

by Nikos Mottas

**CHARILAOS FLO-  
RAKIS**, the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Greece (KKE) from 1972–1991, passed away on 22nd May 2005 at the age of 91. Florakis's life, indelibly tied to the struggles of the KKE, was devoted to the ideals of Marxism-Leninism.

Born in 1914 in Paliozoglopi, a small village in Thessaly, Charilaos Florakis joined the Greek Young Communist League (OKNE) in 1929. As an OKNE member and later as a student and active worker at the 'TTT', the Ministry of Posts, Telegraphs, Telephone Offices, he began his political activity during a politically turbulent period for Greece.

As a teenager, he felt the first signs of the ongoing class struggle in the Greek countryside of 1930s. A telegraph worker, he was a member of the TTT struggle committee active in union campaigns during the especially difficult circumstances of General Ioannis Metaxas' fascist dictatorship.

Due to his union activity, he was transferred many times from town to town. Wherever he went however, young Charilaos worked to build clandestine groups of communists.

#### Guerrilla fighter

Florakis joined the resistance against the German occupation that began in 1941. In June 1941 he became a member of the KKE. He was amongst the organisers of the first mass strike in Nazi-occupied Europe, which took place in Athens in April 1942. At the same time, he joined the ranks of EAM-ELAS (National Liberation Movement – Greek National Liberation Army), going underground in May 1942.

As a member of the anti-fascist liberation movement in the Second World War, Florakis became a commander in the EAM-ELAS guerrilla army. From 1943 to 1945 he was promoted successively to the ranks of Captain and Major in the ELAS army. He participated in the bloody events of December 1944 against British imperialists and the Greek bourgeois administration. He was arrested in October 1945.

The struggle of the Democratic Army (DSE) against the Greek bourgeois forces and their imperialist allies was the

# Charilaos Florakis: The story of a Greek communist leader



• Charilaos Florakis.

most significant moment of class struggle in 20th century Greece. Charilaos Florakis had an active role in the 1946–1949 civil war as a senior officer in the Democratic Army, first as a Lieut-Colonel and later a Major-General in 1948. In September 1949, after the defeat of the DSE, he moved to the Soviet Union. Between 1950 and 1953 he studied at the MV Frunze Military Academy in Moscow, where he graduated with honours.

'Captain Yiotis' – his movement name – never submitted to 'political correctness'. Well known not to mince his words in calling a spade a spade, he told journalist Christos Theocharatos: "Yes the Civil War was unavoidable because the domestic and foreign reactionaries had decided to subjugate and exterminate every patriotic and democratic resistance.

"We could have avoided it if we had simply waited to be arrested, tortured, humiliated and murdered. But wouldn't this extermination, without resistance, be a unilateral civil war? The Civil War was a patriotic and democratic struggle, like the Resistance (in the Second World War), and not a fight for a regime. It was the continuation of the Resistance."

For his political ideas and activity, as a communist and a Democratic Army commander, Flo-

rakis was persecuted by the Greek bourgeois state. He faced numerous trials and was imprisoned several times – but he would always manage to find the courage and transform his defence speeches in the courts into fierce tirades against his prosecutors.

In a testimony to the court in Larisa in April 1955, Florakis said: "Communists aren't those who have no homeland. Communists are simple people, hard-working people, having ties with the land they were born in...those who don't believe in homelands and who have no country are the plutocrats. Wealth gives them the ability to live in any place and any country they choose. The [German] Occupation proved, as well as the present situation does, who has a homeland, who loves her and who sacrifices himself for her freedom and prosperity."

The accusations against him, the persecutions, the threats against his life, could never uproot from his mind his strong belief in the communist ideal, in the Communist Party, in the great values for which he fought. Addressing his prosecutors at the end of a trial, he said: "Personally – as I told you in the beginning – I am filled by the great ideals of communism. There is no power in the world that can oblige me to denounce them. For

the realisation of the Party's policy, for the service of our People's interests, for Greece, I gladly offer all my powers and, without doubt, even the most valuable possession for a human being – my own life..."

Charilaos Florakis served a total of 18 years in the prisons of Greece's post-Civil War bourgeois state. He was imprisoned at the age of 40. He was released under conditions at 52, and then re-arrested and sent into exile at 53. In 1972, in the midst of the struggle against the Colonels' dictatorship in Greece, he was elected First Secretary of the then-banned Communist Party and later General Secretary of the Central Committee.

He served as the General Secretary of KKE from 1972 until 1991, fighting with all his power for a Communist Party dedicated to the ideals of Marxism-Leninism, and against any opportunist or revisionist deviation.

#### Staunch opponent of revisionism

Florakis's role and stance against opportunism was particularly significant during the counter-revolutions of 1989–1991 in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Aleka Papatriga, who succeeded him as General Secretary of the KKE, described his

role: "In front of us, is the decisive contribution of Charilaos Florakis in 1990 in defence of the socialist system at the wide plenary of the Central Committee during the 13th Congress in 1991.

"He took the courageous stance of defying the mountains of lies against socialism and socialist ideology. He had – especially in the then extremely difficult and dark times – the solid belief that the world will change, that socialism will win. It isn't always easy to go 'against the flow'. It isn't always easy to remain firm when others are falling. And, even more, to pave new ways."

Charilaos Florakis remained a consistent supporter of the important achievements of 20th century socialist construction. When Eurocommunists and revisionists were saluting the counter-revolutionary events in the Soviet Union in the beginning of the 1990s, Florakis remained a staunch defender of the ideological heritage of Marx, Engels and Lenin. He knew that the counter-revolution was a negative setback for the international communist movement, but he was also deeply assured that it wasn't the "end of history".

"So, therefore, the overthrow in Eastern Europe is a 'triumph of Democracy' (ironically speaking)! But

what powers were strengthened by this 'triumph'? The real democratic powers or those powers which, in the name of democracy, have literally come out against socialism? 'Triumph of Democracy' with the Communist Party outlawed! 'Triumph of Democracy' with new capabilities for imperialism's intervention! 'Triumph of Democracy' with unemployment, misery, hunger and crime!"

Charilaos Florakis never accepted the theory of the "end of history" that prominent bourgeois analysts and theoreticians, such as Francis Fukuyama, were promoting back then. More specifically, Florakis said: "Despite its metaphysical content it can't change reality. And the reality states that now, with the Soviet Union dissolved capitalism's existing contradictions haven't been weakened, but are getting stronger ... Neither capitalism is eternal, nor the end of communism has come, for the simple reason that the people will not renounce the vision of a just society and won't abandon the struggle for socialism."

Charilaos Florakis died on 22nd May 2005 at the age of 91, in Athens. His funeral was attended by thousands of people, members and supporters of the KKE, communists and non-communists, young and old, working men and women. According to his own wish, he was buried at Agios Ilias, a quiet mountainous place surrounded by forest, close to his birthplace, Paliozoglopi.

Florakis was one of the 20th century's most significant figures in the Greek and European communist movement. A fighter, a leader, an extraordinary personality, but most of all, an unwavering communist who remained loyal to his ideas until the end.

In a speech in 1989, at the age of 75, Charilaos said: "If, like Faust, I had to restart my life, what would I do? I would become a communist once again and I would fight for a better world and, again, I would struggle – with less or more mistakes, doesn't matter – for the homeland, for democracy, for social justice, for Socialism."

Memory eternal, comrade Charilaos Florakis.

**IDOC**

• KKE leader Dimitris Koutsoumpas salutes Florakis at his graveside.

