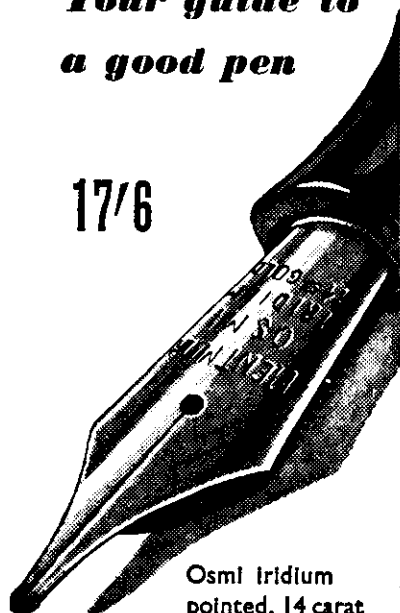


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"DEMOCRACY IS TAKING A BEATING"

First-Hand Picture of Greece

(By an American Correspondent of "The New Statesman")

GREECE is one of the problems of Europe that Potsdam did not settle. If it was discussed the result has not been announced. But everyone knows that the life of its present Government hangs by a thread; and if the thread still holds by the time this article reaches our readers they will be interested to have a first-hand account by an experienced journalist of a recent journey through the parts of the country that many New Zealanders know.

I'VE just finished 16 days in a jeep, on the washboard roads of Thessaly, Macedonia, and Thrace. The journey has reinforced my conviction, despite the contrary views of some of my more sedentary colleagues, that democracy is taking a beating in liberated Greece.

I've talked to the little people—the roadside royalists, the homesick corporals, the small-town officials—who are more reliable than their Athenian bosses because they don't know what you're after and therefore don't know what to hide. I've poked into a few rural jails. I've also met the mighty: Greek generals and provincial governors; British commanders of Gurkha, Sikh, and English troops sitting on the lid all over the country. From all this I regret having to state the following conclusions:

- (1) Arbitrary arrest of anti-royalists, and their prolonged imprisonment without trial, are common practices of provincial Greek "justice" to-day.
- (2) Civilian officials, the gendarmerie and the militarised National Guard, all of them supposed to be pacifying the country and preparing it for the plebiscite on the return of George II., are most pro-king, and pacifying accordingly.

No Interviews with Corpses

I began my trip with one resolution, and I stuck to it. I would not go looking for dead bodies. Each side in Greece calls the other side torturers and murderers. I do not doubt there is some truth in such allegations, life being very cheap in Greece since the Gestapo set

the fashion. But I know that bodies have been dug up in cemeteries here and their dead eyes gouged out in order to prove the brutishness of one's political enemies. I also know that a corpse cannot be interviewed. So when EAM members asked me to inspect the graves of republicans freshly slaughtered by royalist gunmen, I declined. And when Rightists wanted me to climb into the hills to view a ravine stuffed with the vulture-picked bones of 3,000 innocents, I declined. I said I was ready to believe the bones were there, but that none was inscribed by the original owner with an explanation of how it got there.

Whatever the excesses certain elements of the Left committed when they were in power, the present situation is that there is an agreement presumably in effect called the Varkiza Accord, which ended the December revolt. Signed by EAM and the Plastiras Government, and blessed by Britain, this pact stipulated disarmament of all guerrillas, creation of a non-partisan army, and respect for civil liberties regardless of private political opinions. Observance or violation of these terms was checkable, and I went out to check.

They Laughed and Laughed

In the town of Drama I met a young man wearing a bright new uniform and a tommy-gun. I asked him who his commander was. He said Anton Tsaous. Tsaous is the ex-leader of a nationalist band. He now holds a reserve commission as a mere captain and is ostensibly on the inactive list. Tsaous denied that the tommy gunner was under his orders. But he admitted to me that 1,000 of his "former" followers had refused to go home, despite his telling them to go home, and that they occasionally were "lent" arms by the National Guard to help in rounding up Communists.

Two National Guard sentries at a bridge outside Xanthi said their battalion contained men "from every party, but all nationalists." When I inquired if EAM-ites were recruited, they laughed and laughed.

The prison at Alexandroupolis has six cells. Each is about 25 feet square and contains 50 men. They sleep on the floor. Their extra clothes, and their baskets of food brought from outside (prisoners are not fed at public expense unless they are destitute), hang on nails in the wall.

I went into all the cells and asked the 300 men if any of them knew why they were arrested. Only three knew. One used to be the EAM mayor of Alexandroupolis; he was accused of numerous murders. The second was a Communist formerly on the government council of a village in the district; he had been imprisoned by the Bulgars in three wars, and in the last one had been condemned to death by them, but the charge against him now was that he was pro-Bulgarian.



KING GEORGE OF GREECE
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The third was a doctor from Samothrace, and a liberal; his crime was in having obeyed orders during the Bulgarian occupation to vaccinate the islanders and the Bulgarian garrison against a small-pox epidemic.

The warden stood on one foot and then the other. He said he didn't know why all these people were in jail. Who arrested them? Guardsmen, gendarmes, civilian patriots. The warden said there were even 50 prisoners who had been jailed by ELAS five months ago, and they were still being held with the rest. Why aren't they given a hearing and trial? We don't have the authority, confessed the warden, by now quite miserable. We are waiting for a magistrate from Athens.

From Patriot to Desperado

Last January everybody in Kavalla wore a red flag in his lapel. When I was there the other day the only men who were not afraid to admit being pro-Russian were the editors of the EAM and communist newspapers. I visited the office of the EAM paper, *Niki*, and saw the smashed printing-press motors and the bent pickaxe which had mangled them during a recent National Guard raid. My visit was observed. That night guardsmen called on the editor. Significantly, he had anticipated it, and spent the night elsewhere.

In the Larissa jail I found a girl serving three months for shouting, "Down with the King!" Two young men who yelled "Long Live Varkiza and Democracy!" got ten months.

Once there was an ELAS political commissar named Kriton. During the occupation Kriton was "treasonably" engaged in blowing up enemy troop trains. The regiment of which he was co-commander cut communications between Sofia and Istanbul for several weeks. His men captured 700 Germans and two trainloads of Nazi food and ammunition. He operated in Evros, first province of Greece to be liberated. To-day the Greek army and police are combing the mountains for a desperado named Kriton.

Hurrah for the King!

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