

B

GREECE \* - IT'S RECENT HISTORY

John M. Simon  
History 24  
Dr. I. Hirsch  
Jan 12, 1948



Students of imperialism might well pay particular attention to the dilemma in Greece as evidence of the critical struggle now dividing the world. It is quite evident that Greece now and a has been for a long time unindpendent. It's geographical position has doomed it to a mouse's position in the cat's paw of the larger powers. The open and frank imperialistic attitude on the part of the larger powers make no bones about its feelings toward Greece. Greece is desired for its geographical location and its control of the Eastern Mediterrean plus its priximity to the oil fields of the Near East.

The present struggle in Greece mark it for what it is-fruit for imperialist expansion-therefore it might well be advisable to consider some background of this strife torn nation that was once grand and noble and now reduced to a weak and chaotic state.

The history of Greece during the past six years reveals a bitter struggle for power between a Left dominated and led by the Communist party and a Right which has rallied around the figure of the Greek monarch. The struggle between these two extremes has been powerfully and decisively influenced by foreign intervention. The Russians have supported the Left morally (and some say with arms); the British have supported the Right with arms, and, in conjunction with the United States economically as well.

Greece today is a small country, a pawn of great Power politics and distressed by poverty and internal strife and distracted by corruption that has culminated in Civil War.



I I will divide the review of Greece into two parts-the background of the Left and the background of the Right.

Ever since Greece became independent of the Turks in 1830 they have been ruled by a monarch and for some eighty years they maintained a precarious hold on their independence. Great Britain long ago recognizing the strategic importance of Greece in the Mediterranean ~~max~~ managed to control Greece through the effective but not so obvious device of economic imperialism. Britain stabilized the Greek economy with various loans and through the interest on these debts managed to control the Greek yearly budget. In addition it controlled much of the railroads, canals and utilities.

Under a new and fiery personality, Eleftherios Venizelos a Turkish subject noted for his inspired leadership against the Turks on his native island, Crete Greece began a program of expansion. He was installed as prime minister in 1910 and not long time in joining in league with Bulgaria and Serbia for the purpose of attacking the Turks and partitioning the European provinces of the Ottoman empire. He added to his laurels by defeating the Turks and thereby gained more territory for Greece in Thrace and Macedonia. His popularity that followed brought him into open conflict with the then reigning monarch King Constantine.

At the outbreak of World War I Constantine, who was related to the German Kaiser did not wish to join the Allies and preferred instead to remain neutral. Venizelos however saw in joining with the Allies an opportunity for gaining Constantinople for Greece from the Turks.

This rival culminated with Venizelos ~~deciding~~ on insurrection especially when his party gained a majority in an election in



1916 and King Constantine refused to appoint Venizelos Prime Minister. Venizelos withdrew from Athens and established a government in Salonika in open defiance of the King. He was supported by the French and British anxious to have Greece on their side for the purpose of attacking and opening a front on Bulgaria. The Allies forced the government in Athens to come to terms with Venizelos and declare him Prime minister in 1917. It was an open victory for the revolutionaries and Constantine was forced to relinquish his throne to his second son Alexander.

These events marked the beginning of two rival and hostile parties. New men representing a new class rose to power in Venizelos wake and shouldered aside the semi-aristocratic families who had ~~previ~~ previously exercised a near monopoly of political leadership. Thus we see a formation of a Liberal party consisting of Agrarians and overcrowded peasants eager to join Venizelos in his quest for more land for Greece. and on the other hand the Peoples of Popular party consisting of the old families and established wealthy aristocratic Greeks.

This rivalry centered its power in two different sections. The North became strongly Pro-Venizelist and the South, Pro-Monarchy. After 1922 the struggle took on a constitutional form royalist versus republicanism.

After the defeat of Greece in Asia Minor by the Turks under Mustapha Kemal and the subsequent loss of their part of Asia Minor popular revulsion against the monarch that brought about this defeat realized itself and three Venizelist officers, Nicholas Plastiras, Stylianos Gonatos and Admiral Hadjikyriakos seized control of the government and invited the then reigning monarch King George II to



leave the country. In March 1924 George was formally dethroned and Greece officially became a republic. By this act the liberal and associated parties became indelibly stamped as republican; while their major rival for political power the Popular Party by virtue of its origin and composition favored monarchy. Thus the constitutional issue was created which has distracted Greek politics ever since.

The Republicans enjoyed strong but somewhat erratic power until 1935. During this post war period the principal line of division in Greek politics remained royalist and republican. The two main groups were in turn extensively subdivided into a large number of splinter parties. These splinter parties generally formed around some prominent politician. The small parties thrown off ~~the~~ by the liberals were in general left of center like the Progressive party party under George Kafandaris the Democratic Socialist Party of George Papandreou.

Among the conservatives similar developments took place. After 1924 the main stem of the popular party officially accepted Republicanism but privately clung to the hope of seeing the monarch return. Of the parties under the Popular wing was the one of Free opinion headed by General John Metaxes—a bitter enemy of Republicanism.

The world wide depression of the '30's wrought on Greek hardship and sharpened the bitterness of party controversy. The popular party grew in strength and in 1933 managed to win the election. They still could not outright bring back the exiled king. Popular opinion being what it was but when General Plastiras republican and other officers led a revolt in 1935 which was put down they felt the



country securely in their grip and with General John Metaxes installed as Minister of War they purged all republican elements from the Greek army. A plebiscite was held to recall King George II to the throne. What with the republicans boycotting the election and with an extensively falsified plebiscite the monarch was overwhelmingly voted for and King George returned to the throne. King George reigned as a constitutional monarch. He declared a political amnesty for all political offenders and a Chamber of Deputies was elected. The Republicans and the Royalists elected the same number of deputies and a political deadlock ensued. This deadlock marked the arrival of a new force in Greek politics. The communist Party had elected 15 deputies and thus held the balance of power between Republicans and Royalists. This force played a most important force in the subsequent History of Greece. Neither party wished to place itself at the mercy of the communists and accordingly Metaxes persuaded the King to declare an emergency and Metaxes established himself as dictator

He modeled Greece after the Fascist powers and to some extent brought firm and established rule to Greece. The CP was forced underground where they managed to maintain a skeleton of its organization. Sympathizers with the CP increased with the harshness of Metaxes rule and other parties simply disappeared.

The dictatorship was never popular. Metaxas relied upon the army and the police to maintain himself in power.

Benito Mussolini when looking for new glories considered Greece easy prey and accordingly in October 1940 after manufacturing a Quarrel, invaded Greece.



The attack did what no politician had able to do for years. It united the divided factions of Greece and although poor in equipment they presented a united and highly moraled force and after a few initial retreats stooped the Italians cold. and pursued them into Albania.

A few months after the outbreak of World War II the British government had "guaranteed " the territorial integrity of Greece. Accordingly in the first months of 1941, when the threat from the Germans in the North appeared, the Greek government asked the British government to honor this guarantee. Churchill broke up the victorious Nile army and under the command of Sir Henry Maitland Wilson he dispatched about sixty thousand men.

Before the British could succeed in landing more than a small part of this army the Germans declared war and quickly overran Greece. Meanwhile Metaxas had died and King George appointed Emmanuel Tsourderous an ex-Venizelist cabinet minister and a former Governor of the Bank of Greece, as Prime Minister.

The new government, refusing to sanction General Tsolakoglu's surrender of the main Greek army at Epirus, fled to Crete and after the German air conquest of this island fled to exile in Cairo.

At home, General Tsolakoglu travelled to Athens where he was installed by the Germans as the new Prime Minister. Under this Quisling the Greek government continued to function much as before. The army of course was no longer in existence but with the Italian and German armies and the Greek constabulary which continued to function much the ~~the~~ same as before. Axis control was disguised,



operating only behind the scenes on the level of high policy.

The people as a whole did not support the invaders; for the first year of occupation the spirit of resistance found little expression in Greece. Nearly all Greeks turned to the despairing task of deeping alive during the ensuing famine.

The summer of 1942 saw the beginning of effective resistance to the Axis occupiers in Greece. Small bands in the hills attacked isolated German and Italian soldiers. As time went on the guerilla forces steadily waxed in power and numbers and the prestige of the Quisling authorities waned in pproportion. By mid-1943 the gendarmery of the Greek government dared not travel over large areas of the land and its members remained in relatively large concentration near the towns and along the main roads,

The German's to payy for Greek labor had begun to print paper currency willy-nilly and inflation soon showed its head. The steady deterioration of conditions changed the government to what had been comparative efficiency under Metaxas into deep and widespread corruption. As the chances for German victory lessened and eventually disappeared it became increasingly common for officials of the Greek government to come into relation with British of Allied secret services. Many a person liked to have a foot in both camps so that no matter who won the war he would be on the right side.

With the advent of organized resistance in 1943 the Germans short of men; most of the army being on the Russian Front- adopted strong measures to counteract the guerrilla activity. For every German killed, the Nazi's would slay 50 hostages. The average Greek



in a dilemma. Security battalions were formed by the Germans enlisting Greeks on a semi-voluntary basis. Needless to say they had a choice of joining the guerillas or fighting the communists. Numbers of them joined these security battalions to fight the communists.

We shall now examine the resistance organizations for they play an important role in future Greek history.

The Greek Communist Party had succeeded in keeping its organization alive throughout the dictatorship of Metaxas. Communists fought bravely against the Italians in what is known in Greece today as the Albanian war.

the  
In general confusion that followed the Greek defeat most of the jails of the country were opened and their inmates allowed to escape. By this means nearly all the communist leaders regained their freedom and were able to add their efforts to those of the few who had been able to evade imprisonment. Zachariades, the leader of the C.P., however, did not escape and was sent to the Dachau concentration camp for the remainder of the war.

Leadership of the C.P. passed to George Siantos. The communist organization was small but well disciplined. Its greatest strength lay in the fact, that under Metaxas rule they had learned to be adept in undercover activity. All in all the Greek Communist party was in a strategic position. No other Greek political organization was ready on the ground and among most politicians a spirit of defeatism prevented any serious efforts to revive the ~~the~~ party organizations which had been crushed by Metaxas. The communists quickly capitalized on the active dislike of the Greek people



toward the invaders to win wide support. They established a new organization the National Liberation Front or as it became universally known from its Greek initials, EAM. The movement succeeded in attracting great numbers of non-communists and it generated such enthusiasm among them that for a while it seemed possible that the communists would be submerged by the greater numbers of the others and consequently lose control of the movement. But the disciplined energy of the communists prevailed and resulted in their coming into ultimate control of the entire EAM organization.

By the spring of 1942 the EAM was fully organized and had set up local leaders and organizations over the whole of central Greece. Only after this had been achieved was an effort made to form the armed force, the guerilla army. It was called ELAS, a pun on the Greeks name for their country. The letters are the Greek initials of the National People's Liberation Army.

Although ELAS became by far the most formidable force among the resistance organizations it was not without rivals. The most important of these was the EDES, led by Napoleon Zervas. He was born in Western Greece in 1890. After being expelled from the Military Cadet School in Athens. He joined the army as a career non-commissioned officer. When Venizelos set up his revolutionary government in Salonika, Zervas hastened to join and was speedily commissioned. In 1922 he joined with Plastires in his revolt against the royal government. After he assisted General Panagalos, at a later date, to seize power, he became commander of Panagalos's personal bodyguard. The following year he fell in with plots against the



dictator and used his position as commander of the bodyguard to oust Pangalos from power.

This act did not win Zervas a very savory reputation. As a consequence he was forced to retire from the army and for the next 15 years lived as a private citizen. During this he established himself as a sort of gambling king in Athens. He took no part in the Albanian war but under the occupation he became interested in an association of Republican politicians which formed in Athens in the Fall of 1941, under the name of the Greek Democratic National League or EDES. Zervas had more military experience than most of the members of this association, and he was selected as the man to lead a guerilla band that, it was hoped, would be able to forward the political program of the organization. Accordingly, in June 1942, Zervas, left Athens for his native district in Western Greece and there was quickly able to form around himself a small group of EDES guerillas.

The nominal head of the EDES was General Nicholas Plastiras in exile in Paris. EDES differed from EAM in many respects. It never achieved any wide popular base but remained little more than a cabal of ambitious politicians or would be politicians in Athens. Active leaders were mostly professors and well to do businessmen who made little progress toward building up a rank and file membership.

Meanwhile EAM had become a movement of the dispossessed and underprivileged and eventually it became a revolutionary class movement. In September 1942, a pamphlet was secretly published entitled, "What IS EAM AND WHAT ARE ITS AIMS?" It had as its basic points:



1. The protection of the people against hunger, illness, and want.
2. Passive and active resistance against the occupying forces and those collaborating with them.
3. Daily paralyzing of the occupying forces to ensure that their war aims are not served by Greek Labor or Greek materials.
4. Active resistance to force, answering force by force, armed struggle and a final armed rising.
5. Then the occupying forces have been expelled;
  - a. The formation of a government from the leaders of the EAM and from their members.
  - b. The immediate establishment of all popular liberties of press, speech, and assembly.
  - c. The immediate calling of elections for a National Constituent Assembly where the form of popular government will be drawn up.

British officers in Greece came to the opinion that (invasion of Italy) ELAS was husbanding its strength for establishing a new post-war regime in Greece. Zervas, although cooperative with the British, was under suspicion for urging Greeks to active support for the German Security Battalions ~~was~~ fighting the communists. In particular, General Gonatos active head of the EDES in Athens advised young officers of joining these security battalions.

Italy,

In September 1943 with the surrender of ELAS at once took possession of huge stores of ammunition. The British mission suspecting ELAS of ulterior post-war aims, attempted to persuade them to share the booty with EDES. They flatly refused. The British then



attempted to build up Zervas's army. This promulgated the ELAS into declaring the EDES as having violated the guerilla charter and opened war on them. This civil war was averted by an agreement whereby each army agreed to maintain each others territorial integrity.

It would be very difficult to elaborate in this vain for the following events that throw an important light on the further happenings. Suffice to say I will be as brief as possible.

Meanwhile the government in exile was torn with conflicting views. King George was determined to return to Greece as the monarch. EAM ites, had infiltrated throughout the government in exile and built up propaganda against this idea. Greek battalions began to fight amongst each other and Britain fearing Greece would fall into the hands of the EAM, who might favor Russia-worked against this. They suppressed the rebels and tentatively agreed to conduct a plebiscite to decide as to his return.

A makeshift cabinet was formed in Cairo with George Papandreu as Prime Minister. It represented all phases - Royalists to EAM ites. Toward the end of September 1944, preparations were made for the liberation of Greece. An agreement was between the British and the Greeks to regulate the military aspects of the liberation. This came to be known as the Caserta Agreement. Present at the conference were General Sarafis, Commander-in-Chief of ELAS, Aervas of EDES, Prime Minister Papandrou, and two British generals, Sir Herry Maitland Wilson and Ronald Scobie.



By this agreement the guerilla forces in Greece acknowledged the headship of Papandresous government and all greek forces under the command of General Scobie as representative of the Allied High Command in Greece. It was further agreed that the guerilla forces would not make any attempt to seize power at the time of liberation. At first General Scobie in the original draft said that he aimed to restore law and order. This met with an objection from Sarafis, who insisted that law and order was an internal matter. Both sides in a sense were playing for time. The British were determined not to let the Government pass into the sole control of the left. The left were determined to gain control of the country. EAM leaders expected that once the liberation had been accomplished their monopoly of political ~~was~~ organization in the country and the widespread popular support they commanded would compel the government to move ~~on~~ more and more to the left. The conservatives and the British felt that no break with the left could be risked at the moment and were content to establish a government in which EAM held only a minority position and let events guide their actions afterward.

By the end of October Greece was free of the Germans and Papandresous entered into power. A shuffling of the cabinet followed and the political balance was maintained with EAM getting six seats. Four members of the Populist government came into the reorganized government but the liberal party remained aloof.



Themistocles Sofoulis, leader of the Liberal Party, refused to accept a plan of the left where he would become Prime Minister in a cabinet dominated by EAM. Much quarreling arose over the question of collaboration. The EAM wanted to be severe but the right feared that by EAM standards much of their own support would be liquidated. Before this issue could be decided the question arose that all armed units should be dissolved. The EAM agreed but insisted that ALL units be disarmed including those of the right. A tentative agreement was reached and then more delays ensued while each side fought over the terms of that disarmament. General Scobie tired of the bickering and issued orders in the name of the Greek government to EAM and ELAS to disarm. indignant at what they considered outright interference in the internal affairs of Greece they steadfastly refused.

The EAM decided to stage a mass demonstration in Athens square. To this end they massed a number of EAMites. The British fearing repercussions of this demonstration decided to halt the procedure. It was too late. The demonstrators had begun to enter Athens. Police barricades were drawn up and when the demonstrators failed to disperse they were fired on. The EAM took this as a hostile act and moved to take over the government by force. Civil war followed and after initial successes the British calling reinforcements from Italy quelled the ELAS. On January 15 ~~war~~ hostilities came to an end. The power of the ELAS was broken- the revolution had failed.

Before the final military overthrow of the ELAS two things happened to restore political pacification in Greece. On New Years in 1945, Beatitude Demaskinos, Metropolitan of Athens and Archbishop of all



Greece was appointed regent, and three days later Gen. Nicholas Plastiras was appointed Prime Minister. this change in regime attracted many of the EAM followers away from there Communist leaders and made possible the early end of the civil war.

The army of Greece was organized around the core of the Third Brigade of the exile army in Egypt. Tries and tested for anti-republicanism sentiment it was predominately royalist.

Papandrou refused to take part in a coalition government and resigned. A center government was formed with Soufilis as prime minister. Pressured by the world Britain decided to encourage national elections in Greece. EAM vigorously opposed this and instructed all EAM-ites to abstain. The final vote showed that 49 percent of the registered had voted and of these the majority voted for the Royalists. Soufouldis resigned and the leader of the popular party, Constantine Tsakalariis became Prime minister. At the end of Sept. 1946 a plebiscite was held and a majority voted ~~for~~ the return of King George to the throne.

We now come to another phase of Greek history-that is the present period of American intervention. With British economic decline the task of maintaining the Anti-communist Anglo-American outpost in Greece fell to the lot of the United States and with that the Truman Doctrine and its avowed purpose of Russian containment. Forthwith Congress voted special loans to Turkey and Greece. Originally there was no talk of direct American military intervention in the Greek civil war. It was thought that money and materials would suffice to stop Communist infiltration in Greece. Dean Acheson then under secretary of State told the senate foreign relations



committee on March 24th of last year:

"The~~s~~ present proposals do not include our sending troops to Greece or Turkey. We have not been asked to do so-" But apparently from the following facts the next step will be just that.

Since the inauguration of the Truman Doctrine violence and bloodshed has increased in Greece. On Nov. 10th of last year- President Truman in his report on the progress of the Truman Doctrine did not nor did any of the attached State department documents say that the execution~~ing~~ of Greek leftists had surpassed the rate at which opposition leaders were being liquidated in the Russian dominated Balkans. This violence continues today with wholesale executions, heads of partisans set up in public squares, political prisoners used as "mine detectors", strikes forbidden under pain of death and membership in the Communist Party an act of treason.

The British for all their stupidity in dealing with the Greek problem had sufficient humanity to prevent political execution on trumped up anti-democratic charges. Developments have become increasingly worse.

Of the \$300,000,000 loan, 2/3 is going to equip an army of about 150,000 men. This army is already three times the ~~six~~ normal pre-war size and is officered almost exclusively by extreme reactionaries.

The ruling group whom we are supporting with gold and guns is the most corrupt, crooked and heartless in Europe. It pays no income taxes (85% of the taxes comes from levies on foodstuffs and other necessities). It lives in extreme luxury ~~amidst~~ amidst mass



starvation. This regime enriches itself on government jobs and foreign aid. Thus the Liberty ships we gave Greece to build up her merchant fleet were sold to private owners at ridiculously low prices. The grafters owe no accounting to anybody. Recently not a single accountant could be found in all of Athens. In a country that is economically shattered King Paul and his wife get from the government \$480,000 annually.

Paul Porter head of the American Mission to Greece reported;

"Profiteers, traders, speculators and black marketeers thrive in wealth and luxury....at the same time the masses of the people live on a bare subsistence level."

As to the effectiveness of making Greece a loyal satellite of America consider the following editorial in the Athens newspaper, Ta Nea;

"...with their moronic policy, Tsaldaris and his colleagues have been the best recruiting officers for the guerillas. Unquestionably Tsaldaris has sent more men to the mountains than were sent from Yugoslavia. They are those that were beaten and persecuted, those who were dismissed without cause from their jobs. They are the farmers to whom the rightist local authority would not give seeds to sow their fields...."

In an effort to win popular support of the Truman Doctrine in Greece America has engaged in a policy of "broadening" the Greek government. To this end Dana Adams Schmidt correspondent of the N.Y. Times reported on July 23rd;

"a leavening of the predominant right wing cabinet with liberals it is thought, might diminish the skepticism of public opinion in the



U.S. and Great Britain regarding the regime." and then on August 26th Schmidt wrote, "When foreign minister Tsaldaris returns from the US probably within a few days the mission is expected to use its influence to "broaden" the government. "

Seven days later the three mildest right wing ministers- George Papandrou, Panayiotis Kanelloupolous and Sophocles Venizelos prompted by the Americans demanded the removal of Napoleon Zervas-Minister of Public Order. Tsaldaris refused, the three then resigned, the government fell and King Paul asked Tsaldaris to form a new government.

The two US representatives in Greece were at loggerheads. Dwight Griswold, administrator of the Truman Doctrine in Greece wished to Liberalize the entire Greek government but Lincoln Mac Veagh the American ambassador did not wish any serious change. MacVeagh won and Griswold requested to be allowed to resign. America has thus announced itself to support a government that is best constituted to maintain American and British control in Greece.

To maintain such policies and actions in Greece will make it necessary for the American people to send in more money and even troops.

Shortly before Christmas the Communist led rebels opened an offensive in Northern Greece. Greek army failure to put down this rebellion effectively means further military support to Greece. Money has been advanced to the point where \$175,000,000 of the original and some \$15,000,000 has been allocated toward direct military support. The question now is, Is money and supplies enough? Are the Marines' being sent to Greek and Italian ports meant to implement American monetary support in Greece ?



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

READINGS IN MODERN EUROPEAN HISTORY, Robinson and Beard, Boston, Ginn and Co., 1920

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE EUROPEAN NATIONS, J.H. Rose, Putman, N.Y., 1925

THIS AGE OF CONFLICT, F.P. Chambers, Harcourt, N.Y., 1943

GREECE ECONOMIC POLICY, Report of the .F.A.O. Mission for Greece , Wash. D.C., 1947

A HISTORY OF GREECE, C.E. Robinson, Crowell and Co., N.Y., 1929

SPOTLIGHT ON THE BALKANS, P.G. Stoyan, Foreign Policy Assoc., Headline Books, N.Y., 1940

COME OVER ~~IN~~ INTO MACEDONIA, H.B. Allen, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, 1943

### AND

Newspaper excerpts pertinent to the topic from the following New York Newspapers during the period of Oct. 1947 to Jan 1948.

N.Y. Daily and Sunday Times

N.Y. Daily and Sunday Herald Tribune

New York Post

PM

Daily and Sunday Worker