords

- Elementary Education Laws
- National Organization
- Trade Unions
- Communist Party of Cyprus
- Rural debt
- Political Organization of Cyprus
- Οκτωβριανά
- Οκτωβριανά

The onset of the First World War

The eruption of hostilities in Europe on 4 August 1914 had a **profound impact** on the course of developments in Cyprus. For one thing, the entry of the Ottoman Empire in the War on the side of Germany, against the British Empire, brought the **immediate cancellation** of the Cyprus Convention and the **unilateral annexation of the island by the British**. Turkish Cypriots did not protest this development; instead, **they clung as tightly as possible to their new status as British subjects**. On the other hand, the inherent Greek Cypriot belief that Britain would finally consent to their national demands now became **more forceful**. A unique opportunity to fulfill the *Enosis* ideal arose in **October 1915** when the British expressed their willingness to cede Cyprus to Greece, in exchange for a Greek commitment to join the Allies and help Serbia against Germany and its ally, Bulgaria. At the time, however, the short-lived Greek Government of Premier Alexandros Zaimis opted for neutrality and **refused the offer**. Athens was not prepared to jeopardize her gains in the Balkan wars of 1912-1913. In reality, this exemplified the **clashing priorities** between Greek leadership in Athens and Cypriot aspirations. While the offer of 1915 put an end to the repeated British claim that Cyprus could not be handed to Greece because it belonged to the Sultan, and was believed by Greek Cypriots to be a recognition of their national demands, it was a unique opportunity which slipped away. **It was never to be repeated again**, not even when Greece, under the Government of Eleftherios Venizelos, finally entered the War in 1917.

Cypriot society and economy during the 1920s

The island experienced an important boost in its agricultural production during the First World War because the fall in production of the belligerent countries created an **increasing demand for Cypriot exports**. This led to the **betterment of living conditions** on the island, which undoubtedly contributed to the growth of population. This is exemplified by the 1921 census, taken by the British, according to which 310,000 people lived on the island. The number of Greek Cypriots had by then significantly increased, reaching a total of about 245,000 (**78.8 percent** of the total population). By contrast, the percentage of Turkish Cypriots had decreased as, according to the same census, the community numbered about 61,000 souls, in 1921 (**19.8 percent** of the total population). This is explained primarily by the emigration of many Turkish Cypriots to Turkey. This emigration, which began hesitantly in 1878, gradually intensified after 1914, when the British annexed the island, and intensified again after the Great War, when any possibility for the return of the island to Turkey was eliminated.

Table 2.1: Evolution of Population

YEAR	P O P U - LATION	COMMUNITY			PERCENT		
		Greeks	Turks	Others	Greeks	Turks	Others
1921	310,715	244,887	61,339	4,489	78.8	19.8	1.4
1931	347,959	276,573	64,238	7,148	79.5	18.5	2.0

Cited in: Georghallides, 1979, p.427.

As it certainly did in many other parts of the world, the aftermath of the Great War brought many **economic difficulties** to Cyprus. For one thing, the aforementioned demand for agricultural exports fell significantly. This, combined with the **high debts** of many peasants, led in numerous cases to the **loss of their land to money-lenders**. Thus, there was an increase in landless labour, and it was during this period that a significant number of peasants **left their villages** to be absorbed into the larger towns. This peasant relocation to urban areas helped in the creation of the island’s **first proper working class**. By the mid 1920s, the first full-fledged **Trade Unions** appeared. **Limassol**, the chief commercial town on the island, served as **an incubator** for any new ideas; this was particularly true when an **incipient communism** evolved. The British authorities confronted such developments with little sympathy and **exiled** certain labour personalities, including Nicolas Yiavopoulos, one of the founding members of the communist movement in Cyprus. Many peasants also found employment in the **mining sector** – the most important minerals being **copper and asbestos**. The mining industry was foreign-owned and examples of this include the American ‘Cyprus Mines Corporation’, the Anglo-Danish ‘Cyprus and General Asbestos Co’; and the Hellenic Mining Co.



Natives working at the asbestos mines, Cyprus. J.P. Foscolo Collection (Image Courtesy of the Laiki Bank Cultural Centre Archive).

Agriculture remained by far the most important sector of the Cypriot economy, despite fluctuations in production. While the first law providing for the establishment of cooperative credit societies was initially enacted in 1914 (the first cooperative credit society had been founded in the village of Lefkoniko in 1909), the lack of funds delayed any progress being made until the early 1920s. In 1925, the **Agricultural Bank** was finally established, with the principal aim of issuing long term loans through cooperative credit societies. A positive step the British government adopted was the abolishment of the tithes in 1926 and of the Tribute a year later. Despite some measures, the British continued to invest little money on the island. This was especially true as far as agriculture was concerned, and minimal progress was made in the sector. Cyprus continued to be very much an **underdeveloped colony**.

The worldwide **economic depression** that took shape after 1929 was bound to cause **increased frustration and economic distress** in Cyprus as well. Indeed, by 1930, the island was suffering tremendously. In the mining industry, thousands of workers were let go, and **unemployment** peaked. Even those who had a job earned little, and their living conditions were very poor. The severe **droughts** of 1930-1932 had serious effects on agricultural production and on poorer peasants in general, who saw their debts rise even higher as their situation was further exploited by local **usurers**. Indeed, according to the *Survey of Rural Life in Cyprus*, which was prepared in 1930 after government instructions, only 18 percent of Cypriot proprietors were not in debt. Such a state of extensive poverty, combined with existing taxation (land-tax, sheep-tax, salt-tax, etc.) reduced the poorer masses to a state of **absolute misery**.

In September 1931, the Government tried to **impose further taxation** to meet the increasing budget deficits. Taxation proposed by Governor Storrs, however, was not enacted by the Legislative Council because the law did not have the complete support of Turkish Cypriots. Indeed, a Turkish Cypriot, Nejadi Bey, **sided with Greek Cypriots** when they refused to vote in favour of new taxation. The British were faced with the rare occasion when Greek Cypriots actually managed to reject a proposed law. Given the general milieu on the island, it was therefore perhaps unavoidable that, when Governor Storrs completely ignored the outcome of the Legislative Council's decision and **proceeded with the enactment of a new customs tariff**, a crisis was bound to arise.

Enosis after World War I

Following the end of the Great War in 1918, Greek Cypriots sought to **exert further pressure** on the colonial authorities for the fulfillment of their national demands. Cypriots had contributed to the war effort as volunteers, and this further strengthened *Enosis* aspirations. Expectations were also boosted by Allied declarations on the **right of self determination** of subject peoples. Under these circumstances, in December 1918, a **Greek Cypriot delegation**, comprising members of the Legislative Council and with Archbishop Cyril at its head, departed for Paris, where the post-war Peace Conference was taking place. There, the delegation met with the Greek Premier **Eleftherios Venizelos**, who encouraged the delegation to go to London in order to come to a direct understanding with the British. Venizelos firmly believed that *Enosis* would be achieved in the frame of Anglo-Hellenic

friendship. Greek Cypriots were under the moderate rule of Britain, a Greek ally and a western power. According to Venizelos Greece ought to turn her focus toward other irredentist Greek populations in Macedonia, Thrace and Asia Minor. Thus Greece did not officially claim Cyprus during the 1919-1920 postwar settlement. Following Venizelos's advice, the delegation arrived in London in January 1919, where it stayed for the greater part of the year. Despite their efforts, its members **returned home empty-handed, disillusioned and frustrated**.

Source 2.2: The British official response to the Cypriot deputation, November 1919

"...He (the Prime Minister) is fully aware of the sentiment which exists among the Greek population in Cyprus in favour of the Union of the island with Greece. He directs me to make it clear to you that the wishes of the inhabitants of the Island of Cyprus will be taken in the most careful and sympathetic consideration by His Majesty's Government when they consider its future. He is unable, however, at the present time, owing to the uncertainty of the international situation in the Middle East, to give any definite reply to the petition of the Cyprus Mission."

Cited in: Papadopoulos, 2009, p.103.

The British were **immobile** regarding Cyprus because their strategic interests pertaining to the island remained the same. It is true that initial plans for the development of the island into a military base were abandoned once the British acquired Egypt and its strategic harbor of Alexandria in 1882. The British were **not prepared to hand the island** over to another power; however, this was particularly true during the last years of the Great War, when Cyprus was adjacent to the new lands conquered by the British in the Middle East, and even more so after the War, when aviation became an important strategic consideration since the island was well suited for such facilities.

Source 2.3: Lord Curzon, the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, on the significance of the strategic importance of Cyprus, 1919:

"The history of the island shows...that none but a strong power has ever succeeded in holding (Cyprus)... Its cession to Greece would offer a **tempting spoil** for those who are stronger than Greece... [I] hope that **we shall not lightly throw away** an asset which, though it may seem of relatively small value now, may turn out...to possess a very great and powerful significance."

Cited in: Kelling, 1990, p.2.

Such rebuffs were a **turning point** for the *Enosis* movement; Greek Cypriots realized they were on their own in their demand for union with Greece, and this would become a crucial component of the movement. Indeed, it is during the early 1920s that the demand for *Enosis* acquired more **organizational complexity**. Under such circumstances, it was only natural that the **Church** would come to the foreground as the movement's undisputed leader. Greek Cypriot members resigned from the Legislative Council on 8 December 1920, and a year later (December 1921), under Church leadership, a "**Political Organization**" was formed to achieve *Enosis* through **non co-operation** with the colonial authorities and by a **boycott** of the Legislative Council (this lasted until 1925). The British reacted by deporting two leading nationalists, Philios Zannetos and Nicolaos Katalanos. This was seen by many as a sign of a growing British absolutism.

External developments had profound repercussions on internal Cypriot politics. Following the Greek

Army’s defeat in Asia Minor in 1922, the dream of a Greater Greece was **dashed** and Greece was in no position to support the *Enosis* movement in Cyprus. Furthermore, with the Lausanne Treaty, in 1923, Turkey acknowledged British possession of the island and all Cypriots now officially acquired British citizenship. Those who wanted to retain a Turkish one had to leave the island by 1927. This resulted in a minor Turkish Cypriot exodus to Turkey which worried the British.

The new reality after 1923 divided the ranks of nationalist politicians into those committed to “**Enosis and only Enosis**” and **moderates** who sought ‘autonomy’ within the British Empire since under new circumstances at least some accommodation with the British authorities had to be made; during this period, the moderates came to the forefront. Indeed, in 1925, intransigent *Enosists* were defeated in the elections for the first time since 1901. A number of factors, however, made the position of the moderates weaker in the following years and ensured the continuing **dominance of the intransigent Enosis wing**. By 1931, the ground was ripe for the first open defiance against British rule.

Source 2.4: The Treaty of Lausanne’s articles on Cyprus:

“Article 20: Turkey hereby recognizes the annexation of Cyprus proclaimed by the British Government on 5 November 1914.

Article 21: Turkish nationals ordinarily resident in Cyprus on 5 November 1914 will acquire British nationality subject to the conditions laid down in local law and will thereupon lose their Turkish nationality. They will, however, have the right to opt for Turkish nationality within two years from the coming into force of the present Treaty, provided that they leave Cyprus within twelve months after having so opted.”

Cited in: Panteli, 1984, p. 114

In 1925 Cyprus was officially declared a **Crown Colony** and the High Commissioner now acquired the title of **Governor**. The British, responding to continuous complains from Greek Cypriots, also decided to reform the structure of the Legislative Council. According to the 1925 reform of the Legislative Council, the number of Greek Cypriot members was now increased to twelve while the number of Turkish Cypriot members **remained the same**, three. There was also an increase in the number of British official members, who now held nine seats on the Council, instead of six. In practice, however, the balance within the Legislative Council remained the same because the combination of Turkish Cypriot members with official British members was equal to the number of Greek Cypriots. The fact that the Governor possessed the casting vote meant the majority could again hardly pass a law within the legislature. The renewed synthesis of the Council caused further disappointment and increased Greek Cypriot dissatisfaction with the colonial regime.

Table 2.5: Legislative Council synthesis **1882 and 1925**

	1882	1925
Greek Cypriots	9	12
Turkish Cypriots	3	3
British	6	9
Total	18	24

In 1926 the **Communist Party of Cyprus** (Κομμουνιστικό Κόμμα Κύπρου – Κ.Κ.Κ.) was founded. While the party committed itself to the amelioration of economic and social conditions on the island, it nevertheless took a radical stance on the national question. Specifically, the party opted for an independent Cyprus within a Balkan Soviet Socialist Federation. This policy naturally alienated the majority of Greek Cypriots and did little to help the party challenge the well-established and essentially conservative *Enosis* movement. Changing social and economic conditions had clearly contributed to the creation of a new political force. The Left in Cyprus was to play a significant role in Cypriot affairs beginning from the early 1940s when, due to the general conditions the new World War brought to the island, the party of A.K.E.L. would emerge.

Two factors reinforced Greek Cypriot hopes for *Enosis* during the second half of the 1920s: the appointment of a new self-proclaimed philhellene Governor, Sir Ronald Storrs, in 1926, and the ascent of a British Labour Government to power in 1929. That during the governorship of Storrs the *Tribute* was abolished bolstered Greek Cypriot faith in Storrs's intentions while the election of a Labour Government in London inspired fresh efforts on the part of Greek Cypriots to make their grievances heard. A new delegation, under the Bishop of Kitium, Nicodemos Mylonas, met with the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Lord Passfield, and requested *Enosis* or, failing that, proportional assembly. Both requests were denied by Lord Passfield, who rejected even the possibility of self rule or increased autonomy. On the contrary, the Secretary of State for the Colonies hinted that it would be preferable if the Legislative Council was comprised of appointed members. Passfield also refused financial repayment for the *Tribute* extracted from the Cypriot taxpayers, another demand included in the memorandum. Passfield's decisions outraged Greek Cypriot and made union with Greece all the more desirable. The meeting with Passfield only served in augmenting the gap between the colonial authorities and the greater part of the Greek Cypriot population. Telegraphs of protest, as was the usual practice, were sent to London.

Source 2.6:

Lord Passfield's answer to the Greek Cypriot deputation on Enosis and changes in the Legislative Council, 28 November 1929:

“(The Enosis Question) is **definitely closed** and cannot profitably be further discussed...The **time has not yet come** when it would be to the grant advantage of the people of Cyprus to make a trial of a constitutional experiment in this direction.....The island's institutions with popular participation in them cannot be said to have attained that **reasonable measure of efficiency** that should be looked for before any extension of the principle is approved...Responsible observers have contended that had Cyprus possessed an **officially controlled** Legislature its progress would have been more rapid.”

Cited in: Georgallides, 1985, pp. 238-239.

Indeed, such a snub was a turning point for *Enosis* politics and strengthened the position of intransigent politicians. In late January 1930, a **National Organization of Cyprus** (Εθνική Οργάνωσις Κύπρου – Ε.Ο.Κ), itself a development of the old Political Organization, was created. E.O.K. aimed to achieve *Enosis* through multiform struggle under the leadership of the Orthodox Church. The Archbishop was at the Organization's head, while the Bishops presided over the district committees;

all Greek members of the Legislative Council were ex-officio members of the Assembly, the leading body of the Organization. The two dominant personalities of the Organization were the Bishop of Kitium, Nicodemos Mylonas, and the Bishop of Kyrenia, Makarios Myriantheas – both were to have a significant role in the 1931 uprising.

The British and education during the 1920s

Beginning in the early 1920s, education returned to the foreground as a major issue in Anglo-Cypriot relations. Even prior to 1914, the British were concerned about the role education played in strengthening the *Enosis* movement on the island, but any thought of bringing education under government control was halted by the onset of the hostilities in 1914.

A first significant step towards the centralization of Education was the Elementary Education Law of 1923, which was to a large degree based on previous suggestions made by Talbot and Cape. According to this law, an educational fund would be created through taxation (both direct and indirect), while teachers would be appointed by the High Commissioner on the recommendation of the Board of Education. The 1923 law signaled the onset of a confrontation over education and paved the way for its centralization. Indeed, government interference in education took a step further with the Elementary Education Law of 1929. With this law, responsibility for the appointment, promotion, transfer or dismissal of teachers was now vested entirely with the Governor; the law also stipulated that the members of the Boards of Education were no longer to be elected by the District Committees but would be appointed by the Governor himself. This included the three Greek members of the Legislative Council who were always members of the Board. Reformation in education, including an increase in teachers' salaries (a long term demand), was to be funded through additional taxation in what was already a heavily-taxed society, one in which the lower classes, namely the peasantry, assumed the greatest share of the tax burden. Still, at this point, responsibility for the curriculum and textbooks remained under the authority of the Boards.

Both laws, particularly the second, caused intense friction between the Government and Greek Cypriots, who believed these were strongly connected to a colonial effort to de-hellenize the island. Both laws also limited the role of the Orthodox Church traditionally held in education. The Elementary Education Law of 1929, which came into force into 1930; strengthened the position of the hard core *Enosis* wing (its members scored a major victory in elections held that year) and was a key cause for the 1931 uprising.



View of the Government House before the October events, 1931 (Image courtesy of the Press and Information Office, Republic of Cyprus).

The October Revolt, 1931 (Οκτωβριανά)

The events of October, 1931 or *Οκτωβριανά*, mark a turning point in the history of Cyprus under the British. It is now generally accepted by historians that the riots were **spontaneous** and by no means planned. The revolt was the first open defiance against British; although it was quickly suppressed, it nevertheless had **long term repercussions** for the local population. The reasons for the uprising are primarily found in Greek Cypriot national aspirations but also in dissatisfaction with the island's economy and with increased British control over education.

Following the government's decision to introduce a new customs tariff in 1930, the Greek members of the Legislative Council, under the leadership of the Bishop of Kitium, Nicodemos Mylonas, met at the village of Saitta, in Troodos, to discuss a possible response. It was decided to pursue a policy of civil disobedience by calling on people to refuse to pay taxes and to boycott British goods; the final call was to be made by the National Organization itself. The Organization met four times during October, but failed to reach a definite decision. At its last meeting, on 17 October 1931, the Bishop of Kitium, read to the rest of the members a manifesto in which he advocated dynamic resistance to the British. Although the other members agreed in principle with the manifesto, they nevertheless asked the Bishop for a few days to consider it. On the following day, however, the Bishop announced his manifesto publicly and resigned from the Legislative Council. This left little choice for the rest of the Greek members but to submit their resignations a couple of days later. From that point onwards, things moved at speed. The National Radical Union of Cyprus (Εθνική Ριζοσπαστική Ένωση Κύπρου

– E.P.E.K.) was also created and committed to *Enosis*. On 20 October, the Bishop addressed a large crowd in Limassol and declared the union of Cyprus with Greece. At the same time, in Nicosia, the capital, thousands of people spontaneously took to the streets, and thus the uprising began.



The burnt-out car of Governor Sir Ronald Storrs outside the ruins of the Government House, Nicosia, on 21 October 1931. Sukie Cameron Collection. (Image courtesy of Press and Information Office, Republic of Cyprus).

Source 2.7: The Manifesto of the Bishop of Kitium, Nicodemos Mylonas:

“Your Excellency,

I have the honour to tender my resignation as a Member of the Legislative Council of Cyprus...It is a fact, Your Excellency, that even the most Christian patience has its limits; we have suffered for fifty-three whole years an administration by people of a foreign race, foreign to our sentiments and the most elementary of our rights and indifferent to the needs of this unfortunate island in the hope that the petty colonial interests of Great Britain would at least be overcome by those considerations which had so much assisted our great mother country in regaining her liberty. We have let no occasion pass during these dark fifty years without proclaiming **our desire to be united with Mother Greece**, a desire the justice and sanctity of which England first acknowledged in October, 1915, by offering Cyprus to the Greek Government of that time. We have repeatedly sent deputations to England; union memorials and resolutions can be counted by hundred...As a member of the Council I had of necessity taken the Oath of Allegiance to King George, but as an ecclesiastical and national leader I am now obliged to recommend to the Cypriots, subjects by right of might, the **disobedience** dictated by our violated human rights. It will be my duty from now onwards to go about calling my compatriots to a non-lawful opposition to unlawful authorities and unlawful laws. The time has come for us to prove to our foreign rulers that if we have been deceived as to their liberal sentiments they are nonetheless deceived if they consider us such a depraved and debased people as to be intimidated by force and arbitrariness.

Cited in: G. S. Georghallides, 1985, pp. 688-689.

Demonstrations took place in all major towns. Nicosia naturally was a central point of local discontent; this was certainly true once news of the resignation of the Greek members of the Legislative Council became known. People went out in the streets and marched towards the Government’s House, which was **burnt down**. The event would play a central part in British colonial psychology in the years to

follow. In response, the British brought troops and warships from Egypt and Malta; soldiers were summoned from the Troodos Mountains, and air reinforcements were deployed to quickly suppress the upheaval. There were seven Greek Cypriot fatalities and many casualties; later on, hundreds were imprisoned. Although the disturbances were **quickly suppressed** and the British suffered no casualties, the repercussions for Cypriots were severe and long term.

The Communist Party of Cyprus (K.K.K.) was also seriously tested by the October events. While the rest of the island declared disobedience to the British and demanded union with Greece, Cypriot communists took an entirely different approach. The K.K.K. denounced the events as an expression of the desires of the Church and the Bourgeois. As events unfolded, however, and appeared to be a mass movement, the party realized the danger of keeping aloof from what was going on. But by the time the party's Central Committee decided announce its revised position, the revolt was already fizzling out.

The Greek Government in Athens kept its distance from events in Cyprus. Despite Greek demonstrations being organized in favour of the Greek Cypriot cause, for the Greek Prime Minister, Eleftherios Venizelos, an **impeccable relationship** with the British was an absolute priority. Venizelos believed *Enosis* could be achieved through an Anglo-Hellenic friendship, and he disapproved events on the island, as they made any Greek claim on Cyprus impossible for many years to come. To this end he also recalled to Athens the Greek Consul in Cyprus, Alexis Kyrrou, who was involved in the *Enosis* campaign.



View of the Government's House, Nicosia, after its destruction by protesters. 21 October 1931. Sukey Cameron Collection. (Image courtesy of the Press and Information Office, Republic of Cyprus).

Source 2.8:

Extract from Governor Storr's report on the 1931 events:

"At 5:30 p.m. it was generally known that the Orthodox members of the Legislative Council in Nicosia had decided to resign. Members of the new National Union collected at the Commercial Club and sent emissaries to cause the church bells to be rung to summon the people. Others went round the town telling the shopkeepers to shut their shops and assemble at the Club. Speeches began and the crowd swelled from 300 to 3,000 persons who swarmed inside and around the Club's extensive premises. The resigning members arrived and spoke in turn. The keynote of the speeches was that all differences of opinion and party must be set aside. ... Dionysios Kykkotis, chief priest of the most important church in Nicosia, then stepped forward and "declared revolution". A Greek flag was handed to him and he swore the people to defend it. One more speech was made; the speaker kissed the flag and the cry "To Government House" was renewed with frenzy."

Governor Storrs report on the 'Disturbances in Cyprus in October, 1931', 11 February 1932, cited in The National Archives of the United Kingdom, CO 67/243/1.

Consequences of the 1931 events

Following the suppression of the disturbances the British introduced a series of **strict measures**. The Legislative Council was abolished and any kind of political advancement was halted; authority was entirely vested in the Governor, who ruled by decree. He was assisted by an Executive Council consisting of four official members (the Colonial Secretary, the Commissioner of Nicosia, the Attorney General and the Treasurer) and three non-official members nominated by the Governor. Political parties were made **illegal**, and in 1933 the Communist Party was proscribed. Municipal elections were also forbidden, and all councilors were to be **appointed** by the Governor himself. Furthermore, the press was placed under strict **ensorship**, and many newspapers were at times suspended. Congregations of five or more people were not allowed to take place without the prior consent of the District Commissioner, and flying the Greek flag was prohibited, as was the ringing of church bells. Greek Cypriots were forced to **pay a tribute** of about £35,000 to cover damages caused during the events. The British were also quick to **point to the Church as the main instigator of the riots**. The Bishop of Kitium, Nicodemos Mylonas, and the Bishop of Kyrenia, Makarios Myriantheas, along with eight other persons (including both **nationalists and communists**) were deported. The new measures also affected Turkish Cypriots, even though they did not participate in the events. Ironically, however, what the British tried to suppress – the *Enosis* movement, as well as any communist activity – survived underground, only returning to the foreground when conditions permitted.

Source 2.9: *The Economist*, 19 November 1931

"After having existed for fifty years, the Cyprus Legislative Council had shown a sign of life. And how does the Colonial Office respond? Does it welcome this tardy fruit of British political education? On the contrary, it abolishes the adolescent Legislative Council six months later."

Cited in: Georghallides and Markides, 1993, p.5

Life under Palmer's Rule (1933-1939)

The measures that were introduced in Cyprus after 1931, first by Governor Ronald Storrs (1926-1931), then by Governor Edward Stubbs (1931-1932), were consolidated during the Governorship of Richmond Palmer (1933-1939). In Greek Cypriot historiography, his service is known as **Palmer's Rule** (*Παλμεροκρατία*) and has been identified with the most oppressive period of British occupation.

While many of the measures taken after the suppression of the October events were directed toward curtailing the influence of the Orthodox Church and of the *Enosis* movement, both survived. In 1933, Archbishop Cyril III died. With the two Bishops of Kitium and Kyrenia in exile, authority was vested in the only remaining Bishop on the island, Bishop of Paphos Leontios, who was named Acting Archbishop (*Locum Tenens*). During the 1931 October events, Leontios was representing the Orthodox Church of Cyprus at an ecclesiastical conference in London. Not without considerable discussion amongst British colonial authorities, he was eventually allowed to return to the island in 1932. For the election of a new Archbishop, a Holy Synod had to be formed with at least three Bishops; that the two other Bishops were in exile made the conduct of an election impossible. The introduction of two **Church Laws**, in 1937, by Governor Palmer, made an election all the more impossible and caused increased tension between the British administration and the Orthodox Church. Until 1947, when an election finally became feasible, the vacant archiepiscopal throne remained a thorny question and a **continuous source of friction** between the colonial authorities and Greek Cypriots. During that period, the *Locum Tenens* Leontios remained the sole representative of the Orthodox Church and of Greek Cypriots, and he played a significant role in keeping the *Enosis* movement alive. Leontios was tried for his national activities three times and was twice confined within the limits of the municipality of Paphos between 1938 and 1940.

Education was also an issue that caused increased **estrangement** between the British and Greek Cypriots. During the 1930s the British administration attempted to further **centralize** local education. This was exemplified by a new Education Law enacted in 1933, according to which the Governor was to be "the central authority for all matters relating to elementary education on the island"; he was charged with "the control and supervision and the performance of all duties and the exercise of all power connected therewith". **The Orthodox Church was completely excluded** from any of its traditional participation in educational affairs, which caused tremendous resentment. The Board of Education continued to exist, but it had no power virtually; it merely served as an advisory body. Furthermore, in 1935, a **new Curriculum** for elementary schools came into force which was to be common for all communities on the island and which were termed according to their religion (for example, Greeks were termed "Christian Orthodox"). Such a step frustrated the Greek Cypriot majority even more, in that they saw this as a British effort towards the creation of a Cypriot nationality. The teaching of Greek History was forbidden, replaced by World History, and the teaching of the English language was introduced to the higher forms. The British flag was hoisted above the island's schools, making the British atmosphere on the island all the more palpable. The 1935 Curriculum, which was to be revised in 1949, was attacked by the Press, the politicians of the local Right, and the Church. The onset of war and the need for cooperation would, in a way, overshadow the question of education. Education, however, always so crucial to Greek Cypriots, would return to the spotlight in the post

war years, especially during the 1950s, when the connection of education with Enosis politics would reach its peak.

Source 2.10: The Orthodox Church Reaction to the Elementary Education Law and the new curriculum: The *Locum Tenens* Leontios to Governor Palmer, 18 November 1935. Here, Leontios emphasizes the *ethnarchic* role of the religious institution as well as its traditional role in education.

"...We, however, out of duty, by this memorial emphasize that the Apostolic Church of Cyprus, the *ab antiquo* supreme, **responsible authority for the lay and religious education** of the Greek Orthodox people of the island, not only does not disown its *ab antiquo* rights and privileges, but it also sticks to all of them in claiming its sacred and inviolable right to exchange correspondence also with the temporal Government and regulate with it the educational and national questions of its spiritual flock who are still under political servitude. The education of the Greek Cypriot Orthodox not only before the English Occupation, but after it as well, for whole decades, was under the **immediate supreme responsibility, administration and supervision of the Church** since religion and education with us are inextricably connected with each other constituting one and the same thing...The new curriculum of elementary education, which was approved in 1934 on being trumped up with a view to introducing, contrary to all education rules, the foreign to us English language and of abolishing, a thing unheard of hitherto, Greek History and Geography, is a most clear proof that the intention of the Government in none else but a pernicious influence of the conscience of Cypriot Greek children...We strongly protest in all our **official ethnarchic capacity and claim all the *ab antiquo* recognized to us and to our pious people educational rights** which we demand and shall always demand to be restored to us and to our people the same as we had them before 1923..."

Cited in: The National Archives of the United Kingdom, CO 67/260/3.

As stated above, the economic distress of the late 1920s and early 1930s without a doubt affected Cyprus as it did in other parts of the world. The deterioration of the economy resulted in an increase in **rural debts during the first half of the 1930s** which, in turn, led to further loss of land and to an increase in the number of landless peasants. Such an experience was bound to have **political implications**. In 1936, the colonial authority tried to deal with the problem by restricting the interest on loans made to peasants to a maximum of 12 percent per year. The foundation of a **Cooperative Central Bank** in late 1937 was a positive step for the development and expansion of the cooperative movement and for the general economic relief for Cypriot peasants. Finally, in 1940, the colonial authority enacted further legislation, according to which most **rural debts were reduced** by one third and interest rates were capped at 5 percent.

Source 2.11: A.R. Achenson, Colonial Office official on the economic situation of Cyprus, 17.8.1938:

"Cyprus is the Cinderella of the British Empire; though it has been under British administration for nearly sixty years it lags far behind the development of other Colonies...Cyprus is the only Colony of which it can be said that the British Government has not only failed to give it any financial support, but has exacted from it heavy Tribute which has been applied to the subvention of the British taxpayer."

Cited in: Panteli, 1984, p.166.

The British also had a relatively moderate attitude towards **trade union activism** in their Empire, since it was seen as a counter weight to more dangerous political developments. In 1932 the first official law recognizing Trade Unions came into force in Cyprus; the response, however, was disappointing since, by the following year, only one Trade Union was registered, and there were no new registrations in 1933 and 1934. This was due to economic and social conditions of the time,

which were such that workers were discouraged from forming or joining Trade Unions. In the difficult milieu of the early 1930s, workers simply lacked the enthusiasm – or the experience – to combine their forces. This gradually changed during the second half of the 1930s, however, as ‘infant’ industrialization spurred the **foundation of 46 Trade Unions by the end of 1939**, creating a nascent yet vigorous labour movement.

By 1939 the colonial Government in Cyprus faced acute criticism for its practices, not only from within but also outside the island. Indeed, beginning in the mid-1930s, there was a metropolitan reaction against repressive practices adopted by the British in many of their colonies, including Cyprus. This reaction was not irrelevant to developments in Europe. The more Britain projected herself as a liberal power in an age of fascist dictators, the more any association with colonial autocracy – and colonial poverty – was potentially embarrassing. The appointment of a Governor with a liberal reputation, Sir William Battershill, in August 1939, sprung new hopes for the betterment of local affairs. The onset of the war in Europe, however, on 1 September 1939, would halt any potential liberalization of British governance of Cyprus.

Table 2.12: Trade Unions, Branches and Membership, 1939-1945

YEAR	Registered Trade Unions	Branches	Membership
1939	46	-	2,544
1940	62	-	3,389
1941	68	-	3,854
1942	73	43	9,991
1943	84	68	9,628
1944	122	71	11,865
1945	143	78	15,480

Cited in: Avraamides, 1972, p.16.

Cyprus during the second World War, 1939-1945

Aims

This unit examines crucial developments which took place in Cyprus during the Second World War. It examines the Cypriot contribution to the war effort; this contribution was a turning point which forced the British to be more flexible in their attitude toward Cypriots. The unit also discusses the formation of the main political parties, which were founded in the wake of this relaxed attitude. Without a doubt, the most important party was a party of the Left, A.K.E.L. which soon came to threaten the traditional monopoly of the right wing forces – and of the Orthodox Church – on the *Enosis* movement. The unit explains how wartime relations between the British and the local forces paved the way for the developments of the late 1940s and the 1950s. It is also during the wartime period that the process of polarization of Greek Cypriot politics began. Special emphasis is given to the renewed Greek Cypriot expectations of *Enosis*; these were augmented by their contribution to the war effort and by the overlap of British and Greek interests following Greece's entry in the war on the Allied side. The continuous disappointments Greek Cypriots experienced before and during the war became a significant element of post war Anglo-Cypriot relations.

After studying this unit, students should be in a position to:

- Understand how and in what ways the war altered political realities on the island.
- Discuss the British attitude toward the local political forces of the Right and the Left.
- Understand how polarization between the Right and the Left began during the war.
- Follow developments concerning the labour movement and appreciate its impact upon Cypriot society and economy.
- Evaluate the British attitude toward the Turkish Cypriot community.
- Evaluate the British attitude toward the *Enosis* movement.

Keywords

- Cyprus Regiment
- K.E.K
- P.S.E.
- 1943
- March 1
- A.K.E.L.
- P.E.K
- Municipal elections
- Labour movement
- 1944 strike

Cyprus during the early stages of World War II

The onset of the Second World War heralded **far reaching changes** to the situation in Cyprus. This period witnessed a revitalization of the political scene on the island and paved the way for the developments of the late 1940s and the 1950s. The arrival on the island of Governor Battershill, in August 1939, once again raised hopes at least for a move towards gradual representation. As events in Europe after September 1939 unfolded, however, any British intentions towards representative reforms were to remain essentially restricted, since the absolute priority was the Allied victory over the Axis powers. Despite the post 1931 experience, Greek Cypriots responded to the colonial call for help and unanimously stood by the British Empire's war effort. Despite previous volunteering during the Great War, Cypriot contribution during World War II had no precedent and, in February 1940, a Cyprus Regiment was formed in which Cypriots served as volunteers in the British forces.

Source 3.1: "The people of the island whether Greeks or Turks, have shown enthusiastic loyalty. Two volunteer transports units are already serving overseas. Before February 18, when the King approved the formation of a Cyprus Regiment consisting of combatant troops, pioneers and transport, 6000 men had volunteered for service. The number of volunteers is understood to have been nearly doubled since".

Cited in: The Times, 'The Cypriots' War Record', 15 April 1940.

The entry of Greece in the war had a significant impact on the course of events on the island. Following the delivery of the Italian ultimatum to the Greek Premier, General Ioannis Metaxas, and the latter's **refusal to allow Italian troops** to transit over Greek soil, Greece entered the war, on **28 October 1940**, on the side of Britain and its allies. The overlap of British and Greek interests brought about by the war created a new dynamic in the internal politics of the island. Indeed, Greek participation in the war marked the revival of the *Enosis* movement with all its old vigor and forced the British to abandon some of the illiberal laws which had been enacted after 1931. Demonstrations took place in all major towns on the island. The Acting Archbishop, Leontios, was the **central figure** in all pro-Hellenic demonstrations and events on the island. By the middle of 1941, donations to the Greek War Fund had reached a total sum of £100,000. Such contribution continued with the same zeal during the second half of the year but more significantly there was a movement for volunteering in the Greek Army instead of the Cyprus Regiment; this movement was led by the Acting Archbishop. Such an alternative, however, was unacceptable to the British, who eventually refused to let such an option materialize. The war experience strengthened Greek Cypriot belief as to what was a just reward for their loyalty and contribution to the war effort; such a reward could be nothing less than the union of the island with Greece.

Sources 3.2 and 3.3: Governor Battershill's comments on the Cypriot contribution to the Red Cross (before the entry of Greece) and to the Greek War Fund (after October 1940) in his private correspondence with his mother.

a) "You will be surprised to hear that the Red Cross collections which I started here at the beginning of the war now amount to £4500, an amazing sum for such a small and poor country as this. I did not believe it to be possible". 15 November 1939.

b) "There is tremendous excitement here about the success of the Greek Army against the Italians. It is indeed a wonderful success. People are pawing their wedding rings to give the money to the Greek War Fund. I'm afraid any British war charity will fare ill here at the moment when all the local inhabitants are giving to the Greek War Fund", 18 November 1940.

Both sources cited in: Rhodes House Library, Oxford, Private Papers of Sir William Battershill, MSS Brit. Emp. S467, Box 4, file III.

Political parties during the Second World War

One of the significant changes the island experienced during the 1939-1945 period was the **remaking of its political landscape**. Precisely because Cypriots had widely contributed to the Allied war effort, and because this effort was made in the name of Freedom and Democracy, the British had at least to appear more flexible with regard to the island's internal situation. As a consequence, during the war years a number of political parties emerged. Undoubtedly, the most important party formed during this period was A.K.E.L. (Progressive Party of Working People – Ανορθωτικό Κόμμα Εργαζομένου Λαού), which was founded in April 1941 by communists, as well as by people from a wider ideological spectrum. Ploutis Servas was the party's first General Secretary. A.K.E.L. was indeed destined to play a critical role in the island's political scene. It presented a coherent program of social and labour policy and, by December 1941, it also **committed itself to the goal of Enosis**. Such an attachment, combined with the party's rapidly growing influence within Cypriot society, posed a serious **challenge** to local Right wing politicians and to the British administration and both confronted the party with increasing suspicion. The Communist Party of Cyprus (Κ.Κ.Κ.) **existed in parallel** with A.K.E.L. – although underground – for a few more years before its final dissolution; the simultaneous existence of both parties, a fresh leftist one which included 'moderate' elements and an older formation retaining its radical character, was bound to create some confusion.

A.K.E.L.'s expanding influence in the rural areas, however, resulted in friction between the party and more conservative elements. Indeed, in May 1942, the Pan Cyprian Farmer's Union (Παναγροτική Ένωση Κύπρου – Π.Ε.Κ.) was formed in the village of Athienou and was thenceforth the bastion of conservative rural elements on the island. That P.E.K. promoted the amelioration of social conditions in the countryside but also embraced *Enosis* forced the British into an uneasy position.

Increasing pressures within and outside Cyprus during the war, and Britain's refusal to relinquish the island, forced the British administration to grant limited representation to Cypriots in their internal affairs. This included the re-introduction of the municipal elections which had been abolished in 1931. The municipal elections of 1943, the first to be held in twelve years, marked the **first open confrontation** between the two opposing ideological camps of Cyprus. While the results confirmed

the influence of the Right as the traditional power in Cyprus, they also proved the Left was a new power on the island and not to be underestimated, since A.K.E.L. took possession of Limassol and **Famagusta**. In June 1943 A.K.E.L. called its members to enroll in the Cyprus Regiment – the immediate response of 700 members proved again the party’s ability to mobilize its membership. A.K.E.L.’s successes, however, exacerbated the estrangement between the Left and the Right and proved that traditional politicians needed to improve their organization in order to counter A.K.E.L.’s advancing popularity. As a consequence, under the leadership of the Nicosia Mayor, Themistocles Dervis, June 1943 witnessed the foundation of the **Cypriot National Party** (Κυπριακό Εθνικό Κόμμα – Κ.Ε.Κ.) which represented the traditional political forces of the island and was naturally committed to the achievement of *Enosis*. Κ.Ε.Κ. refused to cooperate with the Left, however, and this deprived Greek Cypriots of the opportunity to form a common front against the British. Tensions soon appeared elsewhere, as the gap in the political field also emerged in the Trade Union sector. Beginning in October 1943, a number of workers ideologically closer to the Right decided to depart from the Trade Unions and form their own ‘New’ Trade Unions under a conservative leadership. By October 1944, the founding of more ‘New’ Trade Unions led to the establishment of the **Confederation of Cyprus’ Workers** (Συννομοσπονδία Εργατών Κύπρου – Σ.Ε.Κ.). All in all, by the end of the war, the process of polarization – itself a reflection of the dramatic events of the civil war between the Left and the Right then unfolding in Greece – was well under way. Testimony to this was the Lefkoniko incident, which occurred on Greek Independence Day, on 25 March 1945, where a physical confrontation between supporters of the two ideological camps caused police intervention and resulted in the death of two persons, with several wounded. This polarization would reach its climax in the post war milieu.

The Labour Movement during the War

The onset of hostilities in Europe and the new milieu it fostered in Cyprus created more opportunities for the nascent labour movement to interfere in local affairs. The intense economic dislocation which Cyprus experienced helped the Trade Unions to acknowledge the need for collective action. Such action necessarily involved **strikes**. The growth of the labour movement was also accelerated by increasing **unemployment**, a result of the closure of many foreign markets, and it became a major issue during the war. Indeed, already on the day the war broke out, the employees of the Public Works Department went on strike. Such phenomena became even more intense during the first months of 1940 when strikes occurred in many public departments, resulting in the arrest of many workers. Problems also arose in the mining industry, since half of the employees engaged in the industry – around 4000 persons – were let go. That the Cyprus Mines Corporation (C.M.C.) ceased operations at the mines of Skouriotissa and Mavrovouni put a serious burden on the working class. To such rising challenges the colonial authority responded by the organizing **relief works**. The authorities also introduced **labour legislation** which was welcomed by the working people of the island but generally Government–labour relations remained tense throughout the war. The British believed the Trade Unions were under the influence of communist forces (either the K.K.K. or, following its foundation in April 1941, A.K.E.L.) and became **increasingly anxious** about their activities. Indeed, what began as a rather disparate Trade Union response to the inevitable economic upset caused

by the war steadily evolved into a movement that threatened to disrupt the normal pattern of the island's local affairs.

Trade Union attitude toward the war caused some friction within Greek Cypriot society because while Trade Unionists generally refrained from enlisting in the Cyprus Regiment, they insisted on this stance even after Greece entered the war in October 1940. At a time when Cypriot society was mobilized to contribute to the Hellenic war effort, such a position was bound to cause pressure on the Trade Unions, and there was division within their ranks, with moderates prepared to pledge their loyalty to the national cause and radical members maintaining an anti-war position. Such an attitude, in the early stages of the war, made any fixed position on the part of the Trade Unions clearly impossible. Things changed in June 1941 when the Soviet Union, following an invasion by German forces, entered the war on the side of the Allies. This allowed both A.K.E.L. and the Trade Unions to become more engaged with the war. Indeed, the Trade Unions, in tandem with A.K.E.L., became the spearhead of 'anti-fascism' on the island. In November 1941, Trade Unions were organized under one leading organ, the Pan Cyprian Trade Union Committee (Παγκύπρια Συντεχνιακή Επιτροπή – P.S.E.); this was clearly an important step towards effective cooperation between the Unions.

Throughout the war the labour movement remained occupied with the deteriorating economy, especially with the continued rise of the **cost of living** on the island; this evolved into a thorny issue between workers and the government. Despite anti-inflationary efforts the cost of living continued to increase, fomenting Trade Union militancy. The cost of living strike which began on **1 March 1944** and lasted until the 23rd was a critical moment in wartime Government-labour relations. The strike involved 1800 workers and was supported by the great majority of the public, the press and political parties. Under such mounting pressure, the Government was eventually forced to agree to significantly improve general economic conditions on the island. The March 1944 strike demonstrated the power of the labour movement and the pressure it could exert on the colonial authority.

Source 3.4:

Andreas Ziartides, General Secretary of P.S.E. in a speech he addressed in Nicosia underlined the **political dimension** of the March 1944 strike, including A.K.E.L.'s role in its success.

(Translated from Greek):

"...Following a glorious 23 days struggle...which under the guidance of our party, the Progressive Party of Working People, was transformed into a pan Cyprian struggle, the Pan Cyprian Trade Union Committee believes the course of the struggle so far is a partial but important political victory not only of those unemployed but of Cypriot people as a whole".

Cited in: *Anexartitos* newspaper, "Truce declared at the Government works' strike", 24 March 1944.

Cypriot economy during the war

Despite problems arising on the labour front, signs of a **growing economy** were evident on the island during the last stages of the war. As discussed above, following the onset of hostilities the island

experienced a dislocation of its economy since its traditional export markets, now in Axis countries, were closed to Cyprus. The island's mining companies ceased operations, which had a serious effect on the labor class and increased unemployment. Nevertheless, the military works established on the island, after the fall of Greece to the Germans in the spring of 1941, provided **job opportunities** for many and brought significant relief to the unemployed. The air base construction and the stationing of soldiers on the island also brought a transfusion of money to Cyprus and a general improvement of public health conditions.

Problems with import products led to the development of small enterprises on the island. Prior to the war there was virtually no industry in Cyprus. During the war, however, Cyprus saw an expansion of its **industrial production**, although no heavy industry appeared on the island due to limited investment. Instead, small enterprises mainly produced goods which did not require much capital investment. Despite serious inflation, which resulted in labor discontent, the **military work expenditure** on the island resulted in the **betterment** of the island's economic situation in the later stages of the war and opened the way to post war economic expansion. The war also witnessed a significant development of the cooperative movement which by 1945 numbered 412 societies. In addition, a significant number of local and foreign banks also operated on the island. For example a branch of the Barclays Bank was established in 1937 and the Bank of Cyprus also expanded noticeably over the 1940s and the 1950s.

Table 3.5: Growth of cooperative movement

	1934	1938	1940	1943	1945
Number of Societies	324	353	343	32	412
Number of members	16,035	24,079	31,286	45,000	56,881

Cited in: Government of Cyprus, *Ten Year Development Plan*, 1946, p.62.

Table 3.6: Main Economic indicators 1901-1950

	1901	1931	1950
Total GDP, £ m.	1,2	2,8	38,7
Contribution to GDP (% of total) by:			
Agriculture	70	50	27,4
Mining and quarrying	-	24	12,4
Manufacturing	-	-	15,2
Construction	-	-	3,3
Gainfully employed population (%) in:			
Agriculture	85	68,1	60,1
Manufacturing	-	1,4	-

Cited in: Angelides, 1996, p.224.

The Turkish Cypriot community

While the Turkish Cypriot minority felt unsettled by the alteration of regime during the early stages of British rule in Cyprus, over time it discovered its position was not without advantage under the British. Gradually, the British came to lean on Turkish Cypriots for support – such tendency, as we have seen, was strongly exemplified by the mechanisms of the Legislative Council. The importance given to the Turkish Cypriot minority by the British is demonstrated time and again during British rule. After 1914, when Britain annexed the island from the Ottoman Empire, Turkish Cypriots held tightly to their new status as British subjects.

The revival of *Enosis* had direct repercussions on Turkish Cypriots, as it sparked an immediate **opposition** toward any prospect of the union of the island with Greece. As the war evolved, and the force of the *Enosis* movement became even more intense, Turkish Cypriots naturally felt a certain anxiety. Though they declared their loyalty to Great Britain, the war also accelerated the emergence of a Turkish Cypriot political consciousness, a phenomenon which certainly continued to evolve even after the war subsided. Turkish Cypriots **began looking to Turkey** for protection, instead of to Britain, and this tendency was intensified over the following years. The first actual institutional reaction to the growing reinvigoration of the *Enosis* movement was expressed in 1943. That year witnessed the foundation of the ‘Association for the Protection of the Turkish Cypriot Minority’ (K.A.T.A.K) – one of the party’s founders was Fazıl Küçük, later vice president of the Republic of Cyprus. A year later, in April 1944, Küçük moved on to establish the Turkish Cypriot National Party (K.T.M.B.P.). It was a step which signaled the community’s readiness to respond with greater vigor to political developments on the island.

The British took the wishes of Turkish Cypriots under serious consideration and tried to ease their anxieties. As early as 1907, when Winston Churchill visited the island as Under Secretary of State for the Colonies, he was careful to stress both the just national demands of Greek Cypriots and the importance of the wishes of Turkish Cypriots. The British Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, also stressed the importance of the Turkish factor to the Greek Premier, Emmanouil Tsouderos, when he made his November 1941 speech (discussed below). That year, Churchill, as Prime Minister, put an end to discussions on whether the Greek government could establish itself in Cyprus following Greece’s surrender to the Axis because of the Turkish Cypriot presence on the island. In the following decades the role of Turkish Cypriots – and of Turkey – would indeed prove to be a **perplexing part** of the ‘Cyprus Question’.

Sources 3.7 and 3.8: Winston's Churchill comments on the importance Britain placed on the Turkish Cypriot community is demonstrated in two examples. The first was made during his 1907 visit to the island and the second following official discussion as to whether the Greek Government should be allowed to establish itself in Cyprus (following Greece's occupation by Germany).

1907: Churchill's reply to the Greek elected members to the Legislative Council in which he also exaggerated the number of Turkish Cypriots on the island.

"It (The *Enosis* question) involves not only an absolute change in the Government of the island but also the abrogation of the Treaty with Turkey. It involves further the **setting aside of the views of nearly one third of the population**, and the creation of what would probably be a permanent and dangerous antagonism between the two sections of the community... I think it only natural that the Cypriot people who are of Greek descent should regard their incorporation with what may be called their mother country **as an ideal to be earnestly, devoutly, and fervently cherished**. Such a feeling is an example the patriotic devotion which so nobly characterizes the Greek nation... On the other hand, the opinion held by the Moslem population on the island, that the British occupation of Cyprus should not lead to dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire, and that the mission of Great Britain in the Levant should not be to impair the sovereignty of the Sultan, **is one which His Majesty's Government are equally bound to regard with respect.**"

Cited in: Georghalides, 1970, p. 211.

2 June 1941, Winston Churchill:

"I have followed very closely all that has happened in Cyprus since I visited the island in 1907. I suppose you are aware there is a substantial Moslem population in Cyprus, **who have (sic) been very loyal to us and who would resent being handed over to the Greeks**".

Cited in: The National Archives of the United Kingdom, Prime Minister's Personal Minute, 2 June 1941, FO 371/29846, R 5841/198/19.

British policy toward growing challenges in Cyprus, 1939-1945

The British administration was taken aback by the overwhelming Cypriot contribution to the war effort. The Greek entry in the war, a turning point in Cypriot history with direct repercussions on the island, resulted in an *Enosis* revival. That the interests of Greece and Britain now overlapped, combined with the former's heroic resistance to the Axis powers, had the majority of Greek Cypriots hoping things would alter after the war, should the Allies prevail. It was because Greek Cypriots expected a post war reward – and such a reward could only be the union of the island with Greece – that the British were **anxious to deflate such expectations**.

The question of *Enosis* therefore became highly problematic for the British during the war. The British had to confront the consistent *Enosis* policy of the Orthodox Church as represented by the Acting Archbishop Leontios, and after December 1941 by A.K.E.L. itself. The British had already denied the request of the Greek King George II to move his government to Cyprus after Greece was overrun by Germany in the spring of 1941, as they were determined not to do anything which might prejudice their continuous hold on the island. Such determination was stressed even further in November 1941 when the Greek Prime Minister, Emmanouil Tsouderos, sought to gently raise the *Enosis* question. At a dinner organized by the Greek community in London, the Prime Minister addressed the fate

of Greek majority territories not yet united politically with the Greek state. News of the Greek Premier's speech was soon transmitted to Cyprus and this led to a new wave of intense *Enosis* fervor as exemplified by the numerous editorials and telegrams addressed to Tsouderos.

Source 3.9

The Greek Prime Minister, Emmanouil Tsouderos's speech 15 November 1941:

"Greece...dressed in white and with the nimbus of martyrdom round her head, she is not alone; she is followed by her beloved united daughters. One easily knows them from their costumes. Look! There is the woman of Macedonia, the woman of Crete, the woman of Cyprus, the woman of Peloponese, the woman of Yanina, the woman of North Epirus...adorned with laurels they follow their mother, going forward towards victory that will unite them again in peace".

Cited in: The National Archives of the United Kingdom, FO 371/29846, R 10112/198/19.

To meet the challenges arising on multiple fronts, and to halt any further speculation, the colonial authorities in Nicosia, under new Governor Sir Charles Woolley, issued, after consultation with London, a statement in early December 1941 in which they stressed that no alteration to the status of Cyprus was being considered. The statement **strongly exemplified the British determination to check the *Enosis* movement.**

Source 3.10:

The statement issued by the colonial authorities on 2 December 1941:

"The attention of the Government had been drawn to comments which have been appearing in the press regarding a statement reported to have been made by the Greek Prime Minister in London on the 15th November, in which he included Cyprus among a number of territories which he visualized might be included in a Greater Greece after the war. In view of the conclusions which have been drawn from this statement, the Government is authorized to say that no negotiations have been, or are, in progress between His Majesty's Government and the Government of Greece, regarding the post-war status of Cyprus. The question of transferring Cyprus from Great Britain to Greece after the war **is not, therefore, under consideration.**"

Cited in: The National Archives of the United Kingdom, CO 67/311/11.

It is important to note, however, that London itself was divided as to the future of Cyprus. Certain officials at the Foreign Office were sympathetic to the Greek cause in Cyprus, and voices were heard during the war for the transfer of the island to Greece after the end of hostilities. Such an attitude on the part of some Foreign Office officials was particularly strong during 1944-1945. The Colonial Office, however, held a divergent view on Cyprus and held to its traditional belief that retaining Cyprus was an absolute necessity for British imperial interests. In July 1945, the election of a Labour Government would bring fresh hopes to Greek Cypriots. London, however, would soon decide that the island, in the midst of new global developments had to remain under British control. This would come as a disappointment to Greek Cypriots. This disappointment would be part and parcel of their ongoing relationship with Britain in the post war period.

At the same time, the British were also highly suspicious of both the Left and the Right on the island. They doubted A.K.E.L.'s commitment to the cause of *Enosis* (as did the Right) and feared that A.K.E.L. might eventually resort to open violence – a belief shaped by A.K.E.L.'s recruiting campaign of 1943 and by unfolding developments in Greece which was drawn into a bloody civil war. Simultaneously, however, the British refused to seize the opportunity for a closer cooperation with the Right because they considered the latter as unacceptable a partner as the Left. Once the war ended the British searched Trade Union premises and declared P.S.E an illegal organization, bringing about antagonism between the government and the labour movement. The late 1940s were to witness an even greater estrangement between the British authorities and Greek Cypriots, as well as within the Greek Cypriot community.



View of Limassol, 1930, Avedissian Bros Collection (Image courtesy of the Laiki Bank Cultural Centre Archive).

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