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THE IDEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL CRISIS OF AIMS OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION IN GREECE, 1932-1957

Key words: physical education, ideological crisis, PE aims.

ABSTRACT

On November 12, 1957 the Greek Parliament adopted Law 3769/1957 regarding the aims of physical education, which replaced Law 5620/1932 that had been in force until then. The changes in the new act brought reactions of Greek political and athletic institutions. The present paper investigates the ideological and historical crisis connected with the aims of physical education in Greece at the time of adoption of Law 3769/1957. The data for analysis were gathered from written records of the Greek Parliament, the introductory report of Law 3769/1957, articles from the Greek political and sport press of the period as well as opinions of PE teachers expressed in their professional research journal. The paper shows there was a significant argument between the Greek Union of Physical Education Teachers and the Athletic Union, as well as between PE teachers and sports agents, regarding the aims of physical education under the new law, in particular, whether physical education should be regarded as education or as entertainment.

INTRODUCTION

The history of physical education in modern Greece is a subject that has not been sufficiently studied. Most research into the topic has been concerned with the history of physical education and athletic games in ancient Greece [18]. Few studies on physical education in modern Greece had been published until the end of the 19th century. The majority of research, however, has focused on the history of modern Olympic Games [17]. The same holds true for the content of history courses that Greek PE teachers were taught during their studies [7].

The first attempt to create a historical record of physical education in modern Greece was made in 1914 [38] by I. E. Chrysafis, Director of Physical Education Department in the Ministry of Education [23]. His 99-page report included an extended

outline of history of physical education in the Modern Greek State going back to 1824. However, the purpose of that report was not a systematic presentation of PE history, but rather convincing the Greek Government of the need to increase PE teachers' salaries and improve their education and training [6, 12]. In his historical review Chrysafis referred mainly to legislative efforts to incorporate PE into the school curriculum. He did not use any kind of analytical or interpretative historical approach since his purpose at that time was just to present an official report, and not to complete a truly historical review. In fact, comprehensive studies focusing specifically on the history of physical education in modern Greece have not been published yet. This lack of references was the main motivation to write this paper.

On November 12, 1957 the Greek Parliament adopted Law 3769/1957 regarding the aims of

physical education, which replaced Law 5620/1932 that had been in force until then. The changes in the new act brought reactions of political and athletic institutions from across Greece. The present paper investigates the ideological and historical crisis regarding the aims of physical education in Greece at the time of adoption of Law 3769/1957.

The main concept in the present paper is “ideology” in a socio-historical perspective. The term “ideology” is used here following Louis Althusser’s definition, i.e. a sum of complex concepts, representations, attitudes and behaviours which function as rules for the community [1, 22]. The data for analysis was gathered from written records of the Greek Parliament, the introductory report on Law 3769/1957, articles published in the Greek political and sport press during that period as well as opinions of PE teachers expressed in their professional research journal.

LAW 5620/1932

The first constitutional law regarding physical education and sports in modern Greece

In 1932, Law 5620 entitled “Reformation, Completion and Categorization of the Existing Regulations on Physical Education” came into force in Greece. It was to serve as the first Constitutional Law on Physical Education and Sports codifying the existing legislation and defining the aims of physical education. The Law was proposed by the cabinet of Eleftherios Venizelos, and incorporated in the Government’s wider plans to reform the existing educational system [6]. The Law was the outcome I.E. Chrysafis’s systematic work and was passed by the Greek Parliament without any amendments [5]. The Greek Minister of Education, P. Petridis, who presented the bill in the Parliament, stated firmly that a more systematic and homogeneous organization of *Agonistiki* and physical education, not only in schools but also among the Greek population at large is necessary to promote its educational results as well as the notion of national identity [16]. His statement clearly indicated his intention to associate *agonistiki* and physical education with the concept of national identity. The term *agonistiki*, which derives from ancient Greek *agon* meaning ‘contest’, was used for athletic activities that originated in ancient Greece such as foot racing, jumping, disc throwing etc. These were

activities used in physical education as sports. However, despite their Greek provenance [18], they had not been incorporated into the Greek school curriculum until then. The term *agonistiki* had been introduced into Greek physical education in 1907, at the time when the Swedish physical education system had been proposed to be adopted in Greece [36].

Law 5620/1932 consisted of 49 articles [37] covering the following areas:

- a) physical education as part of school and extracurricular physical activities;
- b) financing extracurricular physical activities;
- c) improvement of PE teachers’ education and training;
- d) administrative supervision and control of athletic and sport clubs.

The law placed the Greek Ministry of Education in charge of administration of curricular and extracurricular physical education. All athletic and sport clubs and organizations such as the Greek Olympic Committee, Association of the Gymnastic and Athletic Unions, Greek Soccer Union and many others were to be supervised by the Department of Physical Education of the Ministry of Education. The law also recognized secondary schools as sport and athletic clubs, and thus obliged them to propagate extracurricular physical activities. Greek students were to participate in sport events as representatives of their schools, while their participation in sport clubs was prohibited and resulted in their expulsion from school. However, it should be mentioned that the ban on students’ membership in sport clubs met with sharp reactions of sport agents and, ultimately, it was never implemented [5]. Another section of the Law concerned the school timetable and, in particular, provided for five hours of compulsory physical education a week as well as two extra hours in the afternoon a day. The last section concerned the foundation of the Greek Academy of Physical Education [37].

The strengthening of the educational role of physical education with the enforcement of Law 5620/1932

Law 5620/1932 strengthened the role of the PE teachers in three ways:

- i) by significantly increasing the number of PE teaching hours in schools,

- ii) by improving the education and training of PE teachers through the foundation of the Academy of Physical Education;
- iii) by appointing new directors of the Department of Physical Education in the Ministry of Education with the responsibility to supervise physical education school programs, sport clubs and organizations.

Apart from procedural issues, the articles of Law 5620/1932 also identified the ideological framework of physical education. In particular, Chrysafis used the terms *Physical Education*, *Gymnastics* and *Athletism* as synonymous in an attempt to promote their educational but not recreational dimension. By doing this, Chrysafis reformed the ideological basis of physical education as outlined in the earlier Law 4731/1929, which had recognized school physical education, military physical education and sport as distinct phenomena.

The projection of the educational dimension is crucial for the present study as it will be explained later on. At this point it should be noted that the educational dimension of physical education and sport activities had already been discussed in Greece before 1932. In fact, the first physical activities and athletic clubs were established in Greece in the 19th century by teachers [18] who considered physical education, games and physical activities as parts of a uniform educational system aimed to promote Greek nationalism [33]. At the beginning of the 20th century, new sports such as soccer, cycling and others were introduced in Greece [18]. Some of them, like fencing [9], shooting [3] and riding [30] were adopted only by the Greek elite. These sports were rejected by Greek PE teachers as they did not promote the Greek national spirit, [40] nor possessed an educational character. It is characteristic that PE teachers used soccer as a popular activity among youngsters, as a way to express their criticism for the absence of the educational dimension of sport on the example of soccer riots. This peculiar attitude towards sports was manifested in the following statement of Law 5620/1932:

“...the State should interfere in order to secure sport events since riots are often observed in many sport games and particularly during soccer games...” [14].

In addition, reactions against sport activities were not only inspired by sports riots, but followed a general belief that they did not comply with the

ancient Greek ideal of *athletism*. Following this approach, in 1909, the teaching of Greek national dances was introduced into schools, [20] and in 1910, the Pan-Hellenic Gymnastic Club, the largest club in Greece, abolished its soccer section [34] because it was considered ‘deterimental to the notion of true gymnastics’.

Additionally, a report of the Greek Federation of Secondary Education Officials from 1932 stated that: “The noble athletic ideals of ancient times have collapsed against the yells, curses and riots of soccer fans during the games” [10]. In the same year, the adoption of the Swedish PE system was proposed by Chrysafis in Law 5620/1932 as a reaction to sport activities. He stated that:

“... thanks to the Swedish model modern Greek gymnastics and agonistiki would avoid the danger of establishment of sport clubs that would promote physical education with methods that would be out and against the proper ideological frame that our people hold for physical education” [14].

LAW 3769/1957

Reactions from the Greek Union of Physical Education Teachers

In 1957, the Greek government proposed and adopted Law 3769/1957 [11]. The introductory report [19] signed by the Prime Minister K. Karamanlis, Minister of Economy C. Thivaivos and Minister of National Education A. Gerostopoulos, presented the articles of the bill but did not refer to the purpose of the new law. According to the act, extracurricular physical activities were no longer under the supervision of the Ministry of Education but under the Presidency of the Government. In addition, the office of General Secretary for Extracurricular Physical Activities was established to raise the necessary funds for the support of extracurricular physical activities [2].

The presentation as well as the voting of the bill in the Greek Parliament met with reactions of PE teachers and the Greek political and athletic press. The reactions of one thousand and two hundred PE teachers [28] began with the introduction of the bill and continued after its passing. They voiced their opinions through the Greek Physical Education Teachers Union, the country's oldest labor union established in 1899

[15]. In early 1957, when the government's intention to establish the office of General Secretary for Extracurricular Physical Activities was published in the press, the PE Teachers Union asked for support of their position against the government proposal by other unions such as the Union of Secondary Education Teachers and the Union of Primary Education Teachers [35].

Due to these protests, in the early summer of 1957, Prime Minister K. Karamanlis arranged a meeting with the Director of the Ministry of Education, E. Kalfarentzos, and the Director of the Academy of Physical Education, K. Palaiologos, in order to discuss the issue [5]. In that meeting, K. Palaiologos did not support the position of the Union of PE Teachers, unlike E. Kalfarentzos, who shared the same view with the union [5]. In fact, these two officials expressed two different ideologies. K. Palaiologos believed that the PE teachers' reaction was a manifestation of their conservative attitude and belief that physical education should be associated with ancient Greek ideals and incorporated into the official curriculum. His views were made clear in a long article published in the newspaper "Athletic Voice" where he wrote: "...PE teachers insist on considering *athletism* sensitive to antiquity and their view expresses a pathological conservatism" [25]. On the other hand, E. Kalfarentzos' conviction was that physical education was an aspect of both curricular and extracurricular physical activities, which cannot be separated. That view was expressed in G. Svolopoulos' article published in the newspaper "To Vima", in which the necessity to transfer supervision of extracurricular physical activities to the Presidency of the Government was questioned [29].

The PE teachers' reaction to the new law was expressed in many other ways. For instance, on June 23, the Union of Physical Education Teachers called a General Assembly which decided to establish a special committee that would deal with the issue and publish arguments against the new regulations. Indeed, in July and August 1957, the Union published its arguments in three articles in the newspaper "Freedom" [26, 27]. However, the supporters of the Law responded quickly as well. An article from "Athletic Voice" at that time mentioned that a significant number of athletic unions belonging to the Greek Association of the Gymnastic and Athletic Unions, officially informed the government about their wish for the new law to

be passed [24]. On August 26, 1957, the Union of Physical Education Teachers sent an official report to the Parliament informing the deputies about its strong objection to the Law [39]. At the beginning of September, the Law was set for discussion in the Greek Parliament. It is a rather peculiar coincidence that the day the Law was discussed in the Preparatory Department of the Greek Parliament, H. Vlachou, one of the most significant Greek journalists expressed her strong reservations against Law 3769/1957 in two articles published in Greek newspapers "Kathimerini" and "Estia" [28].

The reaction against the new bill, expressed even by the press that supported the Government, resulted in the withdrawal of the bill from further legislative discussions. On October 1, 1957, a new, modified bill was discussed in the Preparatory Department of the Greek Parliament. In the discussion, the opposite parties presented their arguments concerning the role of the prospective General Secretary of Extracurricular Physical Activities. Yet, the ideological issue regarding the nature of physical education was not discussed. The bill was forwarded to the Greek Parliament, while the members of the opposition pulled out from the discussion. On December 4, 1957, Law 3769 was passed by the Greek Parliament and came into force.

The ideological basis of the reaction

Law 3769/1957 had two significant consequences for the ideological foundation of physical education in Greece. This ideological basis was first set by E. Pavlinis [8], who in 1927 published the "History of Gymnastics" [31], and later developed by I. Chrysafis [23]. Pavlinis, in particular, considered human movements, plays, games, sport activities, physical activities and gymnastics a single entity [31]. Moreover, despite the fact that athletic games were known in the history of many different ancient civilizations, he regarded them as an achievement of the ancient Greek civilization [31]. He also argued that, although ancient Greek athletic games were associated with recreation and leisure the way they are in modern western civilization, in ancient Greece they were linked to religion and constituted an inseparable part of religious ceremonies [31] as well as education. Pavlinis attempted to establish Greek Physical Education or Greek Gymnastics as a concept that referred not only to promotion of particular nationalistic aims through gymnastics,

but also to what MacDougall calls “racial myth” [21], and thus to redefine the educational role of gymnastics. Pavlinis’s arguments constituted the ideological basis of the opposition of the Union of Physical Education Teachers to Law 3769/1957. In its report to the Greek Parliament, the Union stated that: “It is necessary to point out that what we call today *athletism* is identical to what in ancient Greece used to be called *agonistiki*” and that “...in ancient Greece, athletic games were the most fundamental way of education” [39].

The Union of Physical Education Teachers in their reaction to the passing of Law 3769/1957 emphasized the educational role of physical education referred to in the earlier Law 5620/1932: “In Law 5630/1932 the legislator wisely and with precaution protects young school children from the danger of visiting gyms and sport clubs and coming in contact with people (other than PE teachers) who not only have anything to do with physical education, but are utterly incapable of teaching it” [5].

This particular statement resulted in a conflict between PE teachers and sport clubs officials such as coaches, trainers and sport agents. Their response to the PE teachers’ argument was that the latter opposed Law 3769 because they had no coaching skills and qualifications, and were not able to recognize the importance of modern sports [29]. The argument regarding modern sports – as Kanellopoulos’ statement in the Greek Parliament reveals – was not groundless at all:

“I strongly believe that the existence of sports is crucial for our society and at this point I need to clarify that I do not discriminate between classical athletic games and modern sport games. It is necessary to point this out so as to eliminate any impression that I underestimate the value of sports such as soccer. Such an impression comes from people who believe only in the classical athletic games and I have to mention that I do not at all support this view” [32].

Moreover, the reaction of the Union of Physical Education Teachers resulted from another ideological issue concerning soccer betting. The main arguments were that betting in sports: i) was against the athletic tradition of this country, ii) deteriorated the Olympic ideal, and iii) introduced young people to gambling. It should also be mentioned that in the Greek Parliament the opposition parties were against Law 3769, not because they held the same view about the nature of

physical education as the Union of Physical Education Teachers, but because of the possibility that physical education might be exploited by the government.

CONCLUSIONS

This article examined the ideological and historical crisis concerning the aims of physical education in Greece that took place with the enforcement of Law 3769/1957, which replaced an earlier Law 5620/1932. Law 5620/1932 emphasized the educational role of physical education in relation to the entertaining one. That emphasis questioned in Law 3769/1957 as revealed in the existing arguments between different groups of people, the Union of the Physical Education Teachers and the Athletic Union, and PE teachers and sport agents. The written records of the Greek Parliament, the introductory report of the Law 3769/1957, articles published in the Greek political and sport press and opinions of PE teachers expressed in their journal, showed that the controversy linked with the new law was based on ideological differences regarding the aim of physical education; namely, whether physical education and sport should be regarded as education or as entertainment. That was in contradiction with the existing ideological framework of physical education, according to which it was considered to be a Greek cultural achievement and its aim was the attainment of a complete and proper education of a whole person. Though the ideological contradiction concerning the aim of physical education may seem peculiar for a subject that had been a recognised part of education for almost a century, it is hardly surprising [41]. In fact, the discussion about the ideological and historical crisis regarding the aim of physical education in Greece between 1932 and 1957 enhances this argument. Moreover, following Green’s approach, this discussion was based on systems of ideas enforced by specific laws. Their practical, everyday ‘ideologies’ as these expressed by Greek PE teachers during that period still require further research [13].

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