

Revolution and Counter Revolution in Greece

The events of December 1944 and what led up to them

by Dimitri Asteriou



**first published in French, in "La Verite" no 12/619,
February 1995**

£ 5.00

Ref: GR1

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The Events of December 1944, and What Led Up To Them

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About fifty years ago, in December 1944, the working people confronted the armed forces of a foreign power in a merciless struggle in the streets of Athens. It was not, however, the Nazi armies which they were trying to force to leave Greece, but those of Great Britain, which, in the words of their commander, General Scobie, were "cleansing Athens and Piraeus of rebel forces".

These bloody events express the fact that the end of World War Two saw a revolutionary wave develop, threaten the established order and conflict with the war-aims of all the belligerent powers. To quote Lenin's phrase, the imperialist war was tending to turn into a civil war. In other words, the exploited and oppressed masses rose up, in order to put an end to the carnage by their own methods, and attacked those who were responsible for it.

The Manifesto of the Emergency Conference of the Fourth International, which was adopted in May 1940, the last general document which Trotsky drafted, declared:

"The Fourth International builds its policy, not on the military fortunes of the capitalist states, but on the transformation of the imperialist war into a war of the workers against the capitalists
"... the Fourth International builds its policy, not on the military fortunes of the capitalist states, but on the transformation of the imperialist war into a war of workers against the capitalists, on the overthrow of the ruling classes of all countries in the world socialist revolution."

In May 1940 the Nazi war-machine crushed the Low Countries, Belgium and France, and soon extended its rule throughout Europe. It was the turn of Greece to be dragged into the torment in October 1940.

The article by Francois Forgue, entitled "The Revolutionary Wave of 1943-45" (1) discusses how the working masses on the international scale defended their very existence and grouped their forces, and how they went on to attack from many sides the "old world" of private property in the means of production. That article emphasises the counter-revolutionary role of the Stalinist bureaucracy and of its international apparatus (the various Communist Parties) in containing and turning back the revolutionary wave.

The article which follows here is devoted to the masses of the workers and the oppressed of Greece in this period. Their mobilisation forms part of these general revolutionary developments, while the counter-revolutionary role of the Greek Communist Party expressed the counter-revolutionary policy of the Kremlin and of the parties subject to it. While the revolutionary struggle of the Greek masses is a component of the international revolutionary wave, analysis of its specific features helps us to grasp the content of the movement which shook the established order at this time throughout Europe and beyond.

Occupation and Class-Struggle: the Revolutionary Crisis Ripens

The Occupation inflicted super-exploitation, oilless repression, under-nourishment and suffering on the masses of the workers and of the people (2). In January 1942, the soldiers who had fought in the war between Greece and Italy demonstrated with sections of the people in Athens against starvation. In April 1942 the first big general strike broke out. On April 12 the strike began in the Posts and Telegraphs, and soon spread to workers in the public services and local authorities and in the state control of agriculture, in hospitals and in banks. The strike was declared to be criminal and strikers subject to the penalty of death, but fifty thousand people stopped work for ten days in state and private employment.

On April 21, the government, which the Occupying Power controlled, stopped the arrests, paid wages and conceded increases of 30%. It promised to provide a "people's soup" and released the people who had been jailed during the strike. In the same months, a demonstration of three thousand people at Kardelsa against the black market won the abolition of requisitions of farm products. In the June of 1942, four thousand peasants demonstrated for three days in the province of Pylia in the Peloponese, against taxes imposed by the government.

In Athens, two thousand people demonstrated on June 16, 1942. They broke into the Old Palace, the seat of government, and compelled the Prime Minister to order five hundred tons of oats to be provided for the people. During August, 3,500 workers went on strike for economic demands in a fertiliser plant at Piraeus. During September another mass strike broke out of state

employees and workers in Athens and Piraeus. It lasted eight days, and in order to break the strike, the government tried to dismiss the strikers en masse. The printers in the national printing workers refused to print the decree, and joined the strike. On the fifth day of the extended strike, a strong demonstration attacked the Italian riflemen and the Greek police. The strike ended when the workers and the state employees won wage-increases and the workers jailed during the strike were released.

During October, the public employees in Salonika went on strike, and several strikes of workers in various occupations broke out in Edessa, Noussia and Kosani. Strikes of wage-earners broke out in Volos to demand higher pay. There was another big strike in Athens and Piraeus in December. Four thousand people demonstrated in Athens under the slogans of "Bread, People's Soup, Down with the Terror", and attacked the repressive forces of the occupying powers. On February 21, 1943, Hitler warned the people of the occupied countries in a radio broadcast: "The German are giving their blood, and the people of the occupied countries must give their sweat for the new order".

A German decree on February 23, 1943 introduced a compulsory "levy" on Greek citizens, for compulsory labour inside Greece or abroad. On the following day, Athens was paralysed by a strike. 100,000 people demonstrated and fought the soldiers and the police. Despite deaths and wounds, the demonstrators did not give way: they built barricades and broke into the Ministry of Labour, where they set fire to some of the records. The decision about the "levy" was suspended (3).

A fresh wave of strikes of public employees and civil servants broke out on March 5, 1943. There was another demonstration demanding that the "levy", which threatened 80,000 working people, be abolished. Several thousands of people fought the German and Italian soldiery who fired on them; the streets were strewn with dead and wounded. However, the demonstrators succeeded in penetrating the defences of the Ministry of Labour, and set fire to it. The building was reduced to ashes, along with the lists, which had already been drawn up, up those who were to form the "levy".

Greece was the only occupied country where the Nazi attempt to conscript civilian labour was completely frustrated. This was a great victory, not only for the proletariat of Greece, but for that of Europe and the world. The "Final Report on the Military Administration in Greece", which was drafted before the German forces were withdrawn, records that "the attempt to introduce forced labour in Greece was a failure".

On April 6, 1943, the Germans replaced the Prime Minister, Logothetopoulos, with I. Rallis. The secret German report, no. 16206/43, gives this picture of

him: "A convinced anti-Communist... he is believed to be a trusted adviser of Pagalos, who is England's man". The choice was not made by chance, if we take into consideration what happened later.

A new wave of strikes broke out in September 1943 in Athens, Piraeus and Volos. The owners of the factories in Volos appealed to the Italian administration to use the army to take back the plants which the workers had occupied. The Italian soldiers refused to attack the strikers.

"The Internationalist", the organ of the Central Committee of the International Communists of Greece, section of the Fourth International, wrote on the subject of these struggles:

"The situation has filled the bourgeoisie with concern and anxiety. It sees clearly rising on the horizon the general social revolt of the working people... The nationalist demonstrations by the masses do not re-assure the bourgeoisie. With its class-instincts, it feels that these demonstrations particularly express the terrible regime of repression by foreign imperialists... It feels in its sub-conscious that this movement of the EAM (National Liberation Front) (4), despite being systematically fed with nationalist poison, conceals within itself many dangers for the bourgeoisie. These dangers do not have their roots in the revolutionary intentions of its leadership, but in the anti-capitalist spirit which is developing more and more among the masses... The bourgeoisie is systematically preparing to face the dangers of such a development." ("The Internationalist", September 19, 1943).

EAM had been founded by the Greek Communist Party, with the aim of "national liberation", within the framework of the policy of the "Great Allies" in the war: it addressed itself to the bourgeois parties, which refused to join it. In reality, it was a kind of "Popular Front" with the "phantom of the bourgeoisie", and expressed the desire of the Stalinist leadership to subordinate the resistance movement of the masses to maintaining capitalism.

The repression which the occupying forces exerted was ferocious: they destroyed a succession of whole villages, carried out mass executions, requisitioned harvests and inflicted famine and suffering. Thereby they fed the ranks of the movement of partisans, which took on a mass character

The leadership of the Greek Communist Party and of ELAS ("National People's Army of Liberation") (5) defined its aim as being "to struggle for national freedom" and to subordinate its activities to the military needs of the Allies and

place itself under the orders of the supreme command of the Allied forces in the Middle East. But at the same time, ELAS was a threat to the bourgeoisie and the Allies. Despite the policy of the Stalinist leadership, it was an organisation of thousands of armed peasants and workers, not only in the mountains but also in the cities, where the "reserve" ELAS was formed.

For these reasons, the representatives of the Greek government tried from the beginning to bring into existence a counter-weight to ELAS, by supporting EDES and EKKA (6). These organisations came into conflict with ELAS several times. In reality, the civil war began between the masses of armed workers and peasants on the one hand and military units in the service of German imperialism, but what began during the Nazi occupation continued against British imperialism; at stake throughout was the future of the bourgeois order.

The year 1943 saw the Ralli government (7) create "security battalions" on a large scale. These were organised and armed by the German occupying forces, but they did not go short of British support. In a "top-secret" report to the Allied High Command in the Middle East, drafted on August 12, 1943, the head of the British military mission in Greece, Brigadier Eddy (pseudonym of E.C.W.Myers) stated::

"In accordance with your recent instructions, I have ordered the English and Greek agents who work under my direction to torpedo the work of ELAS and EAM... This organisation (EDES) will be useful to us as a counter-weight to ELAS, and it will eventually be used against ELAS when it is re-inforced. One day, ELAS will have to be liquidated... I am relying on EKKA, within the possible limits... It will be useful for our agents to make contact with representatives of the government (Rallis), that is, with senior officers of the army and the police, in order to encourage the idea that it is their duty and their right to denounce the leaders of ELAS and EAM to the occupation authorities... In this way, when the time comes, these organisations will not be able to oppose British interests..." (Report X, August 12, 1943, 85-4 .S., quoted in V. Mathiopoulos, "The Greek Resistance and the Allies").

This is the period in which the Allies, through the supreme command in the Middle East, ordered the organisations of the Greek partisans to stop for an indefinite period their operations against the occupying forces. In summer 1943, the first German ambassador to Athens under the occupation, Gunther Altenburg, tried, through Rallis, to make contact with the Greek government in

Cairo, in order to appeal to it to mediate with the British and cease helping the partisans.

In October 1943 a British agent in Greece named Capt. Donald Scott took part in a meeting at the home of a mayor, a collaborator. Here he met a German named Loos, who was the head of the military secret police in the Balkans, to discuss joint action against EAM. During November 1943, the same British agent organised a meeting with the participation of an officer of the Gestapo and of representatives of the recently created security battalions, of the military police, the police, the EDES in Athens, the X organisation and National Action (8).

The collapse of Italy had major repercussions in Greece. The forces of the partisans were re-inforced by Italian soldiers who joined them. Entire deposits of weapons, medical supplies and food passed from the Italian army to the partisans. Moreover, the fact that the Germans now had to undertake the whole administration of Greece, apart from Eastern Macedonia and Thrace (which were under Bulgarian occupation), meant that a whole series of regions passed into the control of the partisans.

1943 is the year in which the whole course of the war was reversed. The prospect of military victory went definitely from one side to the other. It was the year of Stalingrad, where Marshall von Paulus surrendered on February 2, 1943. It was, without doubt, the determination and the sacrifice of millions of Soviet workers and peasants, who defended the conquests resulting from the October Revolution despite the criminal policies of Stalin, which explain the victory at Stalingrad. In this sense, the masses of the whole world saw it as a victory over imperialism.

Above all, therefore, 1943 is the year in which the masses began to intervene on their own account, in order to put an end to the imperialist slaughter by their own methods. It was in this year that the collapse of fascism in Italy showed that the revolution had begun. This is the year in which the partisan movement in Yugoslavia went beyond the limits which Stalin had set for it, and established its own rule in the areas which it liberated, with the importance of all this for the Balkans as a whole. It was in November 1943 that the National Committee (AVNOJ) met in Bosnia, at Jajce, and declared that it was assuming sovereign power. It spoke on behalf of a Federation of Yugoslav peoples, and declared that the king's government, based in London, to which Stalin maintained an ambassador, was abolished.

The revolutionary wave in Italy and the Balkans was not independent of the rising resistance of the masses in Greece, but gave it a powerful impetus. To recall these events fifty years later is not merely of historical value... while they are again trying to set the peoples of the Balkans against each other, on the

basis of the ruinous plans of the International Monetary Fund and the generalised decomposition of the imperialist system, while they are trying to set the Greek people against the "Slavs", and are programming the break-up of Italy. These events remind us that the peoples and the working people, when they go down a road of independence, can halt that decline into barbarism which imperialism produces.

As the resolution of the Conference of European Sections of the Fourth International correctly judged, when it succeeded in meeting early in 1944 despite the terrible blows which it had suffered:

"The imperialist conflict is still dragging on, not because German imperialism can effectively resist the pressure of the other imperialist powers, but because the war has entered its final phase, in which the problem of ending it is posed, and in which concerns of a social order more than ever determine the military actions of British and French imperialism and direct it according to their imperialist interests and in the over-riding interest of world capitalism."

The British and the Americans will not come as Liberators

On December 15, 1943, the Central Committee of EAM called for the Cairo Government-in-exile to be broadened. It suggested that a delegation from this government, to number four ministers, be based in Greece, "in order to lead directly the struggle for national liberation". At the beginning of January 1944, the 10th. Plenum of the Greek Communist Party proposed "the formation of a government of national unity, which will co-ordinate the national struggle with the operations of the Allies". The workers' strikes and demonstrations went on in 1944. The clerks in the government and in the banks in Athens went on strike, demanding food and the end to the terror. The textile workers and the workers in the naval yards were on strike.

In March the strike of the railwaymen on SEK and SPAP, the different railway companies, paralysed transport. In 1944 the terror was un-restrained. The security battalions and the German forces began to organise armed operations in the workers' districts in Athens, and ran into strong resistance. Strikes and demonstrations for economic demands and against the terror developed in Athens, Volos, Edessa and other cities.

On April 23, 1944, elections were held for delegates to the National Council, which was to meet in the village of Korishades in Euritania, at the same time as

the Lebanon Conference. The Trotskyist, Stavros Verouhis (9), the general secretary of the Confederation of War Wounded, was elected as a delegate by a meeting of 2,000 peasants in Euboea. He did not reach his destination, and was assassinated by the Stalinists. While the movement as it developed expressed the tendency towards workers' power, the Stalinist leadership of the Greek Communist Party tried to contribute its drive in the direction of a "government of national unity", subordinating the movement to the bourgeoisie and to the Allies.

That is why it had, literally, to strangle to voice of those who could express the immediate perspective of the workers' movement in slogans, and could point out another direction for it to take, that of workers' power, in the framework of the struggle for the United Socialist States of Europe.

The Trotskyists had fallen victim to the terror of the fascists. At Nesero in June 1943, the Trotskyist leaders and militants at Acronauplia were executed. They had been held there by the Metaxas dictatorship and were handed over to the occupation forces. Among them was Pandeles Pouliopoulos (10), a former general secretary of the Communist Party of Greece and a founder of the Greek section of the Left Opposition.

When he faced the firing-squad, he addressed the Italian soldiers in Italian, called on them to revolt against the imperialists and forecast the coming of the proletarian revolution. The Italian soldiers refused to fire, and he was finally executed by a squad of fascist officers.

Pandelis Pouliopoulos and the other leading members of the Fourth International in Greece had adopted, in November 1940, when they were in the jail at Acronauplia, a resolution entitled, "The Moment in the War and Our Tasks". They forecast:

"The movement of the social revolution and the related movement of the colonial peoples, which will bring this war to an end, will draw together far greater masses of the oppressed of the planet than the analogous movement during the preceding world war... We need not to forget that the struggle against war is not a "special", "anti-war" struggle, like that of the trade unions or of the peasants. Fundamentally it is the world-wide class struggle of the proletariat to overthrow capitalism, carried on in a period in every sector and by every layer of the working people."

The group of Trotskyists who were among the hundred people executed at Kessariani on May 1, 1944, fell singing the International. But the Trotskyists and the Archaeomarxists (11) had also to face the murderous barbarity of the Stalinists. Militants who joined the partisans and militants who played leading

parts in the strikes were assassinated by the Stalinists. When the Greek Communist Party murdered them, it was murdering the people who were advancing the independent aims of the working class.

"No government 'of national unity' will give us democratic liberties, peace or a better life... Liberties, peace, the improvement of our life, these we shall win by our class struggle, and the revolutionary government of workers and peasants will guarantee them.. Long live the revolutionary struggle for Soviet socialist power! Long live the Balkan Socialist Federation! ("International", May 28, 1944)

Those whom the Communist Party of Greece assassinated were trying to prevent the enslavement of the exploited masses from becoming a "new enslavement": "The British and the Americans will not come to Greece as liberators, but as executioners and as oppressors of the workers and peasants. The aspirations of the workers and peasants.. cannot be satisfied by means of a nationalist struggle... but by intransigent class struggle, to liquidate the war-fronts, by fraternisation of the proletarians across the national frontiers, and by the common struggle to bring down capitalism and to introduce the socialist regime." ("International", June 20, 1944).

The Revolt in the Greek Army in the Middle East

The movement at the heart of the Greek armed forces stationed in the Middle East - and its savage repression - sheds light on the struggle between revolution and counter-revolution in Greece. Coming in the midst of the war, it was one link in the chain of events which led up to what happened in December 1944 and after the war. In fact, these events in the Middle East were, as it were, a laboratory for what was to follow, revealing the aims of British imperialism, which desired to re-establish after the war its domination over Greece, as well as the policy of the bureaucracy of the U.S.S.R. and of the leadership of the Greek Communist Party, which also desired the defeat of the revolution.

After the military collapse in Greece, the seat of the royal "free" government, the appendage of British imperialism, was moved to Cairo, where it was followed by the civilian leaders and the officers of the Metaxas dictatorship. Cairo was also the seat of the High Command of the royal Greek army of the Middle East, which was under the orders of the British general staff, who wanted to bring into existence an army by means of which to impose its aims on the people of Greece after the war.

The ranks of the Greek army were swollen by Greeks who joined in Egypt, and by the arrival of fugitives from the islands of the East Aegean sea (Lesbos,

Chios, Samos and Icaria and of soldiers from Crete and part of the army in Euboea, who made their way to the Middle East through Turkey.

At the beginning, the Anti-Fascist Military Organisation (ASO) was formed in the Greek Army, with sections in the navy (AON) and in the air force (AOA). These organisations collaborated with the anti-fascist organisation of Greeks in Egypt. The ASO adopted the programme of EAM. We must note that the Greek colony in Egypt, numbering about 150,000, was made up in its overwhelming majority of wage-earners and small people, apart from a narrow layer of rich bourgeois. Close links developed with the seamen's organisations, the federation of which (OENO) had offices in Alexandria, Port Said and Suez.

Even though the programme of these organisations located them in the framework of "the struggle of the Allies", yet their nature as political organisations in the army, their mass character, their existence as parallel organisations and their initiatives challenged the military hierarchy and developed a dynamism inconsistent with the aims of the "Grand Alliance". The problem of the monarchy, which was the pillar of the Metaxas dictatorship and the puppet of the British imperialists, as well as the sensitive problem of the reconstruction of the bourgeois state after the war, which the royalist officers were ceaselessly plotting, made for incessant conflict and agitation.

The prelude to the important revolt in 1944 can be traced in the events of February-March 1943. The spark which fired the powder was the action of the Greek government, which removed officers of the Second Brigade whom it regarded as democrats. At the same time, right-wing officers were threatening to resign if the democratic officers were not removed. Committees to oppose this movement were formed in the army, and the officers who threatened to resign were arrested. The Government tried to use the First Brigade against the Second, with the result that the agitation spread into that formation also. Officers and men belonging to ASO took over the command of the military units. The revolt spread to other units of infantry, aviation and artillery, which refused to accept the appointment of British officers, indicating the state of mind which prevailed in the Greek army of the Middle East. The British general staff could see clearly that such an army was hardly the ideal instrument to install the government which they wanted in Greece after the war. The British authorities feared also that these unsubordinate soldiers would link up with the colonial peoples in the region.

In July 1943, a soldier of the Second Brigade, which was based in Syria, was murdered as he was being moved to a British prison. The murder provoked a revolt of the soldiers, who killed the assassin, arrested the officer in command of the battalion and other officers and manhandled the commandant of the

Brigade. British forces intervened, disarmed the 5th and 6th battalions and carried out large-scale arrests. The arrested soldiers faced courts-martial, which sentenced leaders to death or life imprisonment. The Second Brigade was completely dissolved, and a similar purge was carried out in the navy.

On March 10, 1944 the Political Committee for National Liberation (PEEA) was formed in Greece. On March 15, the Committee sent to the Cairo government a telegram declaring that it had been founded for the purpose of "uniting the national forces and co-ordinating the struggle for national liberation at the side of the Allies", adding that "the Committee aims above all at the formation of a government of national general unity", and it called on the Cairo government to contribute to progress towards that end.

A Committee for National Unity was formed in the Greek army of the Middle East; it declared that it supported P.E.E.A. The Prime Minister, Tsouderos, ordered the members of the Committee to be arrested. There followed a general mutiny in the Greek army at the news of these arrests and of the more general forms of repression which were being prepared. The mutineers seized and occupied the office of the high command in Cairo. British military intervention began. They rescued the office of the high command and its garrison, as well as the offices of the general staff. They despatched "rebel" soldiers to concentration camps, while the head of the British forces in the Middle East, General Paget, dismissed the Greek Minister for the Army and announced that he was taking "direct control" of the Greek army.

Protests were drafted in every unit and signed by nearly all the soldiers and many of the officers. Protest demonstrations were organised at the same time. The Greek residents in Egypt, together with the Egyptian people, demonstrated their solidarity with the mutineers. Moreover, the British soldiers refused to carry out their orders again, as they had done when the First Brigade was liquidated. The Greek soldiers fraternised with the British, and had to be replaced with colonial units. The efforts of the British to disarm the Greek units took three weeks. The same efforts were made in the navy, where the crews were taken off the ships. The whole of the Greek armed forces in the Middle East were disarmed, while 20,000 officers and men were sent to distant concentration camps by the British.

It had been intended to send these troops to Italy; their liquidation was one of the indications that British imperialism regarded confronting the revolution as being more important than the military demands of the war against the Axis powers. The tank regiment demanded to be transferred to the Balkan front, and the British replied by sending them to a concentration camp at Damascus. All that remained of the Greek Army of the Middle East was the mountain

brigade, which consisted of monarchical elements loyal to British imperialism, and the "sacred batallion", made up exclusively of professional officers. The "guards" units was later to be the only armed force of the Papandreou (12) government, and were to be used to put down the rising of the proletariat in Athens in December 1944.

Stalin Wins the Allies' Confidence

During the events in the Middle East, on April 18, the Foreign Office informed the Greek ambassador in London that the difficulties associated with the Greek problem "can be clarified only by direct contact between the British Prime Minister and Marshall Stalin". On April 15, 1944, Churchill sent to Molotov, the Soviet Foreign Minister, a message in which he wrote, among other things:

"The position which you took in Italy in relation to Badoglio heartens me... We cannot have, in the navy and in the brigades, ebels who will take political decisions under our administrations in the Mediterranean, I am sure that you will understand that nothing but anarchy can result from this attitude. On the eve of great events, discipline must reign in the armed forces. Politics must be left to the politicians and the the general decision of the Great Alliuies. I hope that you will support me on this point at least." (Foreign Office archives, F>O> 371/43729.

Three days later, on April 18, a second message followed from the British Premier to Molotov. It was about the events in the Middle East, and revealed the deep anxiety which was prevalent in the leading circles of British imperialism. Stalin and the Soviet bureaucracy were to win the confidence of these circles, as defenders of "order" against the "anarchy" of the masses.

Trotsky wrote, in "The Kremlin: A Conservative Factor in World Politics":

"But, in the long run, the Moscow Trials, with their fantastic accusations and their entirely real executions, strengthen to confidence of these circles in the Kremlin, as a factor of law and order. The wholesale extermination of the heroes of the Civil War and of all the representatives of the younger generation connected with them was the most convincing proof that the Kremlin is not pretending or manoeuvring, but is liquidating the revolutionary past seriously and definitively". ("Writings: 1938-39", p. 369).

The politics of the Kremlin were determined by the interest of self-preservation of the bureaucratic caste, by the fear which the working class inspires in it.

The rise of revolution, in the dreadful conditions of war and barbarism into which the masses are plunged, was no longer a forecast but a reality. However, the revolutionary victories of the proletariat after the war, which threatened to change the conditions which led up to the rule of the bureaucracy in the U.S.S.R. (isolation of the U.S.S.R. resulting from the defeats of the world proletariat) would represent a powerful appeal to the working class of the U.S.S.R., to overthrow the bureaucracy which had appropriated political power, in order to take back into their own hands the control of the conquests of the October Revolution. There lay a mortal danger for Stalin and the bureaucratic caste. The interest of self-preservation defined the policy of the Kremlin. The war must end, not with the proletarian revolution, but with the restoration of the imperialist order. Within this framework, the Kremlin bureaucracy could try to strengthen its own position, taking advantage of the relations of forces as it had come into existence and from the fact that the "victorious" imperialists needed its support.

The Stalinist parties, in subjection to the interests of the Soviet bureaucracy, aligned their policies to meet the needs of the "Grand Alliance" - within the framework of the "alliance of democratic forces". On the basis of conciliation with the "national" bourgeoisie of their country, they flew the flag of "national unity". This policy came into conflict with the independence of the working class and poisoned its consciousness; it expressed the intention of respecting the bourgeois order. This determined in advance what would be the attitude of these Communist Parties. When they faced revolution breaking out in the last phase of the Second World War, they did not aim a proletarian rule, but, completely on the contrary, at restoring the bourgeois order by means of "national unity", that is, by subjecting the working class to the bourgeoisie

This policy of national unity and of support for the "Grand Alliance" was to support the imposition of counter-revolutionary solutions immediately after the war. By following this policy, the Greek Communist Party has made an indispensable contribution to the sufferings of the Greek people since the war, because it has aimed at subordinating the working class to the bourgeoisie. Subordination to the bourgeoisie permitted the reactionary, dictatorial regime of the colonels to come on the scene. The same policy has frustrated the desire of the working class to transform the crisis of the bourgeois regime into an attack on it, and has led to the state of affairs which exists today. Today it is as necessary as it ever was at the end of the Second World War to defend the independence of the working class and to advance a policy independent of the bourgeoisie.

The masses were beginning to fill the stage of history before the end of the war in Greece as elsewhere. Their aim was that, after the war, it should be the masses who took the decisions which determine their destiny. This aim

was expressed in an organised form in Greece itself and in the Greek armed forces in the Middle East. The leader of British imperialism appealed to the Soviet bureaucracy for its support and that of the Communist Parties subjected to it against the revolution, in order to confront the revolution. It was to this support in relation to Italy that Churchill's message to Molotov refers.

Churchill called for it again in relation to Greece, and was to receive it. This Greek Communist Party was to use its prestige, the courage of its militants and the trust which the masses placed in it, to try to prevent the mass movement from attacking exploitation and war at their roots. When that did not suffice, they disarmed the masses in the face of counter-revolution.

What was Agreed at the Lebanon and Gazerta Conferences

The British were actively preparing for the conference in Lebanon when the movement of the Greek forces in the Middle East was being violently repressed. On April 22, S. Venizelos, who had replaced Tsouderos as Premier, invited representatives of P.E.E.A. and E.A.M. to the Middle East. On April 24, as soon as the Greek army had been disarmed, the British nominated George Papandreou as Premier. Not only the British, but also the government of the Greek quisling, I. Rallis (13), organised his journey to the Middle East, where he arrived on April 15, while the repression of the revolt in the Greek army was still going on. On April 21, Papandreou sent a note to the British ambassador, proposing to announce that, after the Liberation, Greece would be occupied by Allied forces, "in order to encourage the Greek people".

In Greece itself, the development of the mass movement and of ELAS had created a situation in which the old bourgeois parties had lost their influence and their power to control. When Tsouderos was still Premier, he described this situation in a report to the king, dated March 8, 1944:

"The parties, or more precisely the leaders of the old parties... have no real strength left to enable them to resist any development whatever of public opinion.. Public opinion is being directed by Left-wing elements of all kinds and by the armed people in the mountains... The young people in our country.. especially in the cities, are lined up on the Left.."

The arsenal of counter-revolution was being prepared on every side. However, the support of the Greek Communist Party was indispensable, if the arsenal was to be used effectively, and the movement defeated. Immediately before the Lebanon Conference, representatives of P.E.E.A., E.A.M. and the Greek Communist Party sent a telegram to Churchill, signed by A. Svolos for

P.E.E.A., by M. Porfirogenis (a member of the Politburo of the Greek Communist Party) for E.A.M. and by P. Roussos for the Greek Communist Party itself. They thanked Churchill for "his favourable interest in our country and its future", and mentioned "his fully-justified regret at the recent events in our own forces in the Middle East". They described these events as "unhealthy actions by irresponsible persons, which have led to painful and catastrophic results, which everyone should condemn". They assured him: "We shall do our utmost to bring about national unity... We know that the help of our great allies and especially that of Britain and its bold leader will not fail us." Three other statements were sent to the Premier, G. Papandreou, from P.E.E.A., E.A.M. and the Greek Communist Party.

P. Roussos wrote, in a report on the rising in the Green army and navy dated May 26, 1944:

"It seems that very diverse elements took part. As well as the left-wing sympathisers of P.E.E.A. and other tendencies which simply wanted Tsouderos removed, it appears that there were other elements, for example Trotskyists, who were pursuing aims which differed from our policy of national unity. The rebellion had a great impact throughout the Middle East and on the people of Egypt, but, above all, it so exasperated the Allies that Roosevelt wrote in a telegram intended for Churchill about the "return" of Greece to the camp of the Allies.. We are trying to get rid of this attitude." (From official documents of the Communist Party of Greece)

The Lebanon agreement and the agreement at Gazerta which followed it opened the way, thanks to the Communist Party and to E.A.M. to the intervention of British imperialism in Greece and to the installation of the Papandreou government, which had no basis of support whatever in the country. The Lebanon agreement (May 1944) decided that a government "of national unity" would be formed. In it, the Communist Party of Greece and E.A.M. would be represented. It was agreed to form "a national army, under the orders of the government", and that "all the partisan units of Free Greece" would be "subject to the orders of the government". It also agreed that it would be "completely in the hands of the government and of the General Staff of the Middle East" to settle the immediate situation. As for the question of the monarchy, the task of "clarifying" the problem of the political regime was left to the government "of national unity".

The Communist Party agreed that E.L.A.S. was to be dissolved, and undertook to support actively the reconstruction of the bourgeois state in Greece after the

Nazi occupation collapsed. It agreed to the British domination over the country being restored after the war.

Roussos also explained, in a report for the Politburo of the Communist Party in July 1944, that when he met the Counsellor of the embassy of the U.S.S.R. in Cairo after the Lebanon Conference ended, the latter passed on to him the opinion of the Soviet ambassador, which was as follows: (a) The Lebanon agreement corresponds to the prevailing state of things: (b) the attitude of your delegation was correct: (c) you should join the government: (d) you should take care that this opinion is communicated "in the mountains", that is, to the partisans." (From official documents of the Communist Party.)

Between the Lebanon Conference and that at Gazerta, the Anglo-Greek meeting took place in Rome, with the participation of Churchill and Papandreou. According to the minutes, Papandreou declared:

"For the present, the state is disarmed, and weapons are in the hands of organisations which represent only a minority. My programme is to change this situation.. For this purpose, we must create a national army and police force, and British military aid is indispensable."

On August 31, 1944, six delegates from E.A.M. arrived in Cairo to join the Papandreou government. Among them was M. Porfirogenis, a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, and G. Zevgos, a member of the Politburo. A few days later, the seat of the government was moved to Gazerta in Italy, on the orders of Churchill. On September 25, 1944, the Gazerta agreement was signed, on the Greek side, by G. Papandreou, by S. Sarafis (14) on behalf of E.L.A.S., and by N. Zervas (15) on behalf of E.D.E.S. and, on the British side, by Henry Wilson, the Supreme Commander of the land forces of the Allies in the Mediterranean, and by Harold Macmillan, the British official responsible for Italy and the Balkans.

We have here, essentially, an agreement between British imperialism and the Greek Communist Party. That is what interested the British leaders. They knew that the Greek Communist Party controlled the movement in Greece. They knew that the bourgeois state was dislocated, and that there was no military need to land British forces in Greece, as the German army had hastily left the country. The Communist Party, therefore, held the key to open the door for British troops to enter Greece, and for the Papandreou government, which the British controlled, to establish itself there. The Gazerta agreement provided that:

"All the forces of the partisans... place themselves under the orders of the Greek government of national unity. The Greek government places its forces under the orders of General

Scobie, who is appointed general administrator of the forces in Greece, by the supreme marshal of the Allies... The leaders of the partisan units will prohibit any efforts by these units to take power. Aush an action will be regarded as criminal and punished as such. As for Athens, no decision will be reached except under the direct orders of General Scobie."

According to the agreement, the aim was to establish "a legal political power". When the leadership of the Communist Party supported the agreement, it accepted that any step by the masses towards an armed, revolutionary seizure of power would be a crime. The power-vacuum which the retreat of the Nazi forces had left was on no account to be filled by the rule of the workers and peasants.

The support of the Communist Party against the revolution was indispensable to the Greek bourgeoisie and the British imperialists. But the Greek bourgeoisie and the imperialists knew that, in order to restore the bourgeois order, they must crush the movement of hundreds and hundreds of thousands of workers and peasants, and that this movement had a dynamic of its own. The forces of counter-revolution prepared to crush the revolution with the help of Stalinism. The Lebanon and Gazerta agreements served the purpose of enabling them to open the battle against the revolution from positions more favourable to them.

A few years later, G. Papandreou, the Premier of the "government of national unity", was to write:

"December (1944) can be regarded as a 'gift from heaven'. But, in order that December could take place, it was necessary first to enter Greece. That was possible only if the Communist Party entered the government, that is, thanks to Lebanon. And, for the British, who were indispensable for victory, to come here, the signature of the Gazerta agreement was necessary first " (from the newspaper, "Kathemerini", March 2, 1948).

What Preceded the Events of December

During the final months before the German forces left Greece, the control of a whole series of regions in the country passed into the hands of E.A.M. and E.L.A.S. At the same time, Athens and Piraeus became a powder-barrel; agitation was boiling up among the workers and the other layers of the population, on account of the hard struggle which they had waged during the occupation. The elements of a power different from that of the bourgeoisie emerged in the struggles of the masses of workers and peasants against the

Nazi occupation. Going beyond the immediate form which the mass movement took, it posed the question of a government established by the workers' and peasants' organisations. The aim of the Communist Party was to prevent these elements from being brought together. The Germans left the capital on October 12. Power was literally floating in the street in the days which followed, before the first British troops and the Papandreou government arrived.

The leadership of the Communist Party, however, did its utmost to enable the British military units to enter Athens un-opposed, and the Papandreou government to be installed. It ordered the Attic E.L.A.S. not to enter Athens; it appealed to the people "to place themselves at the orders of the national government... at the side of the Allies", to ensure 'order' and not to take justice into their own hands, on the ground that "punishing collaborators is the task of the national government". (Resolution of the Political Bureau of the Greek Communist Party, October 6, 1944).

Essentially the Communist Party thereby was protecting various Nazi units and gangs and units which had supported the Nazi occupation, and which were now exposed to the fury of the armed people after the Germans withdrew. Later on, Scobie and the Papandreou government used these units in the bloody repression of the revolution.

In order to get its policy accepted, the Communist Party drew on the enormous prestige which it enjoyed among the workers, as well as that of the U.S.S.R., which had grown as the masses came to believe that it had carried the greatest part of the burden of fighting fascism in the war. It acted in the same way as its other "brother" parties, which offered their services in the same way in other countries, to hold back the revolution and restore the bourgeois order.

G. Zevsos, a member of the Politburo of the Communist Party, write with cynical simplicity in 1945:

"In October 1944, the Greek Communist Party strikingly proved that its policy was sincere. At the moment of the liberation of Greece, it preserved exemplary order in Athens and the rest of the country. It had every opportunity to take power and to wipe out opponents who had been nothing but collaborators, betraying the nation."

G. Papandreou himself wrote that, if E.A.M. and E.L.A.S. had taken power between October 12 and 18, "the E.A.M. state would have been consolidated". This consolidation would have resulted, not only from the relation of force between the classes inside the country, but also from the relations of force between the classes then existing on the world scale.

When Papandreou, Scobie, Macmillan (the British minister for the Middle East) and their collaborators arrived by ship at Poros on October 6, they were in no hurry to enter Athens. The news that units of E.L.A.S. were liberating towns and villages which were coming under their control, and that the masses of the people in Athens were demonstrating in favour of E.A.M.-E.L.A.S. filled them with anxiety.

On October 17, the Politburo of the Communist Party adopted a resolution which emphasised:

"The brave sons of liberal Allied Britain will find the warmest welcome and support from the liberal allied Greek people, who love progress... We support the government of national unity."

On the same day, G. Zevsos boarded a cruiser at Piraeus, where Papandreou, Scobie and the others awaited him. He handed to them the resolution of his party's Politburo and informed them that:

"The Communist Party has given orders to all the leaderships to receive the government and Scobie warmly, showing that the people have decided to resolve their problems in a normal way, with the aid of "anti-fascist", "progressive" Britain, (16) (Th. Hatzis, "The Victorious Revolution Lost", Vol. 3, p.166)

The Communist Party permitted Papandreou and the government subordinated to the British to install their "rump" state in Syntagma Square, and to undertake the reconstruction of the bourgeois state, because in reality the power of this government was not established either in Athens or anywhere else in the country.

The committees for popular administration exercised power in the rest of the country. They concerned themselves with obtaining and distributing food. In the cities, where the industrialists were refusing to run their factories, or were abandoning them, the committees went on to occupy the factories and the workers took charge of running them. These committees also organised free medical aid and public education. Their situation, combined with the fact that there were 60,000 armed people with E.L.A.S., came into contradiction with the process of restoring the bourgeois state, which the Stalinist leadership of the movement was now supporting. Consequently, the situation led inevitably to a confrontation.

To begin with, the Papandreou government and the British gained time. They proceeded to re-organise the counter-revolutionary formations, while they waited for the British military forces to arrive.

"The public power was greatly weakened. The army hardly existed. Armed organisations existed, but they did not constitute the state. On the contrary, their very existence was a negation of the state.. Moreover, there were no important British forces."
("G. Papandreou: His Life", p. 353)

British imperialism, the Greek bourgeoisie and Premier Papandreou prepared and organised the attack on the revolution. During the meeting between Churchill and Stalin in Moscow on October 10 and 11, 1944, Churchill had given to Stalin the well-known piece of paper with the percentages (17). Just after the meeting ended, Churchill wrote to Eden, the British Foreign Secretary:

"The system of percentages... (is intended) to explain the spirit in which the British government and the Soviet government approach the problems of these countries... Here (as regards Greece), it is understood that Britain will lead in the military sense, and will try to help the Greek king's government to settle in Athens."

"The Soviet Union is ready to concede this position and this operation to Britain, in the same way as Britain recognises the close relations between Russia and Romania".

The Stalinist bureaucracy gave "a free hand" to British imperialism in Greece. On November 7, Churchill sent a telegram to Eden:

"Because the high price we have paid to get Russia to give us a free hand in Greece is known, we must not hesitate to use British troops to support the Greek king's government, which Papandreou heads.. This means intervention by British troops. We must examine how to extend the power of the government in Greece; in any case, I await a confrontation with E.A.M."

With the agreement of the E.A.M. ministers, Papandreou handed over the maintenance of order in Athens and Piraeus to the urban police. This was a force which had offered its services under the occupation to the Nazi regime. The National Civil Guard (18) had to hand over its powers to the police, who

were setting free and protecting collaborators whom the Cuvul Guard had arrested.

"The indignant people began to search the houses of known traitors to the nation, and of collaborators. They arrested a large number of these, whom the police had set at liberty, as well as other collaborators, and, as they did not trust the police, they handed them over to units of E.L.A.S." (Hatzis, op. cit., p.225)

On October 22 and 23, there were great demonstrations, demanding that the X organisation be disarmed, that the police be disbanded and the Security Battalion evacuated from the Ecle Polytechnique.

On November 15, members of the X organisation, who had occupied a hotel on Omonia Place in Athens, fired on people returning from a demonstration. Some were killed and many wounded. The people surrounded the building and prepared to set it on fire. B. Bartziotas, the secretary of the Athens organisation of the Communist Party, and an officer of O.P.L.A. (19) intervened. He was responsible to the Politburo of the Communist Party for the maintenance of order in Athens, and his intervention saved the lives of the members of the X organisation, who were taken away in British armoured vehicles to Thissio, where they settled down under the protection of British tanks. At the same time, O.P.L.A. was imposing "order" in the mass movement, by murdering Trotskyist militants and any other dissidents in the Greek Communist Party.

On November 16, Scobie announced that E.L.A.S. must not enter Athens. Papandreou had entrusted the military administration of Athens to him, without any opposition from the E.A.M. ministers in the government, who were members of the Communist Party. The officers of the Ralli "security" gangs, by decision of the Ministry of Military Affairs, were even paid half of their salaries, and those who had resigned by October 12 got their full pay.

The Working People Confront the "Government of National Unity"

The representatives of E.A.M. in the government had the responsibility of "re-constructing" the country, because they held the ministries of Finance and of Labour. They set wages at famine levels, in order to "enable" the capitalists to get productive activities going again, and to keep down the expenditure of the

State on civilian state employees and functionaries. The government also demanded serious restriction of help to destitute persons, because it believed that there were too many of them. It only imposed taxes on the people who had made fortunes during the occupation, a decision which was contrary to the popular demand that these fortunes be confiscated.

The British pound sterling was put into circulation, and this provoked a new wave on the black market, thanks to which some people made fortunes while the people suffered every privation.

Indignation began to be expressed against the economic policy of the government. Numerous committees approached the C.G.T., the Central Committee of E.A.M., the Central Committee of the Communist Party and the Ministry of Labour, which was headed by Porfirgenis, a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party.

The invariable reply of the Stalinist leaders was that the workers must avoid "dubious elements" and oppose any attempt at strikes, because "incidents" could serve only the enemies of the people. These positions echo what the French Communist Party was saying about the strikes after the liberation: "The strike is a weapon of the trusts".

Discontent with these policies began to express itself. Negative opinions of the policy of the Communist Party began to be heard in different connections inside the party. "There is a number of reports from committees of districts, of cities and of regions, in the archives of the Communist Party". (Hatzis, op. cit. Vol. 3, p.239). The pressure grew of working people on the trade unions. The organ of the state employees and functionaries published an article in which increases in salaries were demanded. On the following day, the Central Committee of the state employees and civil servants (which had been formed during the strikes under the occupation) demanded increases in pay and allowances for all state employees. At the head of the Committee, as its secretary, was K. Nikolakopoulos, a member of the Central Committee of E.A.M. and a cadre of the Communist Party. According to the evidence of Th. Hatzis, during a conversation with the Minister of Finance, who was a member of E.A.M., and who refused to concede any increases, the Secretary of the Committee of the state employee's union declared:

The state employees will not agree that they must pay so that plutocrats and exploiters can make fortunes". (Hatzis, Vol. 3, p. 253)

Massive mobilisations began. Despite the immense prestige on which the leadership of the Communist Party and E.A.M. could call among working people, the working people began to prepare for battle, despite the opposition of the leadership.

The secretary of the Athens organisation of the Communist Party, B. Bartsiotas, appealed to the cadres of the party in the state employees' sector: he condemned their attitude, because it opposed the line of the party, and he demanded that they call meetings of the members to condemn any mobilisation. None the less, the state employees everywhere were taking decisions in favour of mobilisation. In the last days of November and the first days of December, the state employees and civil servants were on strike. Their journal, published on December 4, 1944, a report on the mobilisations of the preceding week. It wrote in its editorial that the state employees:

"... cannot accept the fresh violence and the fresh violation of their liberties, which are being carefully prepared with a fury which is as anti-national and as anti-popular as during the black period of the regime of August 4 (20) and the occupation... Those who do not understand this are making a great mistake".

The Fighting in Athens

The counter-revolutionary forces were preparing for a confrontation, by moving British forces and the mountain brigade into the interior of Greece. G. Papandreou explained: "Our aim is to arm the state and to disarm the organisations". On November 22, he signed the draft agreement which the E.A.M. ministers had submitted to him, which provided for all the organisations of the partisans as well as the mountain brigade and the Sacred Battalion to be dissolved. The Politburo of the Communist Party sent to all its units a circular about incorporating the E.L.A.S. fighters of the class of 1936 into the national army. In parallel, the General Staff of E.L.A.S. ordered the demobilised E.L.A.S. fighters to become members of ex-servicemen's organisations.

On November 25, the Politburo of the Communist Party explained to the astounded militants that this order was issued with a view to the early dissolution of E.L.A.S. The Communist Party, with its line of "a single national army" was advancing the same line as that of the French Communist Party, which its General Secretary, Thorez, expressed as "A single state, a single army, a single police force". But, "a single state", in other words a bourgeois state, required that E.L.A.S. be dissolved and that E.A.M. be crushed. Churchill telegraphed to Scobie: "Our clear objective is to defeat the E.A.M."

Papandreou authorised Scobie to give orders that E.A.M. and E.D.E.S. be dissolved: the British General Staff then decided:

"All the men in E.L.A.S. and E.D.E.S. will be demobilised between December 10 and 12".

On November 26, Papandreou called on Sarafis and Zervas to support his decision.

Sarafis declared that only the Greek government had the authority to decree that E.L.A.S. be demobilised. On November 28, Papandreou put forward another suggestion: the mountain brigade and the Sacred Battalion would be retained, and a brigade would be formed partly from forces from E.L.A.S. and partly with a similar unit formed from the forces of E.D.E.S. The Communist Party minister, G. Zevgos, proposed that E.L.A.S., E.D.E.S., the mountain brigade and the Sacred battalion be dissolved simultaneously. Papandreou rejected the suggestion.

On December 1, an enlarged meeting of the Central Committee of E.A.M. proposed that all the partisan units be dissolved and that a provisional civil guard be formed. This would be the nucleus of the new "national" army. Already on the night of November 30, the British armed forces and their Greek auxiliaries were in their fighting positions. On December 1, Scobie issued the order to disarm the partisans. Zevgos declared that Scobie's activities "were not approved by the government of our allies, Britain". On the same day, Papandreou convened a Council of Ministers, from which the E.A.M. ministers were excluded, and on the next day the members of E.A.M. who were not members of the Communist Party resigned. Those who were members of the Communist Party followed them.

Another meeting of the Central Committee of E.A.M. decided to call a demonstration of protest on December 3. Papandreou prohibited the demonstration. On December 3, a tide of people, un-armed, filled the centre of Athens. In Syntagma Square the police had taken up positions in the surrounding buildings and fired on the crowd. The streets were scattered with the bodies of the dead and with wounded. The crowd re-formed to continue the demonstration, and was shot down again. When the demonstration dispersed, the masses of workers and of people went back to their own districts in the city and there counter-attacked the police and members of the X organisation, broke up the armed bands and began to occupy the police stations.

A general strike was declared on the following day. Immense demonstrations of people came out for the funerals of the victims. Again the demonstrators were fired on, this time in Omonia Place. They went over to the attack, but halted when British forces appeared on the scene to protect the police and the security battalions: the demonstrators had been ordered not to confront the British soldiers.

The people attacked one after another the police stations in the working-class quarters, while the members of the X organisation found refuge in the city centre under the protection of the British forces. Churchill telegraphed to Rex

Leeper, the British ambassador to Greece: "act as if you were in an occupied city". The "Battle of Athens" had begun. It was to last five weeks. The proletarian masses were to keep up the struggle with the greatest heroism, and there were to be thousands of victims.

Churchill declared in the House of Commons on January 19, 1945:

"For three or four days we fought to prevent a hideous massacre in the centre of Athens, where every form of government would have been abolished and triumphant Trotskyism would have been in power. I believe that 'Trotskyism' is a much better definition of Greek Communism and of certain other sects than the usual term. It has the advantage of being equally hated in Russia."

When Churchill gave a name to the revolution, he directed attention to the common basis of the agreement with the Stalinist bureaucracy against the proletarian revolution, and therefore against those who physically expressed it at the level of programme. Giannis Ioannides, one of the top leaders of Stalinism in Greece during the occupation, was to write some years later in his memoirs:

"At that moment Churchill was getting ready to go to Yalta. If he demanded this from us, he did so in order to be able to go there and say that he had done his best, but that we were Trotskyists. Churchill did say to Stalin: 'What can be done? They are Trotskyists'. He believed that there would be a discussion about Greece at Yalta, and he wanted to justify his own position. That is why he came to Athens. He said: 'I went there and did my best, but these people were Trotskyists'. In this way, he was correct with us and with Stalin also." (Ioannides, "Memoirs", pp. 359-360)

The workers of Athens fought heroically, but the military manoeuvres of the Communist Party led inevitably to defeat. The way in which the Stalinist apparatus handled military problems was the consequence of their politics. The stake between the two classes was power: the Communist Party obstructed the struggle of the workers for power. The proletarian uprising in December 1944 expressed the extreme sharpness and irreconcilable character of the class contradictions. It resulted from a chain of events which the Stalinist apparatus could not control. The policy of the Greek Communist Party was directed towards a "real government of national unity". This was the way in which it disarmed the movement, leading it to defeat and to the disarming of E.L.A.S. by the Varkisa agreement.

The British forces had already begun an open, direct military offensive on December 6, when the Central Committee of the Communist Party resolved that its aim must be to create "a real government of national unity". On December 7, Ioannides, who was regarded as the "representative of the Communist International" in Greece, believed that "the struggle which has begun and is going on in Athens, even if it ends in the victory of the movement, is harmful to the general war which the Allies are waging." The Politburo decided that the Central Committee of E.L.A.S. should break off the attack in the centre of the city, where the British forces and the Greek forces were re-grouped, in order to seek a political solution." (Hatzis, op. cit. p. 344)

On December 17 the Politburo of the Communist Party adopted a resolution which defined the aims of the Stalinist bureaucracy: "the formation of a democratic Greek government of real national unity." The Communist Party leadership divided the leadership of E.L.A.S. into parts, between the General Staff, which was responsible for the E.L.A.S. forces north of a line between Thebes and Chalkis, which represented the most important and the largest units of E.L.A.S., and the Central Committee of E.L.A.S. The Central Committee ordered the commanders of the General Staff not to attack British forces in the rest of the country. The Communist Party was giving way to British imperialism and, at the same time, it forbade fraternisation with the British soldiers. Important E.L.A.S. re-inforcements never reached Athens. The order for a general attack in the centre of the city was never given. The proletarian masses in Athens had nothing but the E.L.A.S. reserves in the city with which to start the fight. The policy of the Communist Party kept the proletarian masses in Athens isolated from the rest of the country. None the less, they kept up the struggle, even when the relation of forces turned against them on account of the constant re-inforcement of the British troops and to the policy of the Communist Party.

The British were continually moving troops into Athens, including troops from the Italian front. Aircraft and the British fleet mercilessly raided the working class districts in Athens and Piraeus, which were also bombarded by artillery which Scobie placed on the Acropolis and on the hill of Lycabettus. In all, British imperialism was to send 60,000 men of its metropolitan and colonial forces into the struggle in Athens. 12,000 citizens were arrested in the course of the struggle, and were sent to concentration camps in North Africa, where they joined the soldiers who had been imprisoned at the time of the mutinies in the Greek army of the Middle East. The British carried out large-scale arrests and executions in the districts which they took by storm.

The Soviet Union and the Greek December

How did the U.S.S.R. react during the December events? The Soviet press was silent. The Soviet authorities made no declaration. The British authorities regularly and officially notified Stalin and the Soviet authorities about the events in Athens as the fighting developed, and expressed their satisfaction at the attitude of the U.S.S.R. The head of the Soviet military mission in Greece, Grigori Popov, coolly observed the events from the Hotel Grande Bretagne in Syntagma Square.

A senior official in the British Foreign Office remarked, in a note about Poland, on December 27:

"I am not in favour of putting more pressure on Stalin... at the moment when he has a good attitude about Greece, and when we want closer military contacts with him on a world scale".
(Foreign Office archives, F.O. 371/3942, C 18085/9)

The pressure to which the official referred was connected with Stalin's policy in Poland, where he was carrying through the transformation of the P.K.W.N. into the provisional government of the Polish Republic.

On December 31, Vyshinski, the Soviet Minister for Foreign Affairs, the notorious prosecutor in the Moscow Trials, informed the Greek ambassador in Moscow that the U.S.S.R. had decided to send an ambassador to Greece. This was at the time of the meeting in Moscow of Churchill and Stalin in October 1944, when they agreed that the German working class must be crushed, that Germany "would have to be occupied for many years" and that Germany "must be divided as a state".

The minutes of the meeting record that, after Churchill said that "Britain must be the leading force in the Mediterranean, and that he hoped that Stalin would let him have the final word in Greece, as Stalin himself would have in Romania", Stalin replied, "The fact that Britain does not control the sea-ways of the Mediterranean is a serious matter for Britain... I agree with the Prime Minister that Britain must have the final word in Greece."

The policy of "spheres of influence" is only one of the aspects of the global counter-revolutionary agreement between the victorious imperialists and the Stalinist bureaucracy. Imperialism handed over to the Soviet bureaucracy what has been called the "glacis", in order that the world revolutionary movement, which was developing at the end of the Second World War, could be forced to retreat, and that imperialist rule could be preserved in the vital centres, thanks to the policy of the Kremlin and its international apparatus of Communist

parties. But, on the "glacis", which they called the "buffer-zone", Stalin likewise assured his allies that he would permit no independent activities by the working class. During the talks with Churchill in October, Stalin assured him:

"When the Red Army entered Bulgaria, the Bulgarian Communists started forming soviets. The Red army put a stop to all that. The Communists had arrested the Bulgarian police and the Red Army released them. In any case, Ercoli (Togliatti) is an intelligent man; he will not start an adventure in Italy."

The Communist Parties in the different countries served this world-wide counter-revolutionary policy. The Greek revolution and the revolt of the proletarian masses in Athens were sacrificed on the altar of this Stalinist policy. The Stalinist leaders of the Greek Communist Party themselves said that they played this role in the service of the interests of the Soviet bureaucracy in their own fashion. P. Roussos mentions, in his book "Five Great Years", a meeting which he had with Dimitrov, who was the head of the section for international relations of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in the December period. He writes that Dimitrov said, in relation to the December events:

"Truth is cruel. We understand that our immediate national interest experienced a terrible test in the framework of our international movement, which was consolidating recently-acquired positions, especially in the Balkans". (Vol. 2, p. 424).

The general secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Greece, George Siantos, declared at the Eleventh Plenum of that body, the first after the events of December, about those events: "Our resistance contributed a great deal to the decisions at Yalta". This record is in the official documents of the Greek Communist Party, Vol. 5, p. 424. "Rizospastis", the official newspaper of the Greek Communist Party, was to write, on October 2, 1945: "The December resistance was not intended to crush the British empire: it was an armed protest, which has not been wasted".

The Epilogue of the Tragedy

Churchill himself and his Foreign Minister, Eden, arrived in Athens on December 23, to be confronted by the resistance of its people. They met the British commanders in Greece, and then met Archbishop Damaskinos, whom they wanted to appoint as viceroy.

On December 26, when the fighting was growing intense, a conference was held, at which were present the British commanders, the American

ambassador, the American ambassador, McVeigh, the French ambassador, the head of the Soviet military mission, Popov, Archbishop Damaskinos, Papandreou, representatives of the bourgeois parties, and a delegation of three members of E.A.M. Churchill stressed the military strength of Britain, and mentioned the formation of a government of broad unity. Everyone agreed with appointing Damaskinos as viceroy; in reality, this was a first step towards re-introducing the monarchy.

The British troops launched their general offensive on December 28. British imperialism needed to crush the rising in Athens. It needed to consolidate its domination of Greece, to defend its colonial interests in the Mediterranean and to confront the world-wide revolutionary movement of the masses. This is how it was explained in the British War Cabinet on December 29:

"If things develop as we hope in Greece, the result could be to check the immense wave of anarchy in Europe, and to discourage similar revolts in other countries". (F.O. 371/48244 R197/4/G 19)

The journalist André Foulains has written, in his "History of the Cold War":

"In any case, Churchill was the first to acknowledge that, at least for a certain time, Stalin stood by the bargain which they made about Greece. That means that he allowed the E.L.A.S. partisans to be slaughtered, without lifting a finger, when, under the leadership of the Greek Communists, they had secured control of nearly the whole of the country after the Germans withdrew."

The Stalinist bureaucracy supported British imperialism. The latter was acting in its own interests, to be sure, but was also serving those of the "world order" which was forming and was to be codified at Yalta in a few months. At all costs, Greece must remain in the sphere of influence of imperialism. That is what the War Cabinet of the British Empire recognised, when it expressed, in its own way, the international significance of the Greek revolution, within the framework of the general revolutionary upsurge in Europe and the world.

The forces of E.L.A.S. withdrew from Athens on the night of January 4 - 5. On January 11 the representatives of E.A.M. signed the armistice which compelled

E.L.A.S. to withdraw its forces to various restricted points in the country, and to abandon Salonika. On February 8 the negotiations began between the Communist Party on the one side and the viceroy and representatives of the new government, led by Plastiros. These negotiations coincided with the Yalta conference.

The American minister, Stettinius, writes in his memoirs of Yalta ("Yalta, Roosevelt and the Russians") that, when the three heads of state of Britain, U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. met, Stalin asked Churchill what had happened in Greece, and explained at once that "he had no intention of criticising the British about Greece, but was only seeking information". Churchill answered that peace had been restored, and that the British government appreciated that Marshal Stalin "had not shown much interests in Greek affairs".

The Varkisa agreement was signed on February 12, the day after the Yalta conference ended. The Varkisa agreement compelled E.L.A.S. to disarm, and handed over its militants to attacks and repression by the government. It was an application in practice of the counter-revolutionary agreements at Yalta.

The Central Committee of E.A.M. ordered the General Staff of E.L.A.S. to see that the demobilisation was carried out. E.L.A.S. fighters were surrendering weapons up to the end of February, and on February 28 E.L.A.S. ceased to exist.

However, the counter-revolutionary work of the bourgeoisie and the imperialism was not yet completed. They had won a first victory, but this did not ensure that the bourgeois regime was again stable. Despite the bloody terror on which the restoration of the monarchy was based, strikes and mass demonstrations during the period following December 1944 show that the revolution still had great reserves of strength. Another period of bloody counter-revolution was necessary for the bourgeoisie and imperialism to stabilise the post-war regime in Greece.

FOOTNOTES

- (1) See "La Verité", No. 11.
- (2) Greece became a republic in 1923. In 1935, the coup d'etat of General Kondylis restored the monarchy. Then in August 1936, a dictatorship headed by General Metaxas took power, to oppose the rising movement of the masses, (great strike in Salonika in May 1936). Mussolini's Italy attacked Greece in October 1940. In 1941, Greece was occupied by German and Italian forces. What was left of the Metaxas regime joined with other

bourgeois politicians to gather round the king in a government-in-exile based in Cairo.

- (3) The "levy": it was the policy of the Nazi occupation authorities to conscript and deport to Germany workers from the occupied countries.
- (4) E.A.M.: National Liberation Front; a "broad" resistance organisation for struggle to liberate the country, dominated by the Communist Party.
- (5) E.L.A.S.: People's National Liberation Army: the military arm of E.A.M., the leadership of which was controlled by the Communist Party.
- (6) E.D.E.S.: the Greek Democratic Liberation Army, a monarchist military organisation, armed by the British, which nevertheless maintained connections with the government in Greece which served the German and Italian occupying forces. The real reason for its existence was to fight E.L.A.S.
- (7) Rallis: head of the government which collaborated with the fascist and Nazi occupying forces.
- (8) The X organisation and "National Action" were military organisations of the extreme right. The group which called itself X was led by Colonel Grivas, and was to co-operate with the Nazi forces to fight the partisans; it was then employed by the British services.
- (9) Stravos Veroulis was badly wounded in the First World War, and lost his sight. He was general secretary of the National Confederation of the Wounded and Victims of the War, and was editor of its journal, "The Victims' Voice". He had been a leader of the Archaeomarxist organisation (see note 11), and joined the Greek section of the Movement for the Fourth International in 1939.
- (10) Pandelis Pouliopolos remains one of the great figures of the Greek workers' movement and of the Fourth International. He was born in 1900 and trained as a lawyer; he was one of the first leaders of the Greek Communist Party, becoming its General Secretary in 1924, after the Fifth Congress of the Communist International. In 1927 he joined the International Left Opposition, and edited the journal, "Spartakos" from 1928 onwards. His group united with other oppositional groups, and finally produced the United Organisation of Internationalist Communists of Greece (EOXQE). He was arrested in 1938, moved from camp to camp, and executed on June 6, 1943 at Nezeri, in the conditions described in this article. He left behind political and theoretical writings, of which a whole series of elements was worked out in captivity.

- (11) "Archaeomarxist": an organisation in Greece which originated from a group which published a review entitled "The Archives of Marxism" In 1934 it split into two parts, when one of the fractions joined the Spartakos group to form the section of the movement for the Fourth International. The other fraction oriented towards the London Bureau (a liaison committee of different centrist organisations, such as the P.O.U.M. in Spain and the I.L.P. in England.
- (12) This Papandreou was the father of the man who became the leader of P.A.S.O.K. and Premier, and led the bourgeois party of Venizelos.
- (13) Quisling was the head of the pro-Nazi government in Norway, which the German occupation put in power. His name has become the symbol for all the politicians who, in the different countries of Europe, formed governments subject to German imperialism.
- (14) Safaris was a soldier by profession; he joined the Communist Party and headed E.A.M.
- (15) N. Zervas was a reactionary officer who headed E.D.E.S.
- (16) G. Zevgos was general secretary of E.A.M. from 1941 to 1944, and a member of the Greek Communist Party.
- (17) Churchill quotes this note in his memoirs: the note defined the dominant role of British imperialism in Greece as: GB - USA 90%, USSR 10%. For Romania he percentages were reversed, GB-USA 10%, USSR 90%, and, in the case of Jugoslavia 50%-50%.
- (18) The National Guard was one of the organisations of E.A.M.
- (19) OPLA: the "security" militia of the Communist Party; it was used particularly to liquidate physically Trotskyist militants and dissidents in the Communist Party.
- (20) August 4 was the day when the Metaxas dictatorship took power in 1936.