Nyeste tid


Hans Uwe Petersen


These 15 essays are the product of a conference held at the Vilvorde Centre in August-September 1984, and organised by the Department of Modern Greek and
The papers cover the fields of domestic politics, financial policy, population movements, and the policies of the states which did much to determine Greece's fate: Britain, the United States and Yugoslavia. The papers enable one to discern certain trends underlying the chaotic events of 1945-49. They were part of the process whereby the Soviet Union and the United States established their respective spheres of influence in Europe, and in doing so restructured or influenced the social and political order of many countries. The fate of the groups opposed to the dominant forces in their respective countries was often painful, especially in Greece, where the chief victim was the Communist-dominated National Liberation Front, which had won mass support, during the German occupation for a programme of social-democratic reform. The suppression of this force was a protracted and bloody business, mainly because Britain (forerunner of its senior partner the United States) left its work half-done in 1944-45, by disarming the Left without intervening sufficiently to restrain the Right, which re-kindled the civil war. Such a tragedy might have been prevented by an Anglo-American military occupation such as occurred in Italy.

In some other respects, events paralleled those in Italy. Much of the old social order - though discredited by association with the Germans or with dictatorship - was restored. So was the traditional form of parliamentary politics, which, as Keith Legg shows, exhibited the same faults as before its suppression in 1936. These faults were accentuated by loss of contact with voters since then. Legg thus points to institutional factors behind the notorious ineffectiveness of political leaders. As Procopis Papastratis shows, the triumphant monarchists carried out a purge of the Left, persecuting those associated with the wartime resistance, while protecting those associated with the extreme Right. Here there is another important parallel with events in Italy. A tragic consequence of polarisation was that some of the most constructively idealistic figures in politics were condemned to impotence, as Hagen Fleischer shows in his original work on Greek socialists. A fascinating insight into the process of polarisation at village level is provided by Stanley Aschenbrenner, who shows how the polarisation started during the German occupation, and was based largely on pre-war family groupings. As Christos Hadzioussif shows, anti-Left politicians protected traditional social inequalities, which had been accentuated and modified by the scarcity caused by German occupation. The Left, as in Italy, was totally defeated in its attempt to redistribute social and economic power.

The Rightist violence which the British allowed forced the Communist party to retreat gradually from the policy of legality on which it embarked early in 1945. As Ole Smith shows, the retreat led eventually to full-scale military rebellion. Heinz Richter argues that the fateful decision by the Communist leader, Zachariadis, to boycott the general election (held in March 1946 at British insistence) indicates that he intended a city-based putsch. But might this decision merely indicate that, like some Centrist politicians, he did not want to legitimise a farcical electoral process?
Once embarked on civil war, the two sides tried to mobilise the population in their respective zones. Some of the resulting movements of population are analysed by Angeliki Laïou in an important, exploratory article, which is particularly informative on the mass evacuation of mountain villages organised by the government forces. The article also shows, perhaps more forcefully than Ms Laïou intended, how far we are from assessing the number of deaths caused by the civil war. A particularly controversial part of the population movements; the deportation and attempted repatriation of children, is analysed by Lars Baarentzen.

The outcome of the civil war was determined, to a large degree, by the decisions of the United States, Britain, Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union. One-third of this volume is devoted to their policies. Nigel Clive describes the vain attempts by the British to build up the political centre in 1945-46. John Iatrides shows how the policies of Britain, the United States, the Greek government and the Greek Communist party, were influenced by their varying perceptions of Soviet involvement. Although this involvement remained very small, it was exaggerated, for slightly different reasons, by the first three parties; and the American motives for exaggeration would be particularly rewarding to analyse. Robert Frazier shows the symbolic importance of the small British force which remained in Greece during the civil war. Two articles by the late Elisabeth Barker survey the development of Yugoslav relations with the Greek Communists and the Western powers, showing how Tito was strongly committed to supporting the former until 1948, but began to retreat from his commitment after his expulsion from the Cominform in June of that year. Joze Pirjevec analyses the latter part of the process, showing why Tito was forced to move cautiously. As Elisabeth Barker shows, Tito’s desertion loses much of its significance when considered in the light of Stalin’s decision (conveyed to the Yugoslavs in February 1948) to ditch his Greek clients.

Developments which, more than any others, made possible these studies are the opening of the British and United States archives, and to a lesser degree the proliferation of accounts by Left-wing veterans. Sadly missing from the sources used here are Greek official archives. Countries which maintain 50-year rules are condemned to see much of their history written from foreign sources. And how much will be available even when the 50 years elapse? Attempts are being made in Greece, by various bodies, to gather together materials on the civil war. They could become more effective if they received high-level government support.

David Close
Flinders University of South Australia


Lad det være sagt straks, at dette er en i det store og hele både vederhæftig, solid og velskrevet fremstilling. Bogens titel er dog en smule vildledende. De fire forfattere, som er gymnasieførere, skriver i forordet, at hovedvægten er lagt på