

The Burden of Greek History

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Preliminary remarks

... of what you have shifted yourself, in your program and so forth, the better it will be. So let's use a few criteria for that. One: that if you absolutely must shift your time, your section time, try first of all to do so within the sections of the teaching assistant to whose class you have been assigned...

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Lecture

We're going to talk about the burden of modern Greek history. And more precisely, when we say the burden of modern Greek history what we mean specifically, of course, is that economic backwardness, that social stagnation, that political impotence, that semi-colonialism — which, after all, for decade upon decade, circumscribed the lives of the Greek peasantry and of the Greek working class; which ultimately foreclosed the future and the hopes of that peasantry and that working class; and which, after all, made the issue of revolution the burning and the crucial issue of the Greek Civil War in the period of the 1940s. And you see, if you try to get at this problem of the burden of modern Greek history, or the problem of that kind of burden in any Third World society, you look after all, for those clear indices of what you mean by "backwardness" or what you mean by "semi-colonialism."

And in Greek society, it seems to me, and in turning to that history of Greek society, that we can use two indices that really tell us a great deal about the process of that modern history. We can talk, in the first place, for example, about the very important factor of emigration of Greeks from their own country, and emigration that really takes on the proportion of virtually a flood in the course of the twentieth century. And, in the second place, we must talk — because it really goes to the very interior of the process of modern Greek history — we must talk about the failure of the Greek bourgeoisie, about the failure of that bourgeoisie to do precisely what historically, presumably, it was ticketed to do: to develop the country, to make that capitalism, after all, in which there should be viable opportunity, in which there should be an expanding economy. And the failure to do that, after all, poses again the question of who will make that Greek revolution.

Now, you see, if you talk about emigration, you really raise an important question. Because people in large numbers do not leave their own country unless there is blockage, unless there is a push out of their country, unless they no longer have any opportunity. But look at the figures: that between 1901 and 1921, 400,000 Greeks emigrated permanently from the country of Greece. And to give you the monumentality of that figure, I want you to remember that in 1901, you are before the two Balkan Wars, you are before the First World War; you have not, through that Greek imperialism, doubled the territory of the nation state. And so you are talking about a total population in 1901 of 2.5 million, and if you are talking about an emigration of 400,000 in the period between 1901 and 1921, you are talking about a tremendous push out of a country which does not requite its people. And 95% of those emigres went to the United States in the period between 1901 and 1921, where it was assumed there was opportunity. And then, you see from the 1920s into the '30s, in those interwar years, there is a decline in immigration because the United States sets up those great barriers against foreigners, and because in the 1930s there is a Depression, and consequently, there is no opportunity in other countries. And so the Greeks must suffer at home.

But what is most revealing is that when you come to that period after 1950 — when the civil war is over; when the American presence is very central to the development and the history of Greece; when, presumably, Greece will be the jewel of that informal empire that the Americans will establish; when it will become the showcase of development in that American stratagem — in that period after 1950, emigration from Greece becomes a veritable flood.

And it does so because of the internal blockage of that society: that with all this talk about development, that the agricultural system still cannot support the Greek peasantry; that the land is too parcelized in the period of the 1950s, the '60s, down to the present; that there is an under-mechanization; that the yields on the land are far too low; and that the produce is a semi-luxury agricultural produce that has a very volatile, a very insecure foreign market. And because, in the second place, there is so very little industry to take up the gap, and consequently to employ the peasantry that may go from the countryside. When you consider that in a year as late as 1963, that manufactured goods composed only 3.4% of all of the value of the Greek export trade in that year, you understand what a low composition of industrialization you had.

Or consider, in the third place, that fragility — always in the period after the civil war — of the balance of trade: that the crisis of the Greek balance of trade is resolved only in the most parasitical ways. It is resolved, after all, by tourism, by shipping, and especially by that American aid, which goes primarily into the military and the constabulary sectors, which are totally unproductive.

Or consider, in the fourth place (and if you have ever been to Greece you understand this): that

even in the center of Greek urbanization, even in the center of what you would call modern and progressive Greece — and I talk now about the great city of Athens, that city of Athens at almost 2 million people, which has one-fifth of the population of the entire country — that city of Athens, if you look at it closely, is not a productive city. It is not an industrial city; that in 1970, 67% of all of the active population of the city of Athens were employed in commerce or in shipping or in some kind of tourism or in some kind of service, and not in industrial production.

All of which means that there is a blockage which is resolved only by getting rid of your working population. The way the Greek regime survives and the way the Greek people survive is that so many of them leave and look for work elsewhere; not a good society. That from 1962 on, after all, there is a greater rate of emigration than there is a rate of population increase. And those Greek workers have flooded, between 1955 and '64 — just one decade — 600,000 Greek workers left the country of Greece, and that in a population of only 8.5 million by 1964, and they have gone into that labor market in Germany and in the Scandinavian countries and in France. And it should be something that you understand: that the "miracle" of European capitalism that we talk about and that we underscore has been possible because of that reserve army of labor that the Greeks have contributed to — and the Spaniards and the Portuguese and the Africans and the North Africans and the West Indians — that reserve army of labor doing the dirty work in those advanced capitalist countries, and consequently exploiting the Third World inside your own frontiers.

And all of that, you see, a criterion about the burden of Greek history. But get a little closer to that process of Greek history, and bear with me a little bit if we talk about that history *per se*, because it tells you something analytically quite important. And if we say that there is a failure of the Greek bourgeoisie to make a capitalist revolution, what we are talking about we will see in very crystalline form when we talk at length about China, because China likewise (and so many Third World countries) did not have a proper national bourgeoisie. In other words, one that had the ability to stop being a comprador bourgeoisie, or a client middle class — client to the imperialism or the capitalism of more advanced countries — and to become really an authentic bourgeoisie: anxious to reform internal structure, anxious to create an internal market, anxious to develop their resources, and consequently to expand the economy. And that never happened in Greece, and that failure is crucial.

And you began, you see, with auspices. You began back in 1830 with a struggle for independence that had been led by liberal bourgeois in Greece. And they thought about a capitalist society in the development, but it never happened. That the foreign powers were the ones that created that little country in 1830 — a tiny little geographic space with only 800,000 people — and they impose an authoritarian, reactionary monarchy upon the Greek people. And what happened was that the Greek bourgeoisie developed, in those middle decades of the nineteenth century, as a comprador

bourgeoisie, one tied to Western commercial and banking interests. It entered into shipping, into banking, into commerce, but always tied up the Western houses that were then installed in the Greek market. And consequently, that Greek bourgeoisie, with its capital, chose to invest outside the frontiers of its own country, or to waste its resources in conspicuous consumption. It's the Onassis syndrome, is it not? And consequently, it really dominates modern Greek economic development to the detriment of that society.

But, you see, what is most interesting is that there were two opportunities. And both of those opportunities were lost, and that's what makes the 1940s so terribly important and so terribly relevant. There was the [Charilaos] Trikoupis experience and there was the [Eleftherios] Venizelos experience, and both of those are worth explaining momentarily, because analytically they tell us something about other societies of this kind also. And you see, in those two experiences, there presumably was an effort on the part of the Greek bourgeoisie to modernize the society; in other words, to create something viable in Greece.

And the Trikoupis experience comes in the 1880s and the 1890s. And, you see, it comes in the wake of what had been a constitutional revolution in Greece between 1862 and '64. Now, we know that when the monarchy was replaced in 1864, when the old Bavarian line was thrown out and the Danish line was brought in, that the hand of Great Britain was really the guiding hand; that Great Britain didn't like that Otto, the King of the Greeks in the 1850s, because in the Crimean War he was pro-Russian, and they were pro-Turkish, and they wanted another instrument in Greece. And they imposed this Danish House of Glücksburg, and put George I on the throne.

But, you see, behind that movement there really were modernizing forces inside Greece. There was a faction of the Greek Army that was interested in modernization — a kind of Nasserite faction, if you want to use a twentieth-century term — embarrassed by the backwardness of Greece, and there were bourgeois who thought about creating an infrastructure in which capitalism could develop. And Trikoupis was their man. And his ministry in the 1880s and '90s did stir up the Greek economy and Greek society a little bit, and you do get the beginnings of a railroad system; you get the improvement of internal roads, you begin to get the slightest investment in industry.

But, you see, this bourgeoisie was frightened. It was frightened, after all, of the masses — frightened to make those structural reforms in which you would have an internal market. And so Trikoupis, when he did this infrastructural work, had to borrow money from the outside. He wouldn't do it, after all, by agrarian reform, by that kind of process of making a greater market in Greece. And consequently, the loans from the outside began to build up that monumental Greek debt. And in order to pay that horrendous interest on the loans, what Trikoupis did was to impose very heavy interior taxes upon consumer goods, upon tobacco, upon matches; in other words,

pressing down heavily upon the mass, upon the peasantry until there was mass discontent, until Greece was almost bankrupt. And the Trikoupis regime collapsed in the middle of the 1890s. And the king, George I, perfectly delighted to bring into government real reactionaries, not interested in development, who would not rock the boat and threaten the Greek monarchy.

But the hope, presumably, was even greater with Venizelos. And Venizelos is the big name, the big mouth of the twentieth century in Greece. And he comes into office in 1909, this leader in Crete — this revolutionary, this man who wanted unification between Crete and Greece — and he comes in 1909, imposed upon the king by modernist forces. And he organizes an instrument: the Liberal Party, which shall be an instrument of great interior reform. And behind him, he has what is called the Military League, which was a league of 500 military officers who took their inspiration from the Young Turk movement in Turkey: who were young officers wanting to end imperialism, really to improve the society. And behind him, he had what [Léon] Gambetta in France some decades before was to call the *nouvelles couches sociales*: the new social strata, the middle and the lower sectors of the bourgeoisie — tradesmen, to be sure, but also employees in offices, clerks in the financial house, clerks in the commercial houses, in government bureaus — in other words, a bourgeoisie that wanted in on the system, that was nationalist, that wanted a stronger Greece. And then there was stirring from below: there were the first trade unions formed in the cities in the early years of the twentieth century; and there was a peasant party, called the Agrarian Party, that demanded an end to indebtedness on the land, that demanded a lowering of taxes on the peasants. There was, you see, a stir.

And Venizelos came with a tremendous mouth. And he said he was a radical, and he would change all kinds of things. And you see, you see: it is a deception. It is a deception, and in that lies a lot of this history. Because if there was any change under Venizelos — who dominated Greek politics, really, on and off for almost the next thirty years — if there was any change, it was that the Liberal Party became another system of patronage. In other words, new men did get into government; new men did get into the bureaucracy. But it became a patronage machine, that liberalism, and not a machine for structural reform — for the development, in the effective sense, of the economy and of the society. Because, you see, the whole strategy of Venizelos was to co-opt the radical movement growing in Greece within the framework of imperialism.

That the whole strategy of Venizelos was to divert attention from the great structural problems of that country by saying that he would build the national frontiers until all Greeks in Europe were combined into a great Greek country. And what he had in mind were those Greek territories that were still within the Turkish Empire, that were still controlled by other Balkan countries. And consequently, Venizelos does take Greece into two Balkan Wars in 1912 and '13. And as a result of them, he does annex to Greece, Macedonia, and he does annex Epirus, and he does annex Crete.

And then, in the First World War — finally he takes Greece into the war against Turkey, against the Central Powers — and in the Treaty of Sèvres of 1920, he does add Thrace. In other words, he moves close into the areas that are properly Turkish areas, and doubles the territory of Greece.

All of which is a deception, doubly. It is a double deception because that imperialism put Greece firmly into the hand of Great Britain. If there was British overseership, if there was a British province in Greece, it became sure under Venizelos, because it was impossible for Greece to move in its imperialistic ventures without the support of Great Britain. That if Venizelos jumps, 1912 and 13, in those Balkan Wars, it was because Great Britain at that time was a little nervous about the nationalism in Turkey, and perfectly willing to confine its interest to satellite countries in the Balkans, of which Greece would be primary. And if you need a classic example of that, it is the First World War.

Now, this is a fascinating story, because at the beginning of the First World War, the British — who had put that silly George I on the throne in the 1860s, and who loved that Danish ruling house, and who had this fondness for ruling houses anyway, and knew this one to be tied to them by great emotive ties — and all the time they got their bidding from this ruling house of Greece. And then, suddenly, somebody bumped off George I in 1913, one of those unfortunate assassinations that the British wouldn't prevent. And consequently, George's son became the king. And George's son was called Constantine. And he's the only one of these Greek kings who disappoints the British, because Constantine was married to one Sophie, and Sophie was the sister of the Kaiser of Germany, William II. And consequently, he had this fondness for the Prussian ruling house. And consequently, he went off — and he had this fondness for the Prussian military — and in the First World War he actually tried to bring Greece into the war on the side of the Central Powers.

Now, Venizelos, who was the prime minister, flipped out. He wanted in the war, after all, against Turkey, so that he could get territory. The British don't flip out — they just throw out. And consequently, when Constantine got out of line, what the British did was, as we say, to encourage Venizelos to set the king aside. And consequently, in 1915, when there was a great struggle between the king and Venizelos over Greek foreign policy, the king dismissed Venizelos in October of 1915. And then, with British backing and a British encouragement, Venizelos, a year later in October of 1916, founded his own provisional government, a rival government in the city of Salonika. And consequently, with Greek and British troops, marched upon Athens and simply forced the king, Constantine, to abdicate in favor of his rather ineffective son, Alexander. Alexander is one of those great tragedies of the Greek ruling house, because not only did he not last very long, but when he finally died in 1920, it was because he was bitten by a monkey [laughter]! I have looked, really, for where and how this bite actually forced him into oblivion, but

the Greeks are a little bit discrete about that [*laughter*]. It suffices to say, at any rate, that with this kind of change and alteration, there was no question: Venizelos then took the country into war and made his war against Turkey.

But that war, you see, is doubly disastrous. It's doubly disastrous because it really does make Great Britain the suzerain of Greece: that British interest will be paramount in that country. But more than that, that war to add Thrace, that war against Turkey ends ultimately in a great humiliation and disaster. Because if the Greeks manage to get the Treaty of Sèvres in 1920 to give them Thrace — in other words, to give them what the Turks claimed — the Turks refused to accept that treaty. And under their nationalist leader, Mustafa Kemal, they simply said they would fight to retain that territory, and so the Greco-Turkish War continued between 1920 and '22. And now the Turks smashed the Greeks, drove them out of Anatolia, took back much of what they had originally gained in that treaty of 1920. And that humiliation was profound.

But we say that Venizelos is a republican. And as a republican, he is enlightened and will reform Greek society — hogwash. That he wasn't a republican to begin with; he liked kings, it's just that he quarreled with one of them during the First World War. And when he accepted what was imposed in 1924 — namely, the short-lived Greek Republic that lasted from March of 1924 down to November of 1935 — when he accepted that, it was because there was a real movement and he wanted to contain it. Look, this is the story: that that war went badly, didn't it? That war that, presumably, was going to add those good Turkish territories and even get a protectorate over Smyrna. And Venizelos was in at the beginning, to be sure, but he wasn't there at the end. Because, in the elections of 1920, the Greek people were pretty fed up with this war, and consequently they voted Venizelos out of office.

The Liberals lost that election, and consequently their rivals came in and brought back King Constantine, who now replaced his very ineffectual son Alexander again. But it was then Constantine who was burdened with the defeat of 1922. And the defeat of '22 was humiliating. And consequently, there was a military coup, one of those incessant military coups, in September of 1922: General [Nikolaos] Plastiras leading a military junta, and assassinating or executing five members of the government as responsible for the defeat, and then forcing the abdication of King Constantine to his son, George II this time — the George II who belovedly died within our own time.

And that didn't last very long. Because simply replacing a king did not satisfy public opinion. And there is agitation in the cities, and agitation in the countryside. And the Liberals, the younger ones, begin to get ideologically republican; they've had enough of this reactionary ruling house. And in the elections of December of 1923, there is a very big Liberal victory, and half of the people that

go back to the parliament are for a republic. And old Venizelos can't stop them. And in March of 1924, the parliament decrees that the monarchy is over, and the republicans stall. And the next month, on the 13th of April of 1924, there is a plebiscite, and 69% of the Greek people say yes, they support a republic.

And Venizelos came in to accept what was a *fait accompli*. And he is the strongman of that Republic between 1928 and 1933. And during that period of time, you ask, what did he do? He became increasingly conservative. He is, after all, the paradigm of the failure of that Greek bourgeoisie. You come to the year 1929, and there is agitation in the cities: the workers want a better life. And Venizelos pushes through the parliament a law which makes it a criminal offense now to advocate overthrow of the social order. Is it a question of education — that you must give more educational opportunity to the Greek people? There were 69,000 students in...

[*audio cuts out*]

... and in those elections of 1933, they threw the Liberals out. And they voted for the Populist Party, as it was called. And the Populist Party was headed by one [Panagis] Tsaldaris. And Tsaldaris, if anything, was much more reactionary than Venizelos. And the Populist Party was a royalist party. And Tsaldaris becomes the prime minister in 1933, and he immediately begins that purge: the purge in the faculties of the schools, the purge in the bureaucracy, and especially (note it well) the purge in the army. Because 1933 is the last time that you will find a faction in the Greek Army in modern history which is to the left. And all of that purge means that the republicans and the left-wingers in these particular government agencies are ousted. And Tsaldaris moved further and further toward restoring the monarchy: he abolishes the Senate, clips the powers of the lower chamber of the parliament. And for the military officers, for the generals, that's not even fast enough. And consequently, Tsaldaris is removed in 1935. And a general, General [Georgios] Kondylis, is put in. And he calls for a plebiscite under police control, the plebiscite of November of 1935. And 97% of the Greek people, allegedly, voted to bring George II back [*murmuring*].

But you see what you have. You see that the Liberal Party became a clientage: the Liberal Party became, after all, simply an agency of patronage for jobs; it became a client of the British. It is the paradigm of the failure to turn a comprador bourgeois into a viable, altering, national bourgeoisie.

And that has gone on. And I read, parenthetically, my notebooks about Greece last night in thinking about this. And I have been to Greece a great number of times. And in the period of the 1960s — at the time that the Americans were supporting that godawful [Konstantinos]

Karamanlis, and that so-called Radial Union, which was such a military and such a police regime in Greece — and I would go down there to find out whether the Center Party, which was the heir of this Liberal Party, whether the Center Party really had learned anything, whether it was any different than it had been as the old Liberal Party. Now, I remember sitting in the bar at the King's Palace Hotel in Athens, and I had an interview there with Sofoklis Venizelos, the son of this older Venizelos, and was that time the leader of the Center Party in Greece. And he brought along the editor of *Vima*, which was the party newspaper, and I pumped them with a lot of questions. And I read that interview last night in my notebooks. And I read my own comments, which were pretty damned good, I must say [*laughter*], at that particular juncture, because I pumped them with a lot of questions as to what their position was about the American role. Did they think, for example, that the replacement of British influence by American was simply a desirable thing for Greece? And I remember Sofoklis Venizelos saying to me — because the bar looked out on the main street there right near Constitution Square, and across the way is that old Grande Bretagne, which is that old great hotel in Athens — and I remember Sofoklis Venizelos simply waving his hand out there and saying, "Oh, well, Greece, after all, it always has a protector, and after all that was the government of Greece in the late stages of the war, wasn't it?" And then he pointed to the Grande Bretagne Hotel, which is where the British military mission had its headquarters. And consequently, as I wrote in my notebooks at that time, they had learned nothing: that fundamentally they were simply the out party, and they are not the party that was going really to reconstruct Greece or to make what is, after all, finally, a breakthrough in that blockage in that society.

All of which really, then, brings us to the issue. And the issue is that, at the end of 1935, the tragedy begins. And it is the tragedy of contemporary Greece. Because in November of 1935, the king comes back, and within a few months, Greece has fascism. It has, if you please, the regime of General Ioannis Metaxas. And the Metaxas regime, after all, is the Greek variant of fascism at that particular time. And that story has to be told, because if you don't understand the story of Metaxas and what the Greeks put up with right on the eve of the Second World War, then you understand nothing about what went on in the period of the 1940s.

What happened was the king came back, and there were elections in January of 1936. And in those elections, there was a stalemate: that the populist or the royalist parties got 143 seats, and the republican parties — the Liberals and other small republican parties — got 142 seats, and the Communists made a certain kind of show of strength for the first time; they got 15 seats, which meant that they were a kind of bargaining agency between these two blocs. And the king got very worried about that, and consequently decided that he had to bring in a strongman to regulate Greek politics. And so he called upon this general, Ioannis Metaxas.

Now, Metaxas had been a sort of a disciple of that King Constantine. And he'd been sent off to Berlin to the military academy to study, and he loved the Prussians and he loved kings. And he was, you know, a real bona fide reactionary, and a strongman to boot. And consequently, Metaxas, who has a little party of royalists of 7 deputies, is brought in as the prime minister on the 21st of April of 1936. Now, the parliament accepts him because they think that he is a caretaker, that there will very quickly be new elections. And they want to go off for their summer holiday; it is already April, and in Greece that almost begins the summer holiday. And consequently, they vote him powers; they even give him the privilege of voting or of decreeing laws while they're on vacation, assuming that there will be elections in the fall. And so the parliament simply moves out for the summer holiday, and resumes its sessions eleven years later [*laughter*].

And in the interim, of course, Metaxas looked at the social affairs of Greece. And he saw that there was agitation growing in labor ranks; that between January and May of 1936, there were 344 strikes; that between the 7th and 8th of May of '36, was a very bloody strike in Salonika. There had been 5,000 tobacco workers that went out on strike; there was a sympathy strike in Salonika, 20,000 other workers — a very bloody clash with police who were very tough and very fascistic, and consequently, twelve workers were simply left dead in blood. And Metaxas went to the king, and he said, "There is internal subversion, and we must stop this Communist menace. And consequently, I must have full powers." And all he needed was a pretext.

And the pretext came on the 1st of August of 1936, when the Communist Party foresaw for the 5th of August a twenty-four-hour general strike in the country to protest against the end of the right to strike, to protest against the law being introduced by Metaxas on compulsory arbitration — that was set for the 5th of August. Metaxas went to the king, George II, and he said, "That is a revolution! We cannot have it: I demand full powers." The king signed full powers to him, and it is the regime of the 4th of August. On the 4th of August, it is Metaxas himself who proclaims this to the country: "I have assumed the minimum of powers necessary to face up to the Communist danger, and I have no intention of giving them up until we have cleaned communism out of the country. The Greek press, as well as every citizen, will have to submit to strict national discipline for the foreseeable future. There will be no elections for dead parties; there will no longer be any parties in Greece: the old parliamentary system is gone forever." Metaxas didn't mince words, and he put those words into action.

All parties were dissolved; there was a complete censorship over the press; you now got a shackling of the trade unions, an elimination of the right to strike; you got the youth was organized in a kind of *Hitlerjugend* organization; you got women ousted from jobs and sent back into the home and into the kitchen. And of course, in [Konstantinos] Maniadakis, you got a real fascist police system. And Maniadakis is a name, unfortunately, worth remembering. Because when

Maniadakis is the Minister of the Interior under Metaxas, he establishes a Greek police — which is a paradigm of all those Greek police systems that we have had since that time, about which [Vassilis] Vassilikos wrote in that marvelous novel, *Z* — that police system Maniadakis instituted here, under Metaxas, appealed to the Americans. And Maniadakis became a great favorite in the American occupation, in the period of 1950s. And this Gestapo sought out the Communists especially. And the Communist Party was not only banned, but it was dissolved in force: 90,000 Communist cadres put into jail, tortured, imprisoned, exiled; a smashing of that entire operation and that entire apparatus.

And did it solve the Depression? Not a bit. Not a bit — that the Greeks, after all, suffered unemployment; that the Metaxas government ruled by foreign loans, as all other governments had in Greece. What the Greek people had by 1939 and '40 was fear and intimidation and a powerful secret police and unemployment. And that's a burden to bear. And the turning point came with the war.

And the war for Greece was in those big, big eyes of Mussolini. And Mussolini had an army that had gotten beefed up in Spain, and it had gotten beefed up in Ethiopia. And Ethiopia had been conquered, and Franco was in power, and what are you going to do with all that beef? [*laughter*]. And consequently, quite obviously, Mussolini looked, and he was envious. And there was Hitler occupying Austria in 1938, and occupying Czechoslovakia in 1939. And Italy needed something glorious, something that was certain, something that was sure that would add laurels. And Mussolini found Albania [*laughter*], and consequently decided, "Yes, Albania, that can be conquered." And consequently, Albania — yes, it's justifiable because it has petroleum — and, consequently, on 7th of April of 1939, Mussolini sent his forces across the Albanian border, and within ten days conquered that poor, poverty-stricken, stone-age country [*laughter*] at that particular time.

But in conquering Albania, there were then Italian troops on the Greek frontier. And that posed a problem for Metaxas. On the one hand, the king, after all, was very pro-British. The king owed everything to Great Britain — and Great Britain was the only power in Europe that really cared about ruling houses — and consequently was tied. But Metaxas was not. And Metaxas liked the Axis. He liked Germany especially, and he tied some of that kind of agricultural foreign produce to the German economy. And consequently, Germany became a market, it became an ideological friend. And Metaxas was unwilling to threaten the Axis.

And then came the Nazi-Soviet Pact, and that made Metaxas very uncomfortable. And he decided, after all, that it was very difficult to support this Axis if they were going to make a deal with the Russians, and consequently not be pure, ideologically, in terms of their anti-communism. Poor

Metaxas: he didn't know what to do, to which side to turn, how to prepare. And so Greece was unprepared.

And finally came 1940. Italy still wasn't in the war. Germany had begun, had struck at Poland. Italy looked for a place to go, and struck France in July of 1940. But that wasn't much; France was finished by the time Italy got there, and all she got was occupying a little bit of the southeast of France. It wasn't much. And consequently, Mussolini looked for a place to strike his part in World War II. And his intelligence reports, the intelligence reports that came in, said that the Greek Army was very demoralized, and that there was a real possibility of conquering Greece. And that it would be a coup because, from Greece, you had a springboard against Egypt, and consequently you could strike at the British and you could conquer North Africa. And so, the 28th of October of 1940, three o'clock in the morning, the Italian ambassador chose to deliver an ultimatum to General Metaxas at his home. And the ultimatum at three in the morning, of the 28th of October of 1940, demanded that Greece permit Italy all kinds of military bases inside Greece: in other words, a protectorate. And Metaxas — it's the only intelligent thing he ever said — said, "This means war" [*laughter*].

And the war began on the 28th of October of 1940, as the Italians sent twenty-six divisions across the Albanian frontier into the Greek territory. And that war, between the 28th of October till the 25th of March of 1941, is something in Greek history. Because the Greeks had fifteen divisions against twenty-six Italian divisions, and they were underequipped; and the territory was very difficult in the north of Greece, and there was snow; and there was not proper clothing, and there should have been demoralization. But then something incredible happened, and you have to really begin to understand this. And that is that the rank-and-file Greeks suddenly realized that they were fighting not only against Mussolini and the Italian invasion, but they were fighting against fascism. It was their first chance to fight against fascism, under which they were living; one of those peculiar ironies. And consequently, that war that began the 28th of October, by the 14th of November, the straggling Greek army had driven the Italians back over the Greek frontier into Albania. And in the weeks that followed, they drove the Italians a hundred kilometers inside the country of Albania, and inflicted the first military defeat upon the Axis that it suffered. And that was remarkable. And Metaxas, in January of '41, died. And, so, two victories at once! [*laughter*]. And suddenly there was a chance.

Or was there? The Germans were always there to pick up those awful defeats that the Italians suffered. And consequently, by the spring of 1941, the Germans were ready to secure the southern flank for their invasion of the Soviet Union. And consequently, before the Greeks could enjoy that victory, on the 7th of April of 1941, the Germans struck simultaneously at Yugoslavia and at Greece. They sent twelve divisions of their crack 11th Army across the Greek frontier, and the

Greeks were no match for that German army.

And they called, then, upon the British. And the British sent what they could — which wasn't very much — ANZACs, Australians and New Zealanders, to the tune of about 50,000. But it was no-go. By the 25th of April, the British were removing their troops, sending them off into Crete and off into Egypt, and taking — note it well — taking the king with them, George II; taking his puppet prime minister [Emmanouil Tsouderos], who represented that August 4th, 1936 regime, with them as a provisional government in Cairo. That was always there as the British card in the period of the 1940s. By the 11th of May of 1941, all of Greece was occupied.

It was occupied by 300,000 occupying forces: Germans, Bulgarians, mainly Italians. And I ask you the question: What will the Greeks do? The 11th of May of 1941, okay — twenty days later, you wake up in Athens, and it is the 31st of May of 1941. And you are an Athenian who, after all, does not know how to turn with this kind of an occupation. And you walk out into the center of that city of Athens, and suddenly you find something phenomenal. And you know that the war of resistance, symbolically, has begun not only in Greece but in Europe. Because you look at those heights of the Acropolis, and at the top of the flagpole, at the highest point in the Acropolis, the Nazis had put their flag with the swastika, and it had flown over Athens. And the Athenians got up that morning of the 31st of May of '41, and they saw that the flag was down. And the Germans were irate.

And all of Athens was placarded by the commandant, who said that some dastardly act has been committed and that the German flag has been defiled, and that the Athenians will pay for that and a great inquiry will be instituted. And the Germans looked and searched, and they never found. But we know: we know because it was all reported in the Communist press, on the 25th of March of 1945, with all of the testimonial. What had happened had been a very daring, quite magnificent, quite symbolic act by two young Greeks, each of them twenty-five — one named Manolis Glezos, and Glezos the most important of the two, and with him his friend [Lakas] Santas — and they tell the story, and it goes this way. And it is that they walk, on the 30th of May, through the city of Athens. And everywhere they looked they could not stand it, because the sky of Athens was shut off by this damnable swastika. And they walked around the Plaka [neighborhood], and walked around and walked around, until they came to a common thought: "We'll tear it down."

But you have to do that at night. And there are German sentinels everywhere, and there is barbed wire everywhere around that Acropolis, and it is heavily guarded. And so Glezos and Santas meet that evening. And they walk around to the north side of the Acropolis, and they climb through the barbed wire. And then they go monument to monument, hiding as they go, throwing stones, as Glezos tells us, here and there in order to deflect the sentinels. And dammit, it's one of those magnificent Athenian nights in which the moon really is very bright, and consequently does them

no good. And they finally get, really, to the height, and they get to the flagpole. And they are at the flagpole, and they begin to pull, to pull those ropes in order to get the flag down. And the damned ropes have stuck, and they won't go. And Glezos says, "No use, no use." And he climbs up to the top and begins to rip at the flag, and it won't come down. And he's tired and he goes down, and he says, "We can't go back now." And he climbs up again — three times climbed up, the third time biting with his teeth in order to try to rip it down. No-go. They get down. Glezos said: "What do we do now?" In a kind of fury, as he describes it, the two of them together began to rip at these ropes that were holding this flag, and suddenly they loosed! And they lowered that flag, and in a kind of a frenzy that you can only imagine, the two of them with bare hands ripped that flag in shreds, and got the hell out of there [*laughter, applause*]. And they got back and it was already ten minutes after midnight, and midnight was the curfew. And just as they got back to their flat, they were stopped by German sentinels who said, "Why are you breaking the curfew?" And they said, "We've just been to a great party." And the sentinels said, "Okay" [*laughter*].

And with that, you see, in a sense, symbolically, the resistance begins. Because in that winter of 1941 and '42, there is hunger; there is, after all, a food sheet that gives you only 240 calories. There is starvation; in that first winter of 1941 to '42, there 300,000 Greeks who starved of malnutrition. And millions might have starved — it might have been a decimation of the population — except for the fact that the municipalities organized soup kitchens; they organized bread lines. But, you see, the municipalities didn't organize those. The municipalities only formally organized them. From September of 1941, that kind of resistance, just to save the sheer physical presence of the Greek people, was organized by EAM, E-A-M, the Front of Greek Liberation. And that liberation front, which had been organized in September of 1941, begins to be the instrument.

Behind it is the Communist Party of Greece: that decimated party, that party that had had so little destiny in the 1920s, that had been full of those flip-flops, full of that crazy zigzag line that every Communist party was subjected to, which had begun to become important only in the Popular Front period of the '30s, then suddenly decimated, crushed. And it begins to reform by September of 1941. And there are Communists who escape from prison, and they join others who have never really been put into prison. And there is now, by the middle of 1941, a centralized party. And it is a party that has two advantages and one disadvantage, and note it well.

It has the advantage, after all, of not having been tarred with the Nazi-Soviet Pact, because most of those Communists were imprisoned or underground at the time of that Pact; they were persecuted by Metaxas. And when [Nikos] Zachariadis (who was the Secretary General of the Communist Party) from his prison let out a clandestine letter in October of 1940, at the time that the Italians invaded, and urged the Communists to join a broad front against the invader, really to fight a

resistance — that was during the Nazi-Soviet Pact. And, of course, the Greek Communists simply went to the resistance before they had any orders or instructions from Moscow. And they had a second advantage: that when they re-formed in this resistance, they re-formed with new men, with militants who were really formed in that struggle, frontally, against a terrific, terroristic fascism. And consequently, they could go to the hills and do incredible things, as Aris [Velouchiotis], that great guerrilla leader of the Greek Communists was ultimately, to do. But the weakness: that they were not in any way theoreticians. They were not in any way known in Europe; in no way did they have a sense of what the larger context of their struggle was. They blindly trusted that the Soviet Union was really a force for revolution, and they blindly trusted that the Soviet Union would help them ultimately to accomplish what they expected to accomplish. And on that rock a great number of illusions would break.

But EAM was terrific. And EAM quickly, under Communist leadership, began to organize a resistance, the details of which we can't go into. It suffices to say (because it's interesting for us to know what our comrades do), and it is interesting to note, that one month after EAM is founded in September of '41 — that would be in October of '41 — that there already is a demonstration in the center of Athens: people coming one by one, gathering suddenly in a kind of a manifestation, then breaking up immediately after an anti-fascist slogan. A month later, in November of '41, there is a demonstration of students and the faculties. By the time you come to April of '42, there is a strike simultaneously in five cities of Greece, and those of the petty bureaucrats of the governmental offices, also organized by EAM. There is, by April of '42, the beginning of ELAS, the guerrilla army, organized also by EAM. You see the point. The point is — well, that by the time you come toward the end of the Second World War, this Greek resistance will have occupied 70% or 80% of the country. It will have organized in its ranks a million and a half adherents, by no means all Communists — perhaps no more than 10% inscribed in the Communist Party — but who already had the experience, within the framework of that resistance, of organizing their own counter-state inside the territories, inside the villages that they came to occupy.

And so the whole question of Greek history, at this particular point, turns on those four variables: that there is part of the Greek resistance that is not EAM; that within EAM there will be a struggle between those more orthodox Communists who want to keep it a very broad front and those guerrilla fighters out in the hills who already are making a new society, a Guevara-type operation. And then there are the British. And then there are the Russians. And keep all of those variables in mind, because a lot of history will be played out on that kind of chess board, until the game is finally arranged by the Americans. [applause]