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Against the establishment

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against the Establishment

by
George Georgalas

*Secretary of State
to the Prime Minister's Office*

Speech delivered at a dinner
given by the foreign correspondents
on December 9, 1970

An impassioned plea for the world's impartiality while Greece experiments with a new approach to our era of widespread crisis. Arguing that Greece's geographical position in the crossroads of the world as well as her historical experience uniquely qualify her to build a new democracy, the author asserts that the Revolution of April 21, 1967 is attempting this «Great Effort and Aim». The goal is a democratic system capable of adapting itself to modern needs and surviving. [J. Chernoff]

Our era is one of widespread crisis. It appears in differing forms and manifestations, and compasses the West, the East and the Third World.

After having offered all it could, old capitalism in its classical form has definitely entered a period of decadence after two world wars and the economic crisis of 1929.

Thus, the West is in search of something new.

The first signs of this search became clear during the period between the two wars, through President Roosevelt's «New Deal», and other similar attempts. This effort of renewal was completed in the post-war period and led to the present consumer-society of the Western World.

The decade 1950-1960 was that of the silent generation which had worked systematically to reach the present society of universal welfare. But this consumer-society too, has led to a deadlock.

This is why in technologically, economically and socially developed countries, the generation of 1960-1970 is a generation of profound despair and outcry.

It has been established that economic progress alone cannot solve human problems, and that to lead to real progress, technological progress must have a moral and human sense. Otherwise, it leads to despair. Western society finds itself once again at a crossroads. It must trace new courses, and discover new solutions to the new problems looming before it.

The crisis of pre-war capitalism gave birth to the communist experiment, which ended in rapid and total failure. The communist attempt to create a society free of contradiction and antithesis proved to be but reactionary utopia. Its effort to create a society in which everything would develop according to a «plan» has led to the Berlin Wall, which stands in the heart of Europe, and is a symbol of its failure. Today, it is evident to all the world that communism in no way constitutes progress, but, instead, reaction; not a revolution but a counter revolution. It brings no single solution to the human problems. On the contrary, it complicates and causes them to deteriorate.

The Third World too has been unable to this day to follow a positive course, and find solutions to the current problems. It has not been able to bridge the gap which separates it from developed societies. Unfortunately, this gap, grows incessantly. The Third

World is also struggling in an environment of contradiction and antithesis, and at the same time it has become a fighting ground between West and East.

Thus, crisis in our era is a common denominator—in different ways—of all social and political systems, and it has assumed worldwide dimensions. Mankind needs something new. It seems that history has come once again to a deadlock. But, as always, life marches on. It is certain that some day a new way will be found. Who will find it? When and how? These are the questions obsessing the present generation.

Let us draw a cross on the map of the earth. We shall then see that to the North we have a zone of excessive abundance or relative welfare, while to the South there is a zone of relative or absolute poverty. In between these zones, on the line of demarcation, there lies the Mediterranean Sea and the countries surrounding it.

The cross also shows that to the West we have countries concentrating on technology, economy and output, the rationalist societies, the consumer societies of practical people. To the East we have the realm of metaphysics and religions, of men of introspective meditation.

The dividing line lies once more on the Mediterranean, and more particularly in its Eastern basin. The centre of the cross lies where abundance meets poverty, and metaphysics technology; the spot where moral and religious ideals meet with the modern process of production. It is in this region that were born almost all civilisations, and most great religions. It is here that were formed all the great categories of the mind, and political systems. It should, therefore, be easier for the answer—which our era seeks with so much despair—to be found in this region, which is so fertile, and where was written the greatest part of mankind's history.

There are, however, other factors which could determine where the answer could come from. To find the way, a daring experiment new, revolutionary and modern is necessary. It is extremely difficult for such an experiment to take place in a great country. A «Superpower» could in no way risk starting experiments in such complex international surroundings as we have them today. This experiment should therefore be attempted in a small or relatively small country. Besides, it is very difficult for it to be made in a country with a powerful «establishment», for such an establishment would react and prevent all effort toward renewal.

The solution will finally have to come from a people with a long experience and historical tradition, so that such a people should have the capacity of moving forward in future without deviation or great risk. We are, therefore, led to the conclusion that the

quest for this new road which mankind will follow must take place at the centre of the cross, that is to say somewhere in the Mediterranean, in a small country, which has no powerful «establishment», but has on the other hand, a long tradition and historical experience. What is the country which fulfils these conditions? In my opinion, Greece.

She gathers—more than any other nation—all the requisites, and she is also in a position to undertake the Great Effort and Aim. Our country lies in the centre of the cross, and enjoys a historical tradition of many thousands of years; it is rich in historical experience thanks to which it was able to draw many lessons. It has an unlimited capacity for survival, and an immense force of renewal. We are a small country which has no establishment powerful enough to react in a way that could prove fatal to this effort.

Feudalism had a legal standing in the West. Enlightened despotism succeeded it, to lead finally to the democratic society of our times. Greece, for historical reasons, and, in particular, because she was under the Ottoman yoke during five hundred years, did not experience the same evolution. Ottoman feudalism had never been shrouded with a legal structure. We did not cross the necessary period of enlightened despotism, also because Ottoman despotism was very dark. Thus Greek society reached the modern era and democracy, without having paid the necessary fee, a fact which had a negative influence upon its evolution, and no very powerful «establishment», a fact which favours all possibilities of revolutionary change.

Moreover, the people of this country are known for their live mind, a capacity to assimilate, and continually absorb new elements, but without ever losing their character. The Greek is capable of forming and reforming, creating and discovering. This is why the solution may be born in this country.

The crisis which—for special reasons which belong to the past and which are, incidentally, well-known—took a form of unusual gravity in our country. Besides, we have always been struck by storms, and have always reacted sensitively to the new demands of history, because we lie in the centre of the cross, the crossroads of historical trends. In 1965, in particular, we experienced a crisis which was not just political but national, a crisis which called for an immediate revolutionary solution. This is how the Revolution of April 21, 1967 came about.

This Revolution took place to save Greece from chaos, civil war, and submission to Red totalitarianism. It took place to prevent the country from slipping into communism and to maintain it within the bosom of free western nations, of which Greece constitutes a vital and inalienable element.

Nevertheless, the Revolution did not limit itself to putting a brake on the evil. It wishes to safeguard

Greece against another relapse. This is why it is proceeding with an overall reform of the national structure. It proceeds to accomplish, modernise, achieve and equip the democratic system in a way allowing it to adapt itself to modern needs and survive.

During this effort of renewal, the Revolution has naturally run into the «Establishment» which, because of its intrinsic nature, reacted against all change, reform or progress.

When we say «establishment», we do not, of course, refer to a regime in a narrow sense. It is no economic system, a regime or a class. It is composed of a group of men, interests, and concepts dominated by the spirit of the «ownership» and hinders all effort to bring about a change.

There is an «establishment» of the Right, but also of the Centre, and, of course, the Left as well; including a political «establishment», and also spiritual, artistic and cultural ones. The «Establishment» exists in all fields. What is established dominates. And that slams the door to all forms of novelty.

In its march towards renewal, the Greek Revolution clashed against the «Establishment», regardless of the origin of the latter. But in particular, it clashed with the political «establishment». This was inevitable, because the nature of the Greek problem was initially political. In other words, it was a problem of having to change institutions, mentality, organisations, men, methods, and ideas in the political field. The political «establishment» has been totally destroyed, and the field is now clear to build a new political life on.

Our aim is not to create a general pattern applicable to the whole world. We have no such ambition. We have never had the intention of exporting our Revolution. Our ambition is to solve our problem, the Greek problem, by creating a democracy which would correspond to our traditions, our needs, our ideas, and our perspectives. The Revolution was made by Greeks for Greeks. The Revolution is a Greek Revolution, for the Greeks. But our effort presents a certain interest to you as well, and all others.

We are trying to build a new democracy here. A democracy which will preserve all the fundamental values and principles, all the foundations and ideals of abstract democracy, that democracy which is of a general nature, without confining it either in terms of time or space. But at the same time it will be adapted to our era. It will be a militant form of democracy, equipped with the necessary means to defend itself. It will have an effective State machinery, new education. It will be based on reconciled generations, its basis will be national consensus, and it will combine economic progress with a social policy. It will express a well-balanced and harmonious society. The effort is difficult. But it is nevertheless possible that the

effort could not be undertaken anywhere else than in this country.

Obviously, this effort is made by Greeks for Greeks. But the whole world is following the outcome of this effort: it could draw some benefit. There are no general prescriptions affording solutions to all problems. Nevertheless, useful elements may always be found in all efforts. For instance, the problem of education is a universal one, and it preoccupies all modern societies.

We are trying to reorganise our educational system on new foundations. To ensure it a perspective, a continuity, a consequence, but also a balance between the needs of contemporary life and the humanist tradition, between technical knowledge, and character formation.

Would you not profit too from the success of our effort?

We are trying to create a new Press. A free and responsible Press. This too is a universal problem. The question of the Press preoccupies many governments, the public, and scientists.

It is difficult for such a change to the Press to be brought about in great countries with very powerful Press groups. But it is easier for us. If we succeed you may also profit by our experience.

The conclusion is that—here in Greece—a true Revolution is in progress against the «Establishment». A Revolution which is trying to pave new ways. It is a considered effort geared at solving the Greek problem in all its facets and manifestations, that is to say the problem of the Press, political life, cooperation between generations, education, the economic problem, the social problem, and others. We must solve this problem in a certain perspective. We are, therefore, attempting to succeed in something in this country. Something which remains entirely within the framework of the Western way of life, which is—incidentally—of Greek origin, yet adapting and renovating it always.

We believe that we shall succeed. There are certainly some among you who do not believe that we shall do so. It is a question of gauging possibilities, or merely outlook (some are born optimists, others pessimists). But no one has the right to ignore the necessity, the good faith, and the significance of this endeavour and condemn it in advance. For if the special methods we apply have been imposed on us by extraordinary circumstances, our aim remains to build a New Democracy, to rejuvenate democracy, and that should be of interest to the Western world. Those who are not ruted by their established interests, those who regardless of aim feel the jerks of agony of our epoch, cannot but watch the Great Greek Effort with, at least, interest if not sympathy.

All we ask of you is to be impartial.