OFFICE OF STRATEGIC SERVICES
Washington, D.C.

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Fall, 1949.

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GREECE

General Labor and Political Situation

According to the census of 1939, Greece had 8,000,000 inhabitants, 5,456,000 of whom were rural dwellers and 2,544,000 city dwellers. A comparison of the census figures of 1939 with those of the preceding census, 1926, proves that the rural population is diminishing. The total number of inhabitants has been increasing at an average rate of 80,000 a year. Approximately 50% of the urban population live in the 6 largest cities of Greece, Athens, Pireus, Salonika, Volo, Patras and Cavalla. There are virtually no national minorities. There are scarcely 200,000 persons who are not of Greek ancestry.

The rural population is composed mostly of small land owners who cultivate their soil with the help of members of their families. Due to the small size of the properties, lack of capital and of technical equipment, and of difficult soil, the economic situation of the farming population is far from satisfactory. It must be recognized, however, that considerable progress was achieved during the democratic regime, instituted by the Liberal Democratic Party under the late Venizelos. The Liberal Democratic Party seized power in 1910 and remained in power, with brief interruptions, until 1933. After the death of Venizelos in 1936, the party was led by a committee composed of the two former prime ministers, Sofoulis and Gonatas, and the former deputy, Sophocle Venizelos, son of the late statesman.

The Venizelos Party abolished the old rural system under which the peasants virtually had been the serfs of the large landowners, and it distributed soil to the peasants. Vast programs of amelioration and irrigation were developed. New Land was made available for cultivation. The Venizelos Party organized farmers' cooperatives and founded the Agricultural State Bank, through which the farmers were freed from the plague of the usurers. It appointed agricultural engineers in each district to disseminate instruction in scientific methods of agricultural work. It established tobacco and cotton institutes, promoted the intensive use of artificial fertilizers, and created a laboratory for special studies about the best possible use of the soil.

Because of these measures, the annual grain production, which had averaged 400,000 tons between 1924 and 1932, increased to 700,000 tons. Other agricultural products likewise increased. However, the economic situation of the agricultural population in Greece is still inadequate. The average

annual income of a farmer's family in Greece, consisting of 5 persons, is not more than $110 (at an exchange rate of 150 Greek drachmes for $1). The situation of the farm laborers is even worse. There are about 400,000 farm laborers earning not more than 60 drachmes a day and working on an average of 120 days a year, which means that their annual income is $48.

The cost of living in Greece prior to the war was lower than in America. Nevertheless, chronic undernourishment, a high rate of infant mortality and widespread tuberculosis exist as a result of low incomes.

The working population in the cities is in no better condition. Before the Italian aggression, there were 1,602,000 workers in Greece between the ages of 16 and 60, 552,000 being women. Child labor has been prohibited, and there are very few workers above 60 years of age.

The 1,602,000 workers consisted of the following:

140,000	civil servants, employees of public enterprises and banks
168,000	commercial employees
98,000	in liberal professions
390,000	heavy industry
165,000	light industry
170,000	industry processing agricultural products
120,000	transport
70,000	building trades
60,000	merchant marine and fishermen
60,000	health and sanitation services
30,000	industry processing, dairy and other animal products
31,000	public utilities
40,000	mining
25,000	graphic industries
35,000	miscellaneous occupations

During the depression of 1931-1934, the maximum number of unemployed in Greece was between 120,000 and 150,000. About 50,000 wage earners were part time employees. Since then the industrial recovery gradually absorbed the unemployed and there were virtually none left at the time of the Italian aggression.

In 1940 a specialized Greek worker earned on the average $4 to $6 a week, at an exchange rate of 150 drachmes for $1. Women's wages were much lower and rarely exceeded $2 or $3 a week. Under these conditions the life of the Greek worker

was very difficult. For an apartment of two small rooms with a kitchenette, no bathroom, he had to spend about 20% of his income. Only the Greek repatriated from Asia Minor after the Greek-Turkish War were somewhat better housed, since the government had to build new houses for them.

Since 1936 wages have increased by about 20%, but the cost of living rose 30% to 40%. This was largely due to the waste and the embezzlement of the Metaxas dictatorship.

At present the situation of the worker and the entire population has become tragically disastrous. Unemployment has reached staggering heights since many enterprises are closed or work on a greatly reduced schedule owing to the scarcity of raw materials. On the other hand, most workers prefer to remain idle, even at the risk of starving, rather than to work for the benefit of the Nazis. The only enterprises working at full capacity, paying good wages and supplementary rationing cards are those either directly seized by the Nazis or working for the German war effort, although under Greek management.

Even in enterprises not working for the German war effort, salaries have been increased by 400%, but since prices have risen to enormous heights, famine rages. The working class especially is affected.

Since Greece is predominantly an agricultural country of small land and shop owners, where industrialization started late, social legislation and the labor movement began at a comparatively recent date. In 1924 the most progressive wing of the Venizelos Party created the Greek Workers' and Peasants' Party under the leadership of the late Mr. Papanastasiou. He had been Minister in the cabinets of Mr. Venizelos several times, and Prime Minister twice. This party, although not affiliated with the Labor and Socialist International, nevertheless can be defined as the first socialist party in Greece. It was never able to attain a parliamentary majority, but polled up to 200,000 votes of a total of 1,400,000 voters.

In 1922 the Communist Party was established in Greece, under the principles and regulations of the Third International, affiliated with Moscow, from where it received its funds and its political directives. It published a daily paper, "The Radical," and numerous pamphlets, posters and other propaganda material. The Communist Party, however, never had more than 20,000 members and even in the general elections of January, 1936, when the Communist party appeared to have won considerable

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influence throughout the country, it polled only 160,000 votes. At least 110,000 of those votes were given by sympathizers who, without embracing the Communist Party program, wanted to protest against the acceptance of the return of the King by the other parties and against the destruction of the republican constitution by a shamelessly falsified plebiscite.

It actually was the abolition of the republican constitution of 1927 and the restoration of the King by re-establishing the royalist constitution of 1911, combined with the terrorist measures adopted for the suppression of the democratic elements which resulted in conditions favoring Communist propaganda. Under those circumstances the Communists were able to present their party and their program as the only means of opposition to the dictatorial policy of the King.

Nevertheless, there was no "Communist danger" in Greece. The royal government of Metaxas used such an alleged danger merely in order to justify the establishment of his dictatorship. The incidents quoted by the Metaxas government for that purpose were staged by the agents of the police, according to pre-conceived plans.

As soon as the dictatorship of Metaxas was established, it suppressed, along with all other liberties, the right of labor to organize. Unions were dissolved and the workers were enlisted in government sponsored organizations patterned after the Nazi, and particularly after the Italian Fascist, models. The active elements of the labor movement were eliminated by atrocious persecutions. Not only was the Communist Party outlawed and its members arrested and jailed, but workers denounced as "leftist sympathizers" were deported.

A Mr. Dimitratos, formerly secretary general of the Labor Center in Pireus but removed because of his political opinions years ago, was appointed by Metaxas as Under-Secretary of Labor and general secretary of the General Federation of Labor, re-organized according to the "corporative" pattern of the Italian Fascists. Dimitratos immediately abandoned all contacts with the international labor movement and with the International Labor Office in Geneva. He removed from office all elected leaders of the unions and replaced them with people he appointed and whose qualification was their devotion to the Metaxas dictatorship.

The dictatorship did take steps to improve labor conditions, such as wage increases, regulation of working hours, collective bargaining. The general situation of the workers, however, deteriorated and the majority of the Greek workers hated and despised the Metaxas regime intensely.

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Those labor leaders who were honest enough not to collaborate with Dimitratos were either deported or forced to flee. Political activity in the interest of the workers ceased. The right of the labor organizations to appoint two members of the Senate was abolished. In fact the Senate and Parliament were dissolved. Of the last two Senators who represented labor, Mr. Kalomiris accepted a position offered to him by Dimitratos, and Mr. Evangelou, a former secretary of the Union of the Workers in the Graphic Industries, refused any collaboration with the dictatorship and therefore has been persecuted. His prestige among the workers was thereby augmented.

The leading labor officials, especially the general secretaries of the local federations in Pireus, Salonika, Kavalla, of the Chamber of Labor in Athens, of the Federations of Railroad Workers, the Tobacco Workers, the workers in the Graphic Industries, the Heavy Industry and others were either deported to concentration camps on distant islands or placed under strict police surveillance. The same fate was shared by the Communist leaders, among whom were 12 members of the last Chamber of Deputies which was elected on January 26, 1936, and dissolved on August 4, 1936. The secretary general of the Communist Party, Mr. Zachariades, who had been trained in Moscow, was deported.

A few former Communist leaders, among them Deputy Sklavainas, were bribed and corrupted by the dictatorship and became its tools or agents. But important Communist cells avoided police persecution and continued underground activities, masked under the general popular resistance against the hated dictatorial regime.

When the Italian aggression started on October 28, 1940, the working class responded, unanimously and eagerly, as did the entire nation, to the call to arms. The Greek worker considered the war against the Italian invader not merely as a campaign for national independence, but as a war against all dictatorships, imposed by a particularly despised King. The Metaxas regime, which conducted the war not as a national affair but as an affair of its partisan regime, refused to allow political exiles and political prisoners to be sent to the front lines against the Fascist enemy.

It is remarkable that even the Communist Party of Greece was in full agreement with the entire nation, although at that time Moscow had instructed the Communist Parties outside Russia to sabotage the war efforts of their countries. Mr. Zachariades, general secretary of the party, published a manifesto urging the Greek Communists to fulfill their patriotic duty in the war against all Fascism and for democratic liberties.

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After the conquest of Greece by the Germans, the Quisling government established in Athens under General Tsolakoglou continued the policy of the royal dictatorship with regard to the working class. The Nazi invaders prohibited any kind of labor organization since the workers were among the first to start resistance. The tobacco workers of Kavalla had already made their first, violent moves of resistance around May 25, 1941, in the very first days of the occupation.

In spite of all measures by the invaders and by their so-called government, the Greek workers did not disarm. They organized clandestine groups and continued to fight, particularly by means of sabotage. At present, cells exist on a union-like basis, with the virtually exclusive task of continuing and increasing acts of resistance and preparing action for the day of an Allied landing.

Unfortunately the underground work is hampered by two major factors: (1) The Metaxas police, although it was careful enough to destroy its secret archives of the "Surete Speciale" when it evacuated the capital, "forgot" to destroy the dossiers giving all the necessary details about all persons classified as Communist sympathisers, but actually comprising former liberals, Republicans and Laborites. These contain names, addresses, parentage, educational and professional background. This disastrous and inexplicable "forgetfulness" enabled the Germans to seize those persons. The Police Minister of the Tsolakoglou government in Athens, through Police Colonel Polychronopoulos (an old intimate collaborator of Mr. Maniadakis, Police Minister under Metaxas) arrested 2500 persons and sent them to concentration camps, where many have since died, including the journalists, Carvounis and Stournas. (2) When the King and his government, under Mr. Tsouderos, left Athens in the night of April 22, 1941, they left behind Police Minister Maniadakis and General Cavrakos, appointed military governor of the capital "to insure law and order until the arrival of the German troops." Maniadakis used this interval, the last days of Greek national liberty, to order the arrest of many well-known democrats. When the Germans occupied Athens on April 27th, they found those people in prison, kept them there until the start of their war against Russia, and then sent them to concentration camps as "suspected of Communism."

For these two reasons many of the most active and determined anti-Nazis and influential democrats were absent when the labor organizations were reconstituted on a clandestine basis and the secret groups of resistance were formed.

These underground labor groups are based upon the cores of the most important former labor organizations, particularly the Federation of Tobacco Workers (especially important in Salonika), the Federation of Railroad and Streetcar Workers, the Federation of Workers in the Heavy Industry, the Federation of Workers in the Graphic Industries (small in number but very active and of great moral influence) and the local federations of labor in Pireus and Salonika.

Previously there also existed many professional organizations, such as the Confederation of Commercial Employees, League of Journalists, Federation of Bank Employees, Union of Civil Servants, Union of Municipal Officials. Some of these organizations are still allowed under the occupation, but they are very strictly controlled and concern themselves exclusively with the procuring of small additional food rations for their members and their families.

Apart from the Communist Party the Greek workers have not formed new political groups. They belong to those parties which succeeded each other in the government. These were the following groups:

1) The Liberal Party, founded by the late Mr. Venizelos and led after his death by a committee presided over by Mr. Sofoulis, former Prime Minister, speaker of the last Chamber (which was dissolved by Metaxas). The Liberal Party was numerically the strongest group. It had won half of all seats in the Chamber of Deputies at the last general election. Since then its moral prestige has increased as it was always the spokesman of Greek democracy and of the alliance with the western powers against Germany.

2) The former Royalist Party, formerly led by Mr. Tsaldaris. After his death it split up into two factions:

a) The Popular Royalist Party, which has gradually disintegrated. Its sole representatives today are three politicians of secondary importance, Mr. Dino Tsaldaris (nephew of the former party leader), the former Minister George Pesmatzoglou, and Mr. Constantin Tsakopoulos, deputy of Tripolitza in the Peloponnesos.

b) The Conservative Party, under Mr. John Theotokis. This group had taken the initiative in 1935 for the restoration of the monarchy and the return of the present King. After the death of Tsaldaris, this group became the rallying point for most anti-Venizelists and the most important support of the Crown. After the establishment of the dictatorship, however, this party declared itself for the Republic. Only a few months ago its leader authorized Mr. Sofoulis, Chief of the Republican Party, to represent him in the secret

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meetings of the political party leaders who proclaimed the abolition of the monarchy and the removal of the King.

3) The Agrarian (Chief Mylonas, deputy of Epirus, former Minister) and the Liberal-Independent (Chief Papandreou, deputy of Lesbos, former Minister) parties are rather weak and are really part of the Republican-Liberal Party from which they have seceded.

4) The Republican-Progressive Party under Mr. G. Kafantaris (former Prime Minister and collaborator of the late Mr. Venizelos) cooperates also with the Liberal Party.

5) The Workers' and Peasants' Party merged again with the Liberal Party after the death of its leader, Mr. Papanastasiou, in 1936. This party is perhaps the first pro-Socialist party in Greece.

6) The Unionist Party has been founded by the present vice-premier of the royal government-in-exile, Mr. Kanellopoulos. It was always so small that it never obtained a seat in Parliament. Its leader, Mr. Kanellopoulos, professor of sociology at the University of Athens, opposed the dictatorship and was deported by the police for three years. He was accepted as a volunteer when the war broke out and served in the front lines, in a unit belonging to the army of General Tsolakouglou. After the conquest of the country, he participated actively in starting the underground movement of resistance. All these circumstances, together with the fact that he persistently proclaimed the necessity of pitiless sanctions against all guilty men of the dictatorship, made Mr. Kanellopoulos, who is a young man, very popular throughout the country. After having escaped from occupied Greece, however, he joined the royal government-in-exile of Mr. Tsouderos which is as much detested in Greece as the puppet government in Athens. The government-in-exile is actually the continued dictatorship of the Metaxas regime, camouflaged under declarations of democratic faith without any material basis. Subsequently the prestige of Mr. Kanellopoulos is said to have suffered inside Greece, where he is judged as a simple opportunist, although it is recognized that he did useful work in re-organizing the army in exile.

7) The Communist Party, under the German occupation and after the German aggression against Russia, has been reconstituted clandestinely and takes a very active part in the resistance against the invaders. Its militants, for a long time trained in conspiratorial methods, propaganda and sabotage, obtained satisfactory results in their efforts which gradually inspired widespread respect for the national work of the Communists. The Communist Party tries to exploit this respect to gain more and more influence upon the largest possible number of persons. Its efforts are favored by the fact that the

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Communists are widely regarded not only as particularly effective in the battle against the invaders, but also as the only party able and determined to resist any effort to restore the royal dictatorship after the liberation of the country. This popular belief is further strengthened by the policy of the royal government-in-exile and by the conviction that certain Allied circles are also in favor of those personalities.

The famine raging in the country under the German yoke, the hatred against any kind of dictatorship, the general proletarianization caused by the wholesale looting of the Nazis, and the spiteful work of the Italians, are factors facilitating Communist propaganda.

The only former labor leader who is now with the Quisling government of Professor Logothetopoulos in Athens is Mr. Kalyvas, originally a hotel clerk who had been secretary of the Labor Federation of Pireus for many years. Previously he was an honest democrat, anti-Nazi and pro-Allies. He was removed from his post by Mr. Dimitratos, who has been his personal enemy. Nevertheless, last fall he became Labor Minister of the Quisling government and is now in charge of labor conscription and of the exploitation of the workers in the interest of the German and Italian invaders.

Between November, 1941, and November, 1942, after desperate efforts, about 27,000 workers, mostly skilled, were sent to Germany. It seems, however, that the German authorities were not much satisfied with the output of those workers who worked slowly and were a bad example to the workers deported into Germany from other occupied countries. About two-thirds of those workers gradually have been returned to Greece.

In Greece proper, the workers cannot easily refuse work in factories seized by the invader because this is the only way to obtain food rations. Moreover, they are given comparatively good wages and additional food supplies. Nevertheless, there are but a small number of Greek workers in the factories and they practice sabotage and slowdown tactics.

The shipyard company "Vassiliades" has been taken over by the Germans. Its plants and yards in Pireus are under the direction of a retired German Admiral. A limited number of specialized workers have been sent there from Germany. This company is building wooden barges, not larger than 1000 tons, equipped with Diesel engines and with sails, although the yard is equipped to build ships up to 4000 tons.

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The Hymette and Eleusis (near Athens) plants of the "Cartoucherie Hellenique Corp." which specialized in the manufacture of artillery shells, rifle ammunition and bombs, was seized by the Germans. They were modern plants and capable of comparatively high production. Their modern machinery, purchased in Germany between 1935 and 1938, was dismounted and sent to Germany. In their place, special machine tools for the repair of airplane engines were sent from Germany, and German specialized workers were put to work there under orders from the German military authorities.

The source of the report is a former Greek army officer and managing editor of a leading Athens newspaper. He left Greece in April, 1941 and arrived in the United States in August, 1942, having come by way of India.

The informant is a staunch supported of the liberal Venizelos party which was in power from 1911 until 1933. In evaluating the report his political bias must, of course, be considered.

(Source: OSS, A-3620, March 20, 1943).

Mar 29, 1943