Obituary for A[gis] Stinas

Cornelius Castoriadis
Translated by Vrasidas Karalis and Anthony Stephens

With the death of Stinas¹ not only a hero was lost to us, but also a human type that contemporary society does not seem able to create or even tolerate any more. When I started thinking about what I would be saying today, the Homeric verse came into my mind “it’s a man whom not even praise does not befit him by evil people” which I would prefer to see changed into “it’s a man whom not even praise does not befit him by us the evil people.” Calling him a saint would be insulting. Whatever a saint does is with the unshakeable illusion that sometime and somewhere there will be a reward. However in the incredibly tormented life of Spyros, (decades in Akronauplia, Egina,² islands, police stations, criminal wards in Soteria Hospital, as he suffered from tuberculosis all his life), a life, during which this man never tasted, when he was out of prison, warm food, nor ever experienced the affection of either a wife or a child, a life in which he didn’t find any support or any consolation in some otherworldly promise. The only hope that sustained him was that one day humanity could be emancipated and free. Despite the hopelessness with which he responded to the contemporary situation, in the last years of his life he anxiously tried to decipher, in such a chaotic reality, the most miniscule signs that could indicate that the movement for freedom and justice, the genuine revolutionary movement would remain alive for ever.

For many years during all our meetings (probably since 1980) our discussions moved between these two poles. On the one hand, there are hopeful signs that could be seen on the international political stage, i.e., the Polish movement of Solidarity, the establishment of the working-class state of Lula in Brazil around 1983 and the rallies that followed. His attention was always turned towards movements of all peoples, because for Spyros internationalism

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¹ Stinas first appears as Agis, Alexandros and Spyros. His real name was Spyros Priftis.
² Akronauplia and Egina were notorious prisons in which the dictatorship of General Metaxas (1936–1941) kept all left-wing convicts.
was not an ideology but his very nature. On the same credit side of his ledger
he added the visits he constantly received from young people (I don’t know
how they discovered him), individuals, anonymous groups or even organisa-
tions, that suddenly and without invitation went to see him, in order to express
their agreement, or to draw from him ideas and experience. Unpredicted and
unexpected visits that pleased him immensely. When he talked about them—
saying “young people from Kaisariani, from Kokkinia3 came to see me” or
“some group wanted to abandon the party”—anyone could immediately wit-
ness how his face and his voice became passionate again. On the debit side
of his ledger, more and more despair and abhorrence was added against the
ways of contemporary humanity, at least in the so-called developed countries:
apathy, privatisation, cynicism, egotism, the dissolution of ideas and practices,
individual and collective imbecility with television, football and the rest.

He constantly returned to the most pressing question, for those who believe
always in freedom and justice, “How did we end up with this?” When we met,
he used to ask me this persistently, as if I would be able to answer. Or as if any-
one could give an explanation—(in the same way we might explain an eclipse
of the moon or a bushfire) within such a chaotic total sum of trends and phe-
nomena that make up contemporary humanity’s path towards debilitation
through consumerism, the commodification of everything, the most vulgar
manipulation of the presumed public opinion, the cynical domination of eco-
nomic and political bureaucracy and oligarchy.

What I would like to emphasise is the persistence with which Spyros
returned over and over to the question of the primal, if I may so call it, derail-
ment of the working class and revolutionary movement. And on this question
I would like to raise two issues; one, I would say, more historical and the other,
maybe, somehow more philosophical.

The historical issue relates directly to the development of Spyros’ ideas,
which, from quite early on, was parallel to mine from the moment we met,
with the exception of a brief interlude I will talk about. I won’t return to this,
but I will state that from the beginning Spyros greeted enthusiastically all the
work done in Socialisme ou Barbarie. Also, when I was able to return to Greece
in November 1954, I discovered our complete agreement on all primary and
secondary questions. Some time someone should write in detail and analy-
se this development, about which Spyros himself offers some evidence in
his book Recollections. Here I would like to point out certain crucial points.
As John Tamtakos reminded us, quite early on when the Third International

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3 Kokkinia and Kaisariani are working class suburbs in Athens, places of many historical upris-
ings during the twentieth century.