

Deb 07 November 1944

GREECE (FOOD SUPPLIES)

§37. Mr. Petherick

asked the Secretary of State for War what plans were made by the British military authorities for introducing relief supplies into Greece immediately following its liberation.

§Sir J. Grigg

For very many months there has been planning by the British and American military authorities for the shipment of essential relief supplies to Greece at the earliest possible moment. To this end, grain and other commodities have been accumulated and stored by the British authorities in the Middle East, and when the British troops sailed for Greece stocks were immediately called forward as part of the settled plan. Over 60,000 tons of food supplies were so called for- 1254ward and either have been landed or are in the process of shipment.

§Mr. Petherick

Are we to understand from that reply that the War Office are continuing, and are likely to continue in the near future at any rate, to be responsible for sending food supplies to Greece? Should the questions be, therefore, addressed to the Secretary of State for War?

§Sir J. Grigg

I think so, so far as the British end of an Anglo-American liability is concerned.

Deb 05 December 1944

GREECE (DISTURBANCES, ATHENS)

§Dr. Haden Guest

(by Private Notice) asked the Prime Minister whether he can give the House any information on the occurrences in Athens on Sunday, 3rd December, when the Greek police are reported to have fired on a demonstration of children and youths, and what are the casualties, in killed and wounded?

§The Prime Minister

So far as has been ascertained, the facts are as follow: The Greek organisation called E.A.M. had announced their intention of holding a demonstration on 3rd December. The Greek Government at first authorised this but withdrew their permission when E.A.M. called for a general strike to begin on 2nd December. The strike, in fact, came into force early on 3rd December. Later in the morning the E.A.M. demonstration formed up and moved to the principal square of Athens, in spite of the Government ban. On the evidence so far available I am not prepared to say who started the firing which then took place. The police suffered one fatal casualty and had three men wounded. The latest authentic reports give the demonstrators' casualties as 11 killed and 60 wounded. The demonstration continued during the afternoon but there was no further shooting, and by 4.30 the crowd had dispersed and tranquility was restored.

It is deplorable that an event like this should take place in Athens scarcely a month after the city's liberation and feeding. Greece is faced with the most desperate economic and financial problems apart from the civil war which we are trying to stop. We and our American Allies are doing our utmost to give assistance and our troops are acting to prevent bloodshed. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh," and "Hear, hear."] Sometimes it is necessary to use force to prevent greater bloodshed. The main burden falls on us, and the responsibility is within our sphere. That is the military sphere agreed upon with our principal Allies. Our plans will

not succeed unless the Greek Government and the whole Greek people exert themselves on their own behalf. If the damage of four years of war and enemy occupation is to be repaired, and if Greek life and economy are to be rebuilt, internal stability must be maintained and, pending a general election under fair conditions, the authority of the constitutional Greek Government must be accepted and enforced throughout the country. The armed forces must be dependent on the Greek Government. No Government can have a sure foundation so long as there are private armies owing allegiance to a group, a party or an ideology instead of to the State and the nation.

Although these facts should be clear to all, the Left Wing and Communist Ministers have resigned from the Greek Government at this dangerous crisis rather than implement measures, to which they had already agreed, for the replacement of the E.A.M. police and guerrillas by regular national services.

[§Mr. Gallacher](#)

Why did they resign?

[§The Prime Minister](#)

I say they have resigned. I am stating facts in answer to the Question. I thought the House would rather like to have a full answer. In addition, the E.A.M. leaders have called a general strike, which is for the time being preventing the bread which we and the Americans are providing reaching the mouths of the hungry population whom we are trying to feed.

Our own position, though as I have said it is a burden, is extremely clear. Whether the Greek people form themselves into a monarchy or a republic is for their decision; whether they have a Government of Left or Right is a matter for them. But until they are in a position to decide, we shall not hesitate to use the considerable British Army now in Greece, and being reinforced, to see that law and order are maintained. It is our belief that in this course His Majesty's

Government have the support of an overwhelming majority of the Greek people. Their gaping need is to receive relief for their immediate requirements and conditions which give them a chance of earning a livelihood. In both of these ways we wish to help them, and we are working with experts, financial and otherwise, to do so; but we cannot do so if the tommy guns which were provided for use against the Germans are now used in an attempt to impose a Communist dictatorship without the people being able to express their wishes.

§Mr. Pethick-Lawrence

While appreciating the great delicacy of the situation, I desire to ask the Prime Minister two questions arising out of his statement. Is he aware of the very grave anxiety felt in all sections in this country with regard to what has taken place, and will he undertake to keep the House informed from time to time in the immediate future so that we may know what the situation is from day to day? Will he also take care that the Government watch their step in this matter, so that their action in suppressing disorder shall not take the form of support of any one faction? We all recognise that law and order must be maintained but there is evidence, I think, that mistakes have been committed on both sides. This terrible shooting affair On Sunday suggests at any rate that a mistake was made by the Greek Government and that they are to blame for that action. Can the right hon. Gentleman assure the House that, if the Armed Forces of the Allies are to be used in support of the Greek Government, the British Government will impress upon them the need for a conciliatory policy and not assume that, because they have the support of the British Forces, they can take such action as they like?

§Sir H. Williams

Are we not engaged in a Debate rather than asking questions?

§The Prime Minister

The answer to the first part of the question is that the newspapers give full and continuous reports from Greece and, in the event of anything important occurring which is not public property, I shall always be ready to answer any questions. I have no other wish than to keep the House fully informed. I quite agree that we take a great responsibility in intervening to preserve law and order in this capital city which was so lately delivered by our troops from the power of the enemy. It would be very much easier for us to stand aside and allow everything to degenerate, as it would very quickly, into anarchy or a Communist dictatorship, but, having taken the position that we have, having entered Athens and brought food and made great efforts to restore its currency, and done our utmost to give it those conditions of peace and tranquility which will enable the Greek people as a whole to vote on their future, we do not feel that we should look back or take our hands from the plough. We shall certainly not be able to do so but we shall certainly take care that the Greek Government, which we are supporting—or perhaps acting in conjunction with would be a better expression, because General Scobie is for the moment in charge of order—is not used to fasten any rule of a faction—I think that is the word—on the Greek people. They will have the fullest opportunity of a free election. The Government of Mr. Papandreou three days ago represented all parties, including the Communists and E.A.M., whose representatives left suddenly on the eve of a quite evident attempt to overthrow the settled Government.

Dr. Guest

Does not the right hon. Gentleman think some further information might be given? Is it not a fact that the demonstration which was fired on consisted of 200 unarmed children and youths? I quote from "The Times" correspondent. Is it not a fact that the firing went on for an hour, savagely and violently—I again quote from "The Times"—and is it not further a fact that there is a great deal of feeling in Greece that the collaborationists have not been dealt with, and that the security battalions which were appointed by the Germans to fight against the Greek

movement are being maintained by the present Government; and is it not time that the whole Athens police force was disarmed, as they have shown themselves unworthy and untrustworthy to keep the peace?

§The Prime Minister

As far as the incident is concerned, I have told the House that His Majesty's Government reserve judgment upon it. It is a shocking thing that there should be firing by police forces on unarmed children. That is a matter which we should all reprobate. We should also reprobate the massing and the leading of large numbers of unarmed children to a demonstration, the scene of which had been banned by the Government, in a city full of armed men and liable at any moment to an explosion. So much for that. The other point of substance is the question of the security battalions. That is not to be dismissed as easily as the hon. Member has done. They came gradually into existence very largely, according to evidence which I have most carefully sifted, during the last year, in a large measure to protect the Greek villagers from the depredations of some of those who, under the guise of being saviours of their country, were living upon the inhabitants and doing very little fighting against the Germans. I could continue indefinitely to deal with these points but I am sure that I should be trespassing upon the indulgence which you, Sir, have already shown me.

§Mr. Pethick-Lawrence

May I press the Prime Minister to answer a question put by me, which I do not think he did quite answer? I appreciate that the British Government are holding the ring for some future election in Greece, and the question I put to him is: Will he assure us that, so far as the British Government are concerned, any support that we give to the Government of Greece is accompanied by recommendations that the Greek Government should adopt a conciliatory attitude towards all sections in future?

§The Prime Minister

Oh, yes certainly, a conciliatory policy, but that should not include running away from, or lying down under, the threat of armed revolution and violence.

§Sir Percy Harris

Will the right hon. Gentleman state whether, in addition to the military authorities, we have a political representative to advise the Government on political problems in Greece—a representative in first contact with the situation? I have in mind someone similar to my right hon. Friend the Member for Stockton (Mr. Harold Macmillan), who represents our interests in Italy. Is there anybody in Greece in a similar position?

§The Prime Minister

We have an Ambassador in Greece with whom we are in hourly consultation. Telegrams arrive with the greatest frequency, the wires not having been cut—so far. The right hon. Member for Stockton is attached to the staff of General Wilson, the Supreme Commander in the Mediterranean—
[HON. MEMBERS: "Alexander."] Well, General Wilson, the former Supreme Commander in the Mediterranean, who is at this moment carrying on until the changeover takes place—and is frequently referred to by him for advice on the political aspects of the military measures which he has to take.

[...]

Dr. Guest

My moderation in framing my question in order not to excite antagonism, should not be accepted as an excuse for putting off a matter which is, in fact, of very urgent public importance, because it involves the possible issue of civil war in Greece. With all respect to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, he is not fully informed of the situation—and neither am I. We want to debate this matter and I appeal to you, Mr. Speaker, and I appeal to the House, that we should have the Adjournment in order to debate this matter now,

because it is one on which I believe this British House of Commons could come to a unanimous agreement, which would be very helpful in bringing the issue to a close.

§Mr. Shinwell

I understand you to have said, Mr. Speaker, that this question can be raised by any hon. Member in the course of the general Debate to-day on the Address. May I ask, with great respect, whether it is not the case that you agreed that to-day should be devoted to the subject of social insurance, and if that Debate should be interrupted by a long discussion upon events in Greece would not that be a violation of the agreement that has been reached by hon. Members? My second point is that you have said that this is not the responsibility of the British Government, but in fact the Prime Minister has admitted that General Scobie is in charge.

§The Prime Minister

Pardon me. I should not like my hon. Friend to be in error. In fact, General Scobie was not at the time exercising the plenary responsibility which has now been taken.

§Mr. Shinwell

That in no wise affects the point I am putting. General Scobie is our military representative on the spot. Moreover, my right hon. Friend has stated that there is a Resident Minister on the spot. Unfortunately, the Resident Minister is on the back benches opposite, the right hon. Member for Stockton (Mr. Harold Macmillan).

§The Prime Minister

I never said he was on the spot. In answer to a general question on political guidance being available for the military in the theatre now concerned, I said that in Athens we had an Ambassador and that there was available for General Wilson the right hon. Member for Stockton (Mr. Macmillan), who had been specifically mentioned; but I was speaking of

the general principle on which our affairs are carried on, and not with reference to the exact location of the right hon. Gentleman.

§Mr. Shinwell

As my right hon. Friend has interrupted me, I will put my point of Order in another form. If the Prime Minister seeks to absolve His Majesty's Government of all responsibility, that is one matter, but if he accepts a measure of responsibility for the events in Greece and for general administration in Athens is not that a matter for this House to consider?

§Mr. Speaker

The hon. Member for Seaham (Mr. Shinwell) has put two questions which really cross each other out. He asked, first, whether to-day was not to be devoted to national insurance, and would it not therefore be a breach of faith, so to speak, to turn aside to something else. I had intended that to-day should be devoted to national insurance, but if hon. Members of that party wish to take the Debate away from national insurance to Greece it can be done. As far as the responsibility of the British Government is concerned, that has nothing to do with me.

§Mr. A. Bevan

May I call attention to the fact that the Prime Minister in his statement specifically said that the Forces under the control of His Majesty's Government will be used to prevent civil disorder in Greece, and that reinforcements are already on the way, so that His Majesty's Government are now, through the Prime Minister, accepting responsibility for the maintenance of order and for the disarming of the forces of E.A.M.? Does not that, therefore, fix the responsibility directly upon this Government and upon this House? Therefore, may I respectfully suggest to you that all the conditions that are required for the Motion moved by my hon. Friend the Member for North Islington (Dr. Guest) are satisfied—that here is a matter of urgent, immediate and

public importance which ought to lead you to accept the Motion which he has moved to enable the House to debate this matter at the earliest possible moment?

§Mr. Speaker

I regard this matter as very close to an operation of war, and if we were to have Motions for the Adjournment on definite matters of urgent public importance where it is a question of the conduct, or possible conduct, of a general in control in a theatre of war, I think that would be a very great mistake.

§Mr. Gallacher

On a point of Order. I want to join in pressing the urgency of accepting the Motion for the Adjournment on the ground that General Scobie attacked the demonstrators before the demonstration took place. General Scobie is our military representative there, and it is conceivable that his action may have encouraged the rashness and folly of the police. That is a responsibility of this Government and this House, and I suggest that the matter be accepted as a subject to be discussed on the Adjournment.

§Mr. Neil Maclean

In view of what has happened in Greece and in Belgium, and also, earlier, in France, is it not necessary for this House to discuss whether the policy that is being pursued in the countries that we are liberating is the proper policy, and whether we are not allowing men to be placed in power who were actually working with the Fascists in the past, and, consequently, are not acceptable to the people of those countries?

§Mr. Speaker

That question is far too wide to be considered as a definite Motion.

§Sir Richard Acland

Is it not clear that this House should have an opportunity for the widest possible Debate on foreign affairs during this week? If the Amendment in my name on that subject is inadequate, then I would ask you, Mr. Speaker, whether you would favourably consider an Amendment on this issue if it were put on the Order Paper to-night by a sufficient number of hon. Members?

§Mr. Speaker

I do not propose to treat this matter as one of definite, urgent public importance. Hon. Members who object can always put down a Motion criticising my Ruling.

§Mr. Driberg

May I, with great respect, Mr. Speaker, put one point arising out of what you said? Several hon. Members on both sides of the House who would normally take part in such a Debate on foreign affairs, have already exhausted their right to speak in the general Debate on the Address. Is that not another reason why it is desirable that they should be given this opportunity?

GREECE (GERMANS AND BULGARIANS)

HC Deb 13 December 1944

vol 406 c1224 1224

§50. Captain Bullock asked the Prime Minister what information he has as to the number of German and Bulgarian subjects discovered among the E.L.A.S. forces in Greece.

§Mr. Eden There have been reports that Germans and Bulgarians are serving with the E.L.A.S. Forces, but I have no statement to make at present.

Mr. Dugdale If the right hon. Gentleman is going to make inquiries, will he also inquire into the numbers of those serving in the E.D.E.S. forces?

§Mr. Eden I answered the Question with reserve on purpose because I do not want to say anything to make things more difficult.

Mr. J. J. Davidson Is the information at the Foreign Office of the same character as that which existed when the Government could not find out whether Germans and Italians were in Spain?

Dominion Governments (Consultation)

HC Deb 14 December 1944

vol 406 cc1340-2 1340

§45. Mr. Edgar Granville asked the Prime Minister if he can give an assurance that the Dominion Governments have been consulted at each stage in the action taken by His Majesty's Government in Greece; and whether this aspect of foreign policy has been approved by them.

§The Prime Minister (Mr. Churchill) It is not physically possible to consult the Dominion Governments as to every step which the fast moving developments of the war render necessary. They have however throughout been kept closely and continuously informed of what is taking place.

§Mr. Granville Does that reply mean that the Dominion Governments were consulted before the War Cabinet decision was taken, and before military action was taken, and not merely informed afterwards? Can the Prime Minister

say if it is still the practice, as enunciated by him in this House, that the representatives of the Dominion Governments shall be invited to War Cabinet meetings when questions of this kind are being discussed?

§The Prime Minister The hon. Gentleman is mixing up several different kinds of things. Great questions of policy like whether we should go to the aid of Greece after the Germans were driven out, are made manifest to the Dominions by the continued succession of telegrams which are sent from this country, and which give them a perfect, full picture of the situation. The executive measures which are sometimes forced to be taken with the greatest speed, owing to danger to life and limb—these measures it is not possible to refer to Governments all over the world. But they have been kept fully informed of everything that happens as it goes forward, and the Dominions Secretary informs me that I could rightfully say that we have received from the Dominion Governments no indications that they dissent from the action we have been compelled to take.

§Mr. Cocks How long do the Government intend to go on with this policy of murdering—

Hon. Members Order.

§Mr. Kirkwood Is the Prime Minister aware that I am being inundated with telegrams from engineers all over England, threatening a down-tools policy against the part that is being played by the Government in Greece at the moment?

§Sir Herbert Holdsworth On a point of Order. Should not the hon. Member for Broxtowe (Mr. Cocks) be asked to withdraw his imputation against the Prime Minister?

§Mr. Speaker Let us get on with the business.

§Mr. Kirkwood Could I not get a reply from the Prime Minister? What am I to say to the engineers?

§The Prime Minister I am anxious to oblige in every way, especially my hon. Friend, whom I have known so long. I can quite believe that he would receive many telegrams from many parts of the country over a matter which causes so much heart-searching. I gave a long account of this matter to the House the other day, and I may take occasion to give some further account to the country; but we have laid our case very fully before the House, and it was discussed very fully and freely at the Parliamentary Conference yesterday. I have nothing at this moment to add to what has been said.

Liberation Campaign (British Casualties)

§48. Mr. Bowles

asked the Prime Minister what are our losses in men, ships and aircraft suffered since our landing in Greece, this year, up to 3rd December.

§The Prime Minister

So far as can be ascertained, the total casualties sustained by the Royal Navy, the Royal Air Force and the Imperial Military Forces in Greece since our landing this year, in response to the appeal of the Greek Government, were, up to the end of November, under 300. This figure includes killed, wounded, missing or prisoners of war. About 160 additional military casualties—I have not the naval and air figures but they are not large—of whom 35 are killed must be added since that date Eight minor naval vessels and 32 aircraft have been lost in the same period.

§Mr. Bowles

Does not that mean that all these casualties were suffered in fighting against Germans, in Greece, on the mainland?

§The Prime Minister

Yes, Sir. That was the point of the Question, and the answer was given so as to show the very heavy sacrifices we have made for the general liberation of Greece from the Italians and Germans. There is no harm in stating that.

GREECE (UNITED NATIONS, CONSULTATIONS)

HC Deb 15 December 1944

HC Deb 15 December 1944 vol 406 c1470W [1470W](#)
[§Mr. Granville](#)

asked the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs what machinery exists for regular consultation between the United Nations on immediate policy affecting Greece; so, whether such machinery was used for securing an agreed policy in that sphere of operations.

[§Mr. George Hall](#)

The machinery for regular consultation between the United Nations is that provided by the normal diplomatic channels and by the periodical meetings which have been held between the heads of States and Foreign Secretaries, particularly those of the three Great Allies. As the Prime Minister explained in his statement on 8th December, the decision to send British troops to Greece was reached after consultation with the United States Government, and the necessary orders were issued to General Wilson, the Supreme Allied Commander in the Mediterranean, by the Combined Chiefs of Staff. The Soviet Government were also informed of this decision before any British troops were

despatched to Greece. Both the United States and Soviet Governments have agreed that Greece falls primarily within the British military sphere.

Greece (Operations)

HC Deb 19 December 1944

vol 406 cc1595-6 1595

§18. Mr. Cove asked the Secretary of State for War whether any British troops who are sent to Greece will be limited to volunteers for that service.

§Sir J. Grigg No, Sir.

§Mr. Cove Can the right hon. Gentleman tell the House why men who are conscripted to fight Hitler are now being compelled to fight the Greek people?

§Sir J. Grigg The men were conscripted to carry out the orders given to them.

§Mr. Bowles Is not the right hon. Gentleman aware that the great mass of the British Army are a civilian Army, with very serious political ideas about what they are fighting the war about?

§Dr. Edith Summerskill What action is taken against men who refuse to fight on conscientious grounds?

1596

§Sir J. Grigg I prefer not to answer what I believe to be an entirely hypothetical question.

§Mr. Cocks Would it not be a great advantage to have on our side a "sacred battalion" of Tory Fascists?

GREECE (SITUATION)

vol 406 cc1618-21 1618

[...]

§Sir Percy Harris Is the Prime Minister aware that the country is very disturbed about the situation in Greece and that it would like, before we adjourn for Christmas, the very latest information as to developments there, and preferably the cheering news of a satisfactory settlement?

§Mr. Edgar Granville May I ask the Prime Minister, if he is unable to give us a Debate in Government time this week, whether there is any reason why we should not discuss this matter on the Consolidated Fund Bill to-day, and, if we can, will the Foreign Secretary be here to answer for the Government?

§The Prime Minister I am advised that the Consolidated Fund Bill would not afford a convenient Parliamentary vehicle for a discussion on this subject. It would be extraordinarily limited and inconvenient. As to the very serious concern in the country, there is, of course, a sharp division of opinion in the country on the position not only in Greece but in other countries and that division naturally causes heart-searchings and sharp criticisms, but I do not think that this would be allayed by a Debate. Anyhow, I am 1620 at the service of the House, and if the House likes to use the machinery provided, we are entirely ready to discuss the matter.

§Mr. Shinwell May I ask the Prime Minister whether now, or before the end of the week, he could elucidate one point, as there appears to be some question emerging as to the establishment of a Regency in Greece? Would he be able to say whether the establishment of that Regency is being in

any way frustrated or impeded by the attitude of King George?

§The Prime Minister I said just now, in answer to my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Ayr Burghs (Sir T. Moore), that I had no further statement to make at present on Greece, and that still holds.

§Sir Richard Acland On a point of Order, Mr. Speaker. Are we not being asked in the Consolidated Fund Bill to raise money for the purpose of war, and are we not therefore entitled to ask for what purpose the money is being spent, and challenge the spending of it?

§Mr. Speaker It happens that this is a very limited Consolidated Fund Bill. It relates only to Jamaica—a grant of £700,000—and to a grant of £9,750, mainly for Irish clubs in London.

§Mr. A. Bevan Is it not apparent from recent events that the Division which occurred in the House of Commons on this matter a few days ago, does not, in fact, represent the division of opinion in the country any more than the Division in the House of Commons which preceded the promotion of the Prime Minister to his present office represented the feelings of the country? Is it not therefore desirable that the House of Commons should try to influence events in Greece before we rise for the Christmas Recess, particularly in view of the fact that a very large body of opinion associated with His Majesty's Government is committed to the principle of an armistice?

§The Prime Minister I do not intend to discuss the Greek issue at the moment. As far as the opinion of the country is concerned, of course, anybody can always say what the opinion of the country is, but before others of a different opinion accept that view, some other processes have usually to be gone through in the country. 1621 As far as the Division in the House the other day was concerned, it is true

that it may not fully represent the opinion of the House, because only a two-line Whip was sent out summoning Members.

§Mr. Gallacher I want to ask the Prime Minister if it would not be wise to advise that all shooting should stop in Greece and that a debate should take place, not here but in Athens, to sort out these things?

§The Prime Minister I am afraid that we cannot always stop shooting by saying we would like to stop it.

§Mr. Granville On the point of Order raised by the hon. Baronet, is there any reason why we should not discuss the question of whether the Prime Minister should or should not make a statement on Greece, on the Motion for the Adjournment?

§Mr. Speaker The ingenuity of hon. Members often enables them to discuss matters like that. It might be possible, I think.

GREECE (EXTERNAL LOANS)

HC Deb 19 December 1944

vol 406 c1632W 1632W

§Mr. Barstow asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer the financial indebtedness of Greece to this country; whether there are any additional loans to the one of 1898 and eight and one-fifth per cent. interest; and whether any instalments of interest have been paid during the period of the war.

§Sir J. Anderson Presumably my hon. Friend, in referring to a loan of 1898 at eight and one-fifth per cent. interest, has in mind the 2½ per cent. Guaranteed Gold Loan of that year, of which less than £40,000 nominal is outstanding. In addition to this loan, bondholders in this country are chiefly interested in the following external loans of the Greek Government: 7 per cent. Refugee Loan, 1928; 6 per cent. Stabilisation Loan, 1928; 6 per cent. Public Works Loans of 1928 and 1931; and ten smaller loans issued before the last war. The total nominal value of all these loans at present outstanding is about £17,750,000. At the beginning of the war the Greek Government was paying 40 per cent. of the interest due on these loans. As from 1st April, 1940, this rate was increased to 43 per cent., but payments were stopped in April, 1941, at the time of the German invasion of Greece. In addition to the market loans to which I have referred, H.M. Government have lent the Greek Government £46,250,000 during the war.

10. Mr. Lipson asked the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs if the forces of E.D.E.S. in Greece have surrendered their arms; and, if so, to whom.

§Mr. Eden As my hon. Friend will be aware, the date originally fixed for the demobilisation of the guerrillas, both E.L.A.S. and E.D.E.S., was 10th December. General Zervas expressed his complete willingness to abide by the Greek Government's orders for demobilisation. The demobilisation of the guerrillas must clearly await a settlement of the present disturbances.

§Mr. Lipson Can my right hon. Friend make it clear whether E.D.E.S. have actually surrendered their arms? They have

expressed their willingness to do so, but has it actually taken place?

§Mr. Eden The position is that both sides agreed to surrender their arms by a certain date. Unfortunately, as my hon. Friend knows, before that date was reached, the disturbances broke out which are now taking place, and, clearly, what we must secure is the disarmament of all, not of some.

§Mr. Lipson Does it mean that the fact that E.L.A.S. have not disarmed makes it not necessary for E.D.E.S. to obey the Government's orders now?

§Mr. Eden My hon. Friend can surely see the position. For several days, before 1753 the date agreed upon by all to surrender their arms, these disturbances broke out, and, unhappily, therefore, the agreement was broken. It will be necessary for us to make another agreement, but the object of His Majesty's Government is that all these irregular bands shall be disarmed altogether.

§47. Mr. Lipson asked the Prime Minister if there is now complete co-operation and accord between His Majesty's Government and the Governments of the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. with regard to the policy at present being pursued by His Majesty's Government in Greece.

§The Prime Minister (Mr. Churchill) The burden of attending to the troubles in Greece has fallen upon Great Britain, and we have not so far been able to discharge this task without criticism even here at home, which has added to our difficulties. The three great Powers are in entire agreement upon the general aims which bind our alliance and we have every need to keep in the closest association in this dangerous and momentous phase of the war.

§Mr. Lipson Does not my right hon. Friend agree that there is a danger to the implementing of the proposals of the

Dumbarton Oaks Conference, if certain Powers assign to themselves spheres of influence and other Powers are not brought into co-operation, even during the war, on these important matters?

§The Prime Minister That is a topic with which, obviously, I should not attempt to deal now.

§Mr. Shinwell After the answer which the right hon. Gentleman has given to the original Question, will he say whether there is, in fact, complete co-operation?

§The Prime Minister There is complete co-operation, but whether there is complete agreement on every aspect of this matter is another question altogether. I have not the slightest doubt that effective co-operation will go on, in all aspects of the war. We had a certain task thrown upon us, and we are discharging it to the best of our ability.

§Mr. Lipson Are His Majesty's Government taking steps to try to bring about greater co-operation?

§The Prime Minister I think it would certainly be a justifiable conclusion to form at this stage.

1754

§48. Mr. Lipson asked the Prime Minister what terms for an armistice have been offered to E.A.M.

§The Prime Minister This Question was to have been answered by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, together with Question No. 9 in the name of the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mr. Riley).

[To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs whether he is in a position to make any statement regarding the negotiations between the British authorities, the Greek Government and the representatives of the resistance organisations in Greece.]

§Mr. Lipson On a point of Order. When Question No. 9 was called, the hon. Member was not present.

§The Prime Minister It was arranged that my right hon. Friend should answer the Question. I now gather that the hon. Gentleman who put it down was unfortunately not in his place, and I had not prepared myself to answer that Question.

§Mr. Bellenger Let the Foreign Secretary answer it.

§The Prime Minister I would like to see what I am reading out lest I should make a mistake.

§Mr. Bellenger On a point of Order, Mr. Speaker. As it is customary, if a first Question is not called, for two Questions on the same subject to be answered on the subsequent Question, would it not be in Order for the Foreign Secretary now to answer Question No. 9?

§Mr. Speaker I am afraid that, as the first Question was not asked, it cannot, therefore, be answered.

§Sir Herbert Williams Surely a Minister cannot evade answering a Question on the Paper because it is linked up with another Question which has not been asked?

§Mr. Magnay If hon. Members miss their turn, let them wait.

§Mr. Lipson I was in my place when Question No. 9 was called.

§The Prime Minister On a point of Order, Mr. Speaker, Would it be in Order for my right hon. Friend to answer in my place?

§Mr. Speaker That is really slightly out of Order, but I am prepared to agree.

1755

§Mr. Eden May I answer the Question?

§Mr. Speaker Yes.

§Mr. Eden Full accounts have appeared in the Press of negotiations between General Scobie and the E.A.M. leaders for an armistice. At a meeting between General Scobie and a representative of E.A.M. Committee on 12th December, General Scobie stipulated that the E.L.A.S. forces must carry out his orders as troops placed under his command by the Caserta Agreement, These orders were and remain to evacuate Attica. In addition, orders must be issued to all E.L.A.S. supporters in Athens and the Piraeus to cease resistance and hand in their arms. General Scobie made it clear that as soon as these requirements were fulfilled he would inform Field-Marshal Alexander, who would initiate the necessary steps to put an end to the present turmoil in Greece and to restore to all Greeks, whatever their opinions, peaceful enjoyment of their democratic principles. In their reply, which was received on 16th December, the E.A.M. Committee agreed to withdraw the E.L.A.S. forces from Attica, but did not refer to General Scobie's other condition that their followers in Athens and Piraeus should cease resistance and hand in their arms. General Scobie has informed them that this condition must be fulfilled before an armistice can be granted.

§Mr. Lipson May I ask my right hon. Friend if his answer means that, if E.A.M. accept the terms of an armistice, General Alexander will accept responsibility for seeing that order is restored in Greece?

§Mr. Eden I think the position is quite clear that, if these terms are accepted, then we shall do our best to ensure for the Greek people a Government of their choice, and also a free election, and a decision in respect of their constitution.

§Mr. Riley Do I understand that negotiations are still proceeding; and will the right hon. Gentleman bear in mind the great anxiety in this country to see an armistice arranged at the earliest possible moment?

§Mr. Eden Everybody in this country, naturally, wants this situation brought to an end at the earliest possible moment. As regards the first part of the question, 1756 I do not know whether a further reply is forthcoming from E.A.M. I have only seen statements in the Press that that may be so.

§Mr. Shinwell If the Left Wing or so-called resistance movements do agree to the terms laid down by General Scobie, is there any assurance that they will be subsequently protected, in an unarmed condition, against Right Wing elements who may still be in possession of their arms? Is there any guarantee of that kind?

§Mr. Eden I can assure the hon. Gentleman that we will take every precaution in that respect. It is not our desire that as a result of this business there should be victimisation, either of one side or the other. Our desire is, that as soon as this is over, there should be an amnesty and that the Greeks should have a chance to live their own life again, in peace and harmony.

GREECE (SITUATION)

HC Deb 20 December 1944

vol 406 cc1858-909 1858

§ Motion made, and Question proposed, "That this House do now adjourn."—[Mr. James Stuart.]

§ 3.11 p.m

Mr. Arthur Greenwood (Wakefield) Before I enter on a discussion of the Greek situation, I would like to say that I think we are all fully aware of the serious turn of events on the Western front and that must be in the forefront of our minds all the time. I have never, so far as I know, on any occasion in this House since the declaration of war, spoken in any sense which I thought would interfere with its active prosecution towards the final victory, and one feels that now we are suffering—and we must admit it—a substantial and serious reverse. We shall go through critical days, and I can understand that these matters are giving grave anxiety to members of His Majesty's Government. But it is, of course, quite clear that now on the Western front, as indeed on other fronts, might is on our side. I submit, however, that this problem of Greece has its importance not from the military point of view so much as from the fact that when final power has exercised its force spiritual values will finally determine victory.

One must regard the situation in Greece as a test case. I am fully aware of all the difficulties that we have had in the past. I remember the heart-searchings there were in this House and outside in the country with regard to M. Darlan. I remember the heart-searchings there were about the Italian situation after liberation had begun. We are now in very considerable difficulties as regards the situation in Greece. I want to make full allowance for the Prime Minister's difficulties and the enormous strain, physical and intellectual, which rests upon him at this time. But I must say this, and I say it far more in sorrow than in anger—I am bound to say it, and I do so with a full sense of responsibility—that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has not handled this situation in the way in which it should have been handled. I am not taking any joy in saying this, but I feel it on my conscience to say it because I believe that my right hon. Friend's words have, in fact, done something to embitter the political situation over here.

When my right hon. Friend, the other morning, said that there was a division in the country on this issue, I felt myself, and I had better say it now, that there is no division in the country on this issue. Everybody deplores this situation. Everybody knows that it is a fantastic situation, a tragic situation, to have Greeks and Britons at each other's throats, and a terrible thing to have British soldiers having under orders to attack men with whom they have fought in the past. There is no difference of opinion. If there is a difference it is, and I regret to have to say it, due to the tone and the words used by my right hon. Friend a week last Friday. Again this week, if my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister had been 1860 a little more responsive and a little more generous in the words he used, I do not think there need have been any occasion for a special Debate this afternoon. I say that with the deepest regret. We have arrived at the situation where the Prime Minister comes down to the House and threatens us with a Vote of Censure. Really, on the eve of—I must not use the word "holiday" as I did this morning, but I would refer to it in this regard as a holiday—the Prime Minister should not come down as the schoolmaster prior to the Christmas holidays waving his birch in front of him instead of wishing all the boys a happy and merry Christmas.

This is no occasion for Votes of Censure. There is no challenge to the Government as a Government on this issue. There is great perturbation in the minds of millions of our people and of our Allies overseas with regard to the situation which has arisen in Greece. I have, during the past fortnight, given a good deal of time and thought to this problem. It was my duty a week ago to-day, at the annual conference of my party, to move a resolution on this issue, and it is on those lines that I would like to speak. I am not seeking to cast blame on anybody for past actions. I am anxious, as, indeed, everybody is, to find a way out of this

difficulty which will redound to the honour of Britain and Greece and cement the bonds of friendship which have already been laid. I find very little controversial in the resolution which I moved. I had a little hand in the drafting of it, and naturally I would be inclined to agree with it, but I submit that the House can regard it as really representing what, in my view, is the opinion of the people of this country: This conference deeply regrets the tragic situation which has arisen in Greece, and calls upon the British Government most urgently to take all necessary steps to facilitate an armistice without delay, and to secure the resumption of conversations between all sections of the people who have resisted the Fascist and Nazi invaders, with a view to the establishment of a provisional National Government which would proceed to a free and fair general election as soon as practicable in order that the will of the Greek people can be expressed. These are the operative words of the resolution. They march on from a difficult situation to its possible solution, and, as I gather, it is really the intention of the Government to pursue, broadly speaking, that line. Yesterday afternoon I attended 1861 a meeting of the National Council of Labour which, if I may say so in all humility and respect, is one of the most powerful bodies in this country, representing as it does the Labour Party, the Trades Union Congress and the Co-operative Movement, and there, unanimously, this resolution was endorsed. I speak on this issue, therefore, in the name of those three combined movements, which represent no inconsiderable proportion of the population of this country. I speak in advance of the General Election, and therefore I shall not offer figures of what "no inconsiderable proportion" means, but at least this was the considered opinion of the leaders of three great democratic movements.

If I understand the position, the Government intend more or less to proceed along these lines, but, as I gather from

statements in the Press, and I think my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House referred to the matter this morning, there is one difference. A demand has been made for certain people to lay down their arms. I really do submit that British honour and British dignity are at stake in this business and that we ought not to stand on the ordinary kind of rules and regulations. I am glad to think that, following very shortly the Debate we had 10 days or so ago, when my hon. Friend the Member for West Leicester (Mr. Nicolson) made a speech which I said I was sorry the Prime Minister did not have the advantage of hearing, and when he and others, including my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Mr. Cocks), made a suggestion about some Minister going out, the suggestion made in this House was adopted.

I believe this problem is not a military but a political problem. It will not be solved by forcible means or by a demand that arms shall be laid down before anybody talks. This is a supreme test of statesmanship, on which the future of our liberated countries will largely depend. This is not an isolated problem. We have had some discussions about Belgium. I am not going into that question again, but other territories will, in time, be liberated, and we are likely to have the same kind of problem, because political views have developed with amazing rapidity under the pressure of war. Old conflicts have been intensified. That is clearly the case in Greece. If, on each 1862 occasion when a nation is liberated or partially liberated, we are to be driven into the position of a sort of Gestapo, to keep underground forces whom it has been our glory to admire in the days when they were overrun and were resisting at very great peril to themselves—[An HON. MEMBER: "Poland."]—then Britain loses her good name in Europe.

I would say this: The name of this country has never stood higher in Europe than it does to-day. We have given them

great succour. We stood by them, at first alone, in their direst hours of trial. They looked to us for a certain measure of moral leadership. Surely it is the duty of His Majesty's Government, as it would be the wish of the people of this country, that some forces and His Majesty's political representatives should, in each land that is freed, use their influence for the fulfilment of those high aims for which this war is being fought. Now I would hope that my right hon. Friend would not stickle for the laying down of arms by one section of the people. I am not quite as afraid of E.A.M. as is the Prime Minister. As was pointed out a week last Friday, the Prime Minister tends to divide people into sheep and goats. I have never known quite which are the worse, the sheep or the goats. My right hon. Friend did try to convey the impression in the House that we were helping to support a righteous cause and that everybody who was in E.A.M. was a gangster. [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] I thought it was most unfortunate language.

It is not as easy as that. I have no doubt that E.A.M. consists of people—I think I have mentioned it—quite as respectable as the right hon. Baronet who speaks for the Liberal Party. If that is so, I cannot imagine E.A.M. being such a dangerous and revolutionary force. It may well be that there are disorderly influences inside that movement, but our problem is to stop the fight. When that is stopped the position can be dealt with. The British Government are now embarked upon a course from which they cannot escape. I am not challenging their motives in going into Greece at all. They went in for perfectly good motives, to feed the Greek people. They got involved in it, and now they cannot escape and they have to see it through. I think they have a great part to play in establishing an armistice. When the fight is stopped, 1863 things can march along to the time to which my right hon. Friend looked forward, I am

sure with complete sincerity, to the right of the Greek people freely and fairly to determine their own future.

The situation has become a little more complicated this week. I am not going to argue as between monarchy and republicanism, but a new situation has arisen this week because of the action taken by the King of the Hellenes. I think it is wrong for the British Government to use their influence until the Greek people can freely express their minds either one way or the other; but when the King of Greece takes action, as he does, I think it may be argued that it is the only Government they have got and the only King they have got. That might well be argued. I would say that the question of a regency is not new. I think I am right in saying that it was raised during the Lebanon discussions and it was certainly felt, not only by the Left Wing of Greece but by a very large proportion of the people in Greece, that this matter ought to be allowed to rest in abeyance without coming down on either side and that a regency was the best kind of caretaker for the existing situation.

The new demand for a regency does not arise, as I understand it, from His Majesty's Government, but spontaneously from the people in Greece at this time, who regard it as an essential element in some established, stabilised form of government. I submit that it is unfortunate that the King of Greece should have expressed great reluctance against the establishment of a regency which, so far as I understand, is generally agreed upon by the vast majority of the Greek people. I hope I have not spoken with bitterness on this issue. I do not feel any sense of bitterness about it, but I do feel a sense of very deep sorrow. I feel that it lies upon us to deal with this situation now, because unless we do, unless we are courageous enough to handle it firmly but in the interests of the

liberated people, we shall set a bad precedent for the days that are to come.

I can foresee that, in the new year, with the victory of our arms, we may have this situation arising over and over again, We have now arrived at a stage in the war at which I am prepared to forget the Darlan episode, I am prepared to forget 1864 Badoglio, but I could not forget Greece, not now. We have in a special way taken this responsibility upon ourselves, for purely humanitarian reasons in the first instance; we are involved in it, and I beg the Government, in the interests of the people of Greece, in the interests of their future, in the interests of our relations with the Greek people, in the interests of the honour of our people in the eyes of the world, to get rid of the shooting and get down to the making of the ballot rather than the use of the bullet.

Major Mott-Radclyffe (Windsor)

I rise for a few moments to intervene in this Debate. I do so with great diffidence, because my halting and ill-expressed phrases must indeed compare unfavourably with the speech of the right hon. Gentleman who has just sat down. I would only hope to convince the House that what I lack in eloquence I may perhaps be given credit for in sincerity. I saw the Greek nation rise as one man to repel the Italian invaders in the autumn of 1940, and I was privileged to serve with Greek troops in that campaign. No one who witnessed those events can have any doubt in their own mind as to the great qualities of the Greek nation, and it is to all of us a great tragedy that after these long years of bondage and incredible suffering, when at last liberation has come, Greek should be shooting Greek in the streets of Athens, and that British troops should be involved.

I feel that the best service which we in this House can render is to avoid being violently partisan on either side. It is frightfully easy to be pro-K.K.E. or pro-E.A.M. or pro-E.D.E.S., or any of the factions that make up political life in

Greece. I believe we should be "pro-the-Greek-nation-as-a-whole," with their welfare as our only goal. As I understand it the policy of His Majesty's Government is threefold. In the first place it is immediately to do everything possible to stop the shooting; secondly, to distribute such relief material as we can spare for Greece as quickly as possible, thereby creating stable conditions; and thirdly, to create conditions just as soon as we can which will permit of free elections at which the Greek people will be entirely free to choose whatever Government they want. Those aims seem to me to be both humanitarian and democratic.

I want to try to analyse just a few facts. I am not altogether happy in my mind that the E.A.M. movement, or at least the extremist element in it, is quite so patriotic and quite so democratic as is sometimes suggested. It is, I am afraid, an escapable fact that although E.L.A.S. forces carried out acts of great valour at intervals against the Germans in Greece, some proportion of their military effort as a guerilla force was directed instead, with the use of the weapons which we gave them for guerilla warfare against the Germans, to seizing power by very ruthless methods at the expense of those who disagreed with them politically, over large areas of Greece. And it is, I am afraid, an inescapable fact that some of those methods employed were against peaceful Greek people who had no violent political leanings one way or the other. The actions of E.A.M. were certainly as cruel as, possibly even more cruel than, those of the Metaxas police. I suspect that the extremist element of E.A.M. have pushed the more moderate elements further than they wish to go, and that when the Greek Government, containing six or seven E.A.M. Ministers, returned to Greece, those Ministers failed to face the music when it came to putting into actual force the terms of the Caserta agreement regarding the disbanding of all guerilla forces, to which the E.A.M. members, together with every other Member of the Greek Cabinet, agreed. These extremist elements, with some Germans in their midst, are now, by the most undemocratic and most Fascist of all methods, attempting to seize power by the use of the tommy gun and the hand

grenade. Would we be honouring our obligations to the Greeks if we were to give way to this threat?

I submit to the House that it is extremely dangerous to affix party labels that we understand in this country on to the political parties of other countries, that it causes a great deal of confusion, and that what are Left and Right, as normally understood in England, would not necessarily be Left and Right in Greece.

I also submit that we should be fair in our criticism. Some of the statements made in the Press and elsewhere have been somewhat less than fair to the Sacred Regiment and the Greek Mounted Brigade. I think I am correct in saying that the Greek Sacred Regiment was originally composed largely of officers who [1866](#) volunteered to revert to the ranks and to go back into battle as parachutists in the Western Desert. I think it is also a fact that the Greek Mountain Brigade is almost the last regular formation of the old Greek Army, that Army which throughout the winter of 1940 and 1941 held between 250,000 and 350,000 Italians on the mountains of Northern Greece and Albania. It was right and proper that they should wish to go back to Athens and take part in what was hoped would be a march of liberation. I find it very difficult to believe that some strange metamorphosis has overtaken them, and that those troops who have played such a gallant part in Libya, the Western Desert and Italy, some of whom are even now prepared to go back to Italy and continue fighting, would really be supporting the present Government if it was as reactionary as it is labelled.

I would beg this House, as the oldest and most democratic of all Parliamentary institutions, to stand firm on one point: that no Greek Government is set in power by the threat of force. We have got, I think, to the stage where there is a psychological deadlock on both sides. The extremists in E.A.M. are unwilling to withdraw because they are afraid of reprisals if they do; the more moderates on the other hand are extremely frightened of giving way, because they fear an E.A.M. reign of terror. I would beg my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary to do everything he possibly can to

convince both sides that when the shooting stops there must be no reprisals, on the one side or the other. I feel that in Greece it is a test case of the machinery of true democracy versus the threat of a Government by force. Democracy is a Greek word by origin: it is also the most important word in the English language; but neither in Greek nor in English does it mean that a Government which shoots its way into power is truly representative, when there is the alternative of free elections.

Sir Percy Harris (Bethnal Green, South West)

I congratulate the hon. and gallant Member for Windsor (Major Mott-Radclyffe) on the tone and temper that he has set for our discussion, and I hope that this Debate will follow in that spirit. I find myself very much in agreement with the speech of the right hon. Gentleman who speaks for my hon. Friends above the [1867](#)gangway. I have a vivid memory of the first week in September, just before we entered this war, when, as we shall never forget, the right hon. Gentleman exercised the opportunity to speak for the whole nation; and I felt all through his speech to-day that he was trying to live up to the very high standard he set on that occasion. I agree with him that this is not a military problem; it is a political problem, and, as he so wisely said, at a time when there is critical fighting on the other side of the Channel and the lives of thousands of our fellow-countrymen are at stake, we want to approach this burning issue—and it is a burning issue in the country—without too partisan an outlook. Believe me, the whole country is stirred by these incidents in Greece. It is not merely, as some people think, an agitation by the Left. All through the country, in the villages and in the towns, people who are not violently political have had their consciences stirred.

There are many reasons. First, there is the historic feeling about Greece, the home, as has been said, of experiments in self-government. We owe everything that we have to the political ideals and teachings of the philosophers of Greece. Therefore, it is natural for us to be moved when we see that country locked in a struggle apparently for its liberties. But there are other reasons. We were stirred in the early years

of the war by this gallant little country being the first of the small countries to put up a fight. Almost alone they held up the Italian Empire, defeated the Italians in battle, and would have destroyed them if it had not been for the attack in the rear by the Germans. There is real resentment, too, among the common people that their sons, who are conscripted, are being used, as they think, not to fight the Germans but to shoot down our Allies. They want a lot of proof that this policy that the Government have been compelled by circumstances, perhaps, to pursue, is justifiable. Next, it is suspected by many people—and we have to face up to the fact—that this is a direct attack on democracy. I was in Greece in 1936 and 1937, just when Metaxas established himself in power. All the walls of the cities were covered by unattractive posters, in imitation of the technique of Mussolini. Hoardings were made hideous by Metaxas aping the style and method of the Italian dictator. I was informed [1868](#) that all the leaders of every party were either exiled or in prison; in other words, the Constitution had been brought to a standstill. It was pointed out to me that the sinister part of it was that, only a year before, the King had been brought back, by a popular vote, to establish a monarchy on constitutional lines; and the feeling was that he had betrayed the Constitution. That very great feeling is understood in this country, and we have to face it.

I am sure there is a feeling, which may not be justified by the facts—a suspicion, at any rate—that the Government are playing the game of power politics, endeavouring to establish a sphere of influence. The Minister of Labour gave colour to that feeling in a speech which he made, by pointing out that the Mediterranean was of special interest to this country—[Interruption.] As I understood it, he meant that strategically the Mediterranean is of vital importance to our country. That is my interpretation. But many people feel that this is an attempt to establish a sphere of influence. This problem of law and order has constantly arisen since we started to bring relief to the occupied countries. It has happened in Italy. We faced it there, and with skill. It has happened in Belgium, it has

happened in France, and, of course, it has happened in Poland.

We are always talking about the United Nations. It is true that in the early part of the war we were standing alone. Now we have great and powerful Allies. I think that if we are to have a satisfactory understanding before the armistice, and after the armistice, these United Nations must prove themselves united and co-operative. I am informed that Russia was quite willing to hand over the responsibility for Greece to ourselves. I think that is the wrong policy, and that we should not be compelled to have the odium or unpleasantness of shouldering alone the responsibility of bringing order and peace to Greece.

§Mr. Petherick (Penryn and Falmouth)

Would the right hon. Gentleman agree that, in that case, the United Nations should be responsible for other countries overrun by the Allied Armies, such as Poland and Rumania?

§Sir P. Harris

I quite agree with my hon. Friend. I think the real danger at [1869](#)the present time is that all the Allies are manoeuvring for position and sowing the seeds of future wars, not only in the Balkans, but in the Baltic also. We had a Committee for trying to work out machinery for a post-war organisation which met at Dumbarton Oaks. Of course, it is quite impracticable for it to start work under present conditions, but I plead that the right way to settle the immediate future of all the occupied countries when they are released is by establishing some machinery of the kind foreshadowed in the Dumbarton Oaks scheme.

There is a body called the European Council, representing ourselves, Russia, the United States and France. It was set up in order to share the responsibility for peaceful organisation in Europe as the nations are released. I want to know what has happened to the European Council. Is it fast asleep or is it functioning? Has it considered the problem of Greece, the problem of Poland, the problem of Belgium and

the problem of any other country that is likely to be released in the near future? I say it is a mistake and an unwise policy to take the whole responsibility.

The hon. Gentleman who spoke last pleaded the urgent necessity of bringing this civil war to an end. We are all conscious of the difficulties. I cannot see why our Allies should not be required to share the responsibility. We have a lot of critics on the other side of the Atlantic and they are very free in their criticism. They must be asked to share the responsibilities, and I do not see why we should not also have the advantage of the wisdom and experience of the French; but I do not pursue that. The longer this trouble is prolonged, the more bitter will be the feelings of the Greek people. There will be the danger of turning loyal friends into bitter enemies. I want to see a settlement. I agree with my right hon. Friend; I want to see an armistice. Do not let us be too particular about the terms. The Greeks, both E.A.M. and E.L.A.S.—we do not know which is which, though one is political and the other military—have proved, in the last two years, that they have been able to hold up the whole of the great German organisation with very little outside assistance. If we are prepared to challenge that force, they could hold up the civil settlement of Greece for a long time, and that is the last thing we want.

The Greek Patriarch is ready, we understand, to act as Regent. We have, more or less, something of the kind in Italy. I cannot believe that the Greek King will allow himself to be used to hold up a settlement of that kind. The Foreign Secretary, with whose speech, on the last occasion when we debated this subject, I agreed so much, because it was a wise speech, said that a message should go out from this House—

[§Mr. A. Bevan \(Ebbw Vale\)](#)

A reactionary speech.

[§Sir P. Harris](#)

—a message of profound sympathy with the Greek people and of a desire for a peaceful settlement. I want a message again to go out, but I want that message to be accompanied by a constructive policy and proposals to show that this great and powerful nation is not prepared to stand on its dignity, but is prepared to discuss with the Greek people a settlement to bring peace to this most sorely tried nation.

§3.56 p.m.

§Wing-Commander Roland Robinson (Blackpool)

Some 10 days ago, on a miserable wet evening in Italy, I was sitting in a tent with a group of British and American officers. On turning on the radio to listen to the B.B.C. news we heard a report of a heated Debate in the House, in which complaint was made that the British Government and the British Army were denying freedom and liberty to the people of Greece. One of my friends turned to me and said, "I wonder what is happening to the people at home when they talk like that?" The view was freely expressed, "What a good thing it would be if some hon. and right hon. Gentlemen could get out of this House to see some of the practical realities." [Interruption.] With that experience, many of their views would be radically changed.

§Mr. J. J. Davidson (Glasgow, Maryhill)

May I ask my hon. and gallant Friend if, at that discussion, ordinary privates and lance-corporals were present?

§Wing-Commander Robinson

As I said, there were British and American officers present. On the other hand, those of us who have been in the field have taken care that we know what the ordinary soldier is thinking. In general, it is the [1871](#) experience of all our Forces that nowhere do the British Forces in the field deny liberty, but rather that they are its champions wherever they go, against tyranny and against aggression. The immediate reaction of nearly everyone there was the feeling how dangerous it was that statements, perhaps ill-founded

or unconsidered, about British Government policy should go out as facts to the whole of the world, for there is a real tendency, led on by many statements which have been made, to destroy some of the good will and mutual trust which have been built up among our Allies. Some statements about the British Government's policy, when repeated in America, may well tend to alienate our American friends, and sow discord and distrust among our Russian Allies. Above all, in building this impression of apparent disunity, we are giving our enemies the opportunity of creating propaganda which would indicate that there is dissension in the Allied camp and cause the Germans to foster the hope that, if they hang on long enough, we may quarrel among ourselves.

The conversation that evening was the more interesting because some of us had been to Greece and had been privileged to arrive there in time to see the glorious scenes which took place round the time of the liberation of Athens. It was, indeed, a great inspiration. Freedom and liberty are things which can easily be talked about by politicians but one never realises how much liberty means until it is lost. Apart from their behaviour generally, the people of Athens had a look in their eyes and one saw perhaps for the first time how much liberty can mean to an oppressed people. The Greeks were a grand people.

[§Mr. Bevan](#)

The hon. and gallant Gentleman has referred to his presence in Italy and in Greece. Would he be good enough to tell us in what capacity he was in both places?

[§Wing-Commander Robinson](#)

As a serving officer in the Royal Air Force. The city of Athens, when we went in, was decked out with Greek and with British flags. Across the streets people had strung large banners which said, "Welcome to our Liberators." I admired their guts because perhaps for the first time in his- [1872](#)tory, a people had not waited until the Germans had gone out before they put up their flags and banners but

had put them up for the Germans to see, so that they marched out underneath banners welcoming their liberators of Greece. There was no doubt, too, about the people's feelings for the British Army. Everywhere one saw signs, which said, "Salute to Glorious England." One of them delighted me particularly because it showed a keen sense of humour. It said, "Salute to Glorious England, the second country of Byron." We watched a small group of Tommies marching in through the streets. They were tired, dusty and weary, but wherever our ordinary soldiers went the people of Greece stopped in the streets and stopped in their work to clap them and to indicate the very warmth of the welcome they had for them. Some detachments from the Greek Navy marched in, and the people lined the streets to cheer and welcome them home. It was touching from time to time, when somebody broke out of the group and embraced a friend who had not been seen for years. They told us that in the harbour had come "an old Greek ship" and that was the cause of so much feeling. It was a ship they had got from the British some years ago, perhaps not in very good fighting trim, but always that ship remained free and carried with it the spirit of Greece. It was the spirit of Greece.

In my spare time I tried to find out what the Greek people were thinking. I did not talk to any Greek politicians; I did not meet any Greek political leaders. I was more concerned with the ordinary man in the street and with what he wanted and what he thought. It was perfectly easy. All we had to do was to walk down any street and stop for a minute and we were instantly surrounded by a group of people. There was always a fair number of them who could talk English. They freely came forward and told their stories of oppression under the Germans and the Bulgarians. They told us of the acute starvation that they had been through and they used that illustration to tell us that the Germans had done their best to use starvation as a weapon to set Greek against Greek. They blamed many of their acute political dissensions to that. The Germans had deliberately fostered this disunity among them. They hoped things would be a little better. Tribute was paid to the work that had been

done in helping to get rid of the starvation through the International Red Cross, but there was a great deal more that could be done. They told us of their sorrow and distress, but always, every man said the same thing, "We have kept alive. We have kept our faith during these last three years because we always knew that the British Tommy would come back." They paid a great tribute to the work we had done in the early days in Greece. They had lived for our return. We ourselves felt that. We knew why we were back. I asked about Greek politics. I knew that there had been dissension and almost civil war at times during the past year. I knew that guns we had supplied to the Greeks had been turned upon other Greeks. The general view of the man in the street was that, "Now you are back we hope and pray that we may get unity. We have got a Greek Government to which all political parties have promised their adherence and we feel that you will help to keep the situation as it should be."

From the military point of view the operation in Greece was not a major operation, but it will fulfil its part in harassing our enemy wherever he is. But behind all that there was the main task, to bring food and supplies to people who needed them probably more than anyone in Europe and to bring order out of chaos to men who had suffered. Those things are what the common man in Greece wants. It must be clear that this state of order and of supplies coming in cannot be if armed bands are roaming the country and are allowed to seek to impose their will to settle whatever differences they may have by force. When an individual is given a gun there is inevitably trouble. How oft the sight of means to do ill deeds, Makes ill deeds done! It was obviously right that the Greek Government, which had the pledged support of all parties and the British military authorities, to whom all the partisans had promised obedience, should say to the Greek parties and to individuals, "Hand in your arms." It would seem that, while our Armies are the controlling factor in any country, we are the custodians of the liberty of the freedom of the people. When we go in we promise to the people freedom of choice of their own Government and of their rulers. We do not care

whether the Government is to come from the Right or from the Left, or whether they want a monarchy or a republic. It is for the ballot box to decide and, when we are in a position as custodians, are we to allow this freedom to be stolen from the people by armed bands? We have responsibilities and we must honour them. We do not wish to use force and we hate the thought that one Greek or one British soldier should be killed by our orders, but we must stay in Greece and we must do our best to ensure peace and order.

There can be only one reason for the use of force by E.A.M. or, indeed, by any party—and my remarks would apply equally to all—and that is that they use force because they have no faith that the people of Greece would back them through the ballot box. If the cause is good, then surely it can always be submitted, with safety, to the people. The Greek people have suffered much. Greek forces have fought gallantly. Let us see that the common man of Greece does not lose his newly-won freedom. Let us direct our policy to work for the end of the German-fostered dissension. Let us urge the Greek parties to surrender their arms and to settle their differences around the conference table and not by the arbitrament of force. Let us do this, and let us give such leadership that once again the gallant people of Greece may achieve unity, freedom and dignity.

§4.11 p.m.

[§Mr. A. Bevan \(Ebbw Vale\)](#)

The speech to which we have just listened has been confirmed and given added weight in our minds since it was given by the personal witness of some of the events which have occurred in the last few weeks, but I would remind my hon. and gallant Friend that there are other witnesses from Greece, many of them as gallant as himself, many of them as distinguished as himself, who wholly disagree with that speech. There is, however, one thing about which they do agree. All to whom I have spoken, and I have spoken to a good many in the last fortnight, are agreed upon one thing, that the British naval, army and air forces, though they hate being out of this country, would rather be in Greece than in

any other foreign country in the world. So warm, so hospitable, and so overjoyed were the Greeks when we landed there, that all our people paid universal tribute to the hospitality and the warmth of their welcome. I was told [1875](#) by an officer the other day that the diaries of all our men—not only officers but privates as well—were full of engagements with the Greeks all over the place, so pleased were they to see us.

But the scene has changed. It has changed fundamentally in the course of the last two or three weeks. Where we landed as liberators, we look like staying as tyrants. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] I did not say we were staying, I said we looked like staying as tyrants, in the eyes of many Greeks. I do not know whether hon. Members are aware of it, but we are meeting this evening under the shadow of a threat which General Scobie has distributed by leaflet over Athens to-day. We have been pouring in, during the last fortnight, heavy reinforcements that ought to have been used against the Germans, but we are pouring them into Greece. General Scobie has declared by leaflet that unless E.A.M. guns cease firing by nine o'clock to-morrow morning, every weapon that we have at our disposal—and he itemises them: bombers, rockets, guns, tanks, mines—will be loosed upon Athens and environs. [An HON. MEMBER: "Blow up the Parthenon?"] That is the latest message of General Scobie to the people of Athens. If those threats are carried out, then we in this House shall be put in a most shameful situation. When the Germans were fighting in Greece we issued an ultimatum: we said that if Athens was bombed, we would bomb Rome. The Germans did not bomb Athens, but we have bombed Athens. A statement has appeared in the British Press that the Acropolis did not take much damage from the recent bombing by British planes. Do not hon. Members on the other side of the House realise that for British bombers and British airmen to be used in bombing Athens—taking sides in a political quarrel in Greece—brings the whole of the British nation to humiliation and shame?

My hon. and gallant Friend referred just now to the statements made elsewhere about speeches in this House. It

is not necessary to make speeches in this House at all. Has he read the American Press? Has he read the French Press? Has he read some parts of the Russian Press? It is not necessary for us to make speeches here in order to show our detestation of what we are doing in Greece. The Press of the whole free world—

1876

§Wing-Commander Robinson

I feel sure the hon. Gentleman will allow me to answer his question. I do read the French Press, and the American Press, whenever I can, but an illustration of my point is well made by the hon. Member's own statement. Obviously, neither he nor I have seen the leaflet dropped on Athens this morning, but he gives it as fact that we have said we will bomb Athens until the job is done.

§Mr. Bevan

Yes, certainly.

§Wing-Commander Robinson

I have not seen it, but I would be perfectly certain that it does not say we would destroy Athens but that certain groups of people would be attacked. There is a difference.

§Mr. Bevan

I was saying what I have said with a great sense of responsibility. I have confirmed it this afternoon [Laughter.] I would like hon. Members on that side of the House to realise this, that it is for them to disprove what we say. Unfortunately for them, as was shown yesterday in the Prime Minister's speech, our statements are usually correct but unfortunately they do not catch up with the lies from the other side until a fortnight or three weeks afterwards. [HON. MEMBERS: "Order."] That happened yesterday over Belgium. The Prime Minister came down a little over a week ago and painted a picture about Brussels which was a complete distortion of the reality. I interrupted the right

hon. Gentleman, and what was his reply? That my statement could not have been a more concise statement of the opposite of the truth. [An HON. MEMBER: "Loud Tory laughter."] Yes, loud Tory laughter from the little boys opposite. What are the facts? The facts are that the Prime Minister distorted the whole situation either willingly or unwillingly—or rather, knowingly or unknowingly. Now I say that the information we have from the most reputable sources is that General Scobie has issued an ultimatum, and that ultimatum is that the whole strength of the Allied Forces will be loosed upon Athens and the environs unless the enemy ceases to fire by nine o'clock to-morrow morning. Now, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, when he comes to reply, can confirm it or otherwise. That is my information, and my information comes from international sources. [An HON. MEMBER: "Reuters."] Yes, it is [1877](#)Reuters; I think it is on the tape now, and it is "hard" news, as the journalists say—in other words, it has been confirmed by cross-checking. Are we prepared to go home for the Christmas Recess and allow this strife in Greece to be continued in such terms as that?

We are meeting not only under the shadow of the Grecian situation, we are also meeting under the shadow of a German offensive in France. The war with Germany is not yet over. This offensive is as much a political offensive as a military one. It is as much designed to split the Allies as it is to achieve an immediate military result. I ask my hon. Friends opposite, Do they think that they are contributing to the spiritual consolidation of the alliance in these circumstances by sending British Armed Forces to shoot down Greeks at the present time? Is it not obvious to them that the adventure into which they have been led in Greece is an adventure which they are following to the detriment of the whole of the Allied objective against Germany? They say, "We were there, and we are obliged to discharge our obligations."

What are our obligations? My hon. and gallant Friend, like a good many others before him, has been pretending that we are endeavouring to suppress an attempt by E.A.M. at

dictatorship. There is not the slightest shadow of evidence of that. On the contrary, all the evidence is against it. E.A.M. would never have succeeded if they had been so bungling as they appear to be, if that were true. If they wanted to achieve the military coup d'état in Athens they could have done it long before we landed. But the Germans had practically cleared out. We have not done much fighting against the Germans in Greece during the past year because the German garrisons had gone, and if E.A.M. had wanted to achieve a military coup d' état they would have done it long before we landed. It is obvious that E.A.M. represents the vast majority of the Greek people. Why should a majority take part in a Government in which they had a minority of seats if they wanted to achieve a military coup d' état? According to all the evidence at our disposal, E.A.M. have been striving all the while to open negotiations with the British. All the evidence supports that. Is that the behaviour of a body attempting to achieve government by military force? There is no evidence whatsoever that this was a military coup d' état, any more than was the evidence in Brussels when partisans, consisting of two lorry-loads of soldiers, were trying to achieve a military coup d'état there.

What are the facts? The Foreign Secretary made a very temperate speech recently. It would have been so much better if his had been the only speech from the Government side that day. In spite of his speech being temperate, I am bound to tell him that it did not accord with the actions of the Government. The Government pursued their objectives behind the obscurantism of the right hon. Gentleman's speech. The whole history of the Greek affair goes far beyond the formation of Papandreou's Government. You cannot start the business there. If hon. Members opposite would do us the honour of wanting to understand what happened they might read the speeches we have been making on this side of the House during the last two years about the Greek situation.

Hon. Members opposite must ask themselves this question: Why is it that the Greek people do not accept the word of the British Government that their sole concern is the

establishment of a democratic Government in Greece? Will they answer that? Why do not E.L.A.S. lay down their arms and accept the assurances of the Foreign Secretary? I will tell him. It is because the Greeks do not trust the British Government, because the British Government have been intriguing for more than two years to get King George of Greece back on to the Greek Throne.

§Mr. Eden indicated dissent.

§Mr. Bevan

The right hon. Gentleman shakes his head, but if there was time we could produce the proof of this. Will he answer this question: Will he give an assurance to this House that the British Government favour the establishment of a Regency in Athens at the present time? Further, will he give an assurance that King George of Greece is not to be allowed facilities to intrigue with the Greek Ministers from the Clarendon Hotel in London? Will King George be cut off from communication with Greece at the present time? [HON. MEMBERS: "Why?"] Well, why not? Why should British soldiers lose their lives in Athens [1879](#) in order to back up the intrigues of King George of Greece? Hon. Members on the other side of the House must face the realities, not run away from them. I believe that the right solution of this difficulty is for E.L.A.S. to lay down their arms, along with the Sacred Battalion and the Mountain Brigade. I believe that the British Government should become the real custodian of the restoration of Greek democracy. In order to convince the Greeks that we are sincere in that we have to take certain steps. The first step we have to take is to disarm both sides, and the second is to agree to the establishment of a Regency. If King George is as patriotically a Greek as the Foreign Minister pretends he is, he would save his country this agony by agreeing to the establishment of a Regency.

All we know is this, that with the support of the British Government King George is bringing pressure to bear upon his Ministers in Greece to reject a Regency. If the right hon. Gentleman says that this is untrue then we shall be very

glad to hear it, because what we want to hear from him is that the British Government will use their prestige in Greece for the purpose of establishing a Regency. What we want from the British Government is a rejection of the immediate claims of King George of Greece to the restoration of the Greek Throne. The right hon. Gentleman says, "We are in favour of holding a plebiscite when the war is over," but the Greeks do not trust us and the reason is because we favoured the Greek Government after the overthrow of a democracy in 1936. We were on good terms with the Metaxas dictatorship in Greece before the war broke out. Is it, therefore, reasonable to ask the Greek people to believe in our intentions at the present time? I suggest that the British Government, in addition to making themselves the custodian for the restoration of the Greek democracy, ought to ask the American Government to associate themselves in that guarantee to the Greek people. [An HON. MEMBER: "Why not Russia?"] Why not Russia, although I can see—and hon. Members opposite will be perfectly entitled to point it out—that in these circumstances that may produce additional complications. But if it is necessary to end hostilities in Greece, and reassure the Greek people in their fears, why should [1880](#) not America and Great Britain jointly guarantee to the Greek people that when hostilities are over, after the armed bands on both sides have been disarmed, plebiscites will be held to allow the Greek people to decide their own form of government in their own way? Is not that a statesmanlike thing to do in present circumstances? It would be a far better thing to do than to allow ourselves to be dragged further into this squabble.

I ask hon. Members on the other side of the House—and I am going, to say something which is grave, although I am not saying it for the purpose of being an alarmist—to realise that large numbers of men in this country enlisted in the British Forces to fight the Nazis. I have some friends in the Middle East. If they are ordered to fire on the Greeks who may believe, rightly or wrongly, that they are fighting for their own forms of government, those friends of mine, and friends of Members on all sides of the House, will have a very painful choice to make, either to disobey orders or to

carry on a war that they did not enlist to fight. Ought Englishmen to be put into that position at present? Furthermore, the hon. Member did not tell us how much the Greek people resent Ghurkas being used against them. [HON. MEMBERS: "What is wrong with that?"] I do not on general grounds object to the use of black troops. But the reason why they are resented is that the Greeks object as much to being dragooned by Ghurka troops as the Spaniards did to being dragooned by Moors, and as the English would too. The hon. Member knows that the reason why Ghurkas are used in Greece is that they are a politically backward people.

§Mr. Eden

There is one point of fact on which I must correct the hon. Member. I think he would agree that it is a fact that an overwhelming proportion of the troops of the British Army in Greece at the moment are white troops?

§Mr. Bevan

That is true at the moment, but it is true that at the beginning a very considerable proportion were Ghurkas. It is perfectly true that, as we pour more troops in, the greater proportion of our troops are white.

§Mr. Molson (The High Peak)

What was the point of the hon. Member's offensive remark about the Ghurkas being used because they were politically backward?

§Mr. Bevan

The point of the remark was that the Greek people resent their presence.

§Mr. Quintin Hogg (Oxford)

It was said in the hearing of the House. Let us get it absolutely clear and on record. The hon. Member asserted that the reason why our gallant Indian troops were used

was that they were politically backward. That is now proved wrong and the hon. Member refuses to withdraw it.

§Mr. Bevan

What is proved right is that we used Ghurka troops in Greece. [An HON. MEMBER: "That is not what you said."] It is exactly what I said. The right hon. Gentleman is so heated that he cannot even remember.

§Mr. Hogg

It is in the recollection of the House. The hon. Member said the Government were inspired, in sending these troops, by a certain motive. That is proved false and he has not the decency to withdraw it, and says that he did not say it.

§Mr. Bevan

I do not understand why I should give way in order to hear that. The Foreign Secretary has not denied the presence of Ghurkas. What he has said, perfectly properly, is that the overwhelming majority of Allied troops in Greece are white, and I said there was a larger proportion of Ghurka troops at the beginning. I said further—and this surely is obvious—that the use of Ghurkas is deeply resented by the Greek people.

§Mr. Hogg

On a point of Order. Is there any means whatever of being able to ascertain now what it is that the hon. Member said, which he now says he did not say?

§Mr. Bevan

I really think the hon. Member is abusing my courtesy. He will see in HANSARD to-morrow which of us is correct.

§Major Sir Derrick Gunston (Thornbury)

If the hon. Member does not correct it meanwhile.

§Mr. Bevan

That is an offensive remark and I ask the hon. and gallant Gentleman to withdraw it.

1882

§Mr. Deputy-Speaker (Major Milner)

I did not hear the remark. But may I point out that whatever is said is in the hearing of the House and the House must be the judge?

§Mr. Bevan

I dare the consequences of my own indiscretions, which is more than the hon. Member does. I wish to end what I have to say here. My right hon. Friend who opened the Debate spoke in very moderate terms and said that we do not desire to bring down or end the Coalition Government on this issue, but hon. Members opposite must not put too great a strain upon us, because, if they wish to do these things, they must carry the responsibility for doing them themselves. Our participation in these policies has gone as far as some of us will allow and, when we come back after the Christmas Recess, if the fighting has gone on, if we use our Forces any further for the subjugation of the Greek people, and if the right hon. Gentleman rejects the friendly advice offered by my right hon. Friend, then if the Labour Party itself does not put down a Vote of Censure on the Government, some of us will, so as to make it clear to the country that, if these policies are going to be continued against the people of Greece, they are the policies of the Tories alone and not the policies of Socialist Members.

§4.39 p.m.

§Lieut.-Colonel Wise (Smethwick)

I think the House may well be grateful to the hon. Member for Ebbw Vale (Mr. A. Bevan). When I first came in and listened to the right hon. Gentleman the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Greenwood) making his extremely moderate

speech I rather felt that there seemed to be really little issue between the two sides of the House. When I further listened to the right hon. Baronet who leads the Liberal Party, I became even more convinced. He was following the traditional Liberal attitude in these days: first of all, agree with everyone; secondly, cover them with as much soft soap as possible; and, thirdly, if possible, run away from any British interest. That is a sad degeneration since the days when the Liberal Party had to be restrained by its coat tails from taking too forward a policy in the foreign affairs of the country. But the hon. Member for Ebbw Vale has reintroduced that heat which many of us on this side may well welcome, because [1883](#) it is an old cliché that thunderstorms clear the air.

I should like to examine some of the things the hon. Member has said. His picture of the situation in Greece was gloomy and his solution was so self-contradictory that I am surprised that a debater of his experience produced it. What did he say? He said, first, that we must disarm both sides. In other words, the Government must lay down its arms, E.A.M. must lay down its arms, and, the most outrageous suggestion of all, the regular Army must lay down its arms. To suggest that a regular Army that has fought from the opening of the war against Italy with success and glory on all fields should be asked to go through the formality of laying down its arms now, when they have got back in glory to their own country, is a suggestion outrageous to their honour and impracticable in fact.

§Mr. A. Bevan

My hon. and gallant Friend may disagree with me, but that is certainly not self-contradictory.

§Lieut.-Colonel Wise

I am coming on to the contradictory bits in a moment. This is merely a slight diversion on maintaining the very proper honour of a military force. A force which refused to lay down its arms to the Italians and Germans should certainly not be asked to lay down its arms now to please E.A.M. I will come

to the contradictory point. Having said that we must disarm everybody in Greece, the hon. Member implied that the only force available for maintaining law and order must be the British Army. A temporarily disarmed country without even an armed policeman will hardly be the people to maintain internal order, particularly in the state of chaos that exists in Greece to-day. In other words, the hon. Member suggests that having disarmed everybody we must assume full responsibility for the preservation of law and order, and then, with a terrific flourish of trumpets, he says that nobody trusts the British in Greece anyway. It does not make sense anywhere.

What is actually the real policy in Greece? There is a short-term policy which is practicable. That is to see that order, decent government and some form of livelihood are restored to that unfortunate people as soon as possible.

During [1884](#) the days when the Germans were in full occupation of Greece there were frequently in this House considerable voices raised, and raised justly, that we should lift the blockade and send food to Greece, even though it might help the Germans. Now that the Germans are gone and food to Greece can be sent in full, what is stopping it from reaching the population? The fact that E.A.M. will not allow the ships to be unloaded. I submit that a party which is prepared to starve its own people in order to enforce a political object is not a party which can be regarded with any great degree of confidence on any side. That is the practical point. We have to feed the population of Greece, and it looks as if at the moment we shall have to use force of arms to do it. Nobody would deny that it is a right and proper use of British arms. If we must carry food on the end of our bayonets to the starving Greeks, it is a very good use for bayonets, for it is getting food to the people who badly need it.

The long-term problem of Greece is a much more complicated one. Greece has, unfortunately, always been divided by factions. From the very earliest days there has been in all Greek cities a party within the city gates which was more ready to treat with the enemy than its own side.

The first axiom of the most famous classical besieger of cities was not how to erect tortoises and catapults but how to sit down outside the gates and wait for your friends inside the city to open them to you. That unfortunate doctrine has persisted throughout Greek politics. Being the nation in which politics took birth, they probably regard them more seriously than even we do here, and they are prepared to impose their political ideals above the general welfare of their country. That is the long-term problem of Greece. It is all very well to say that Greece is suffering from the dictatorship of General Metaxas and because we supported the Government of General Metaxas. But it was the Greece of General Metaxas which fought the Italians and beat them. It was the Greece of General Metaxas which went on with the war and continued fighting by our side and which received the support of its own people. During the whole of the time the Germans were in full occupation one heard a lot about these heroic—and in some cases they were heroic—forces of E.L.A.S. which fought on our side. I have not heard any Member yet mention that there were a lot of people who were not in E.L.A.S. who fought on our side, sometimes under continuous sniping from E.L.A.S. itself, and that the security battalions which we now have quite rightly disbanded because their needs, we hope, will soon be over, were largely formed for the purpose of protecting the villages from the depredations of the armed forces.

§Mr. A. Bevan

That allegation is continually being made and was repeated by the Prime Minister last week. How are irregular forces going to maintain themselves when they are cut off from communication with the rest of the world except by foraging in their own areas, as irregular forces are doing in Yugoslavia?

§Lieut.-Colonel Wise

I am perfectly ready to agree with the hon. Member's description of his friends' activities during the campaign in Greece, and one can hardly blame their own people for raising the security battalions to protect what small property

they had left. I find it satisfactory that the hon. Member and I have reached such a measure of agreement on the activities of some of the guerilla forces, but I would point out to him that, although his friends, according to him, did this foraging there is, as far as I know, no assertion that villages had to be protected from other forces of Greek guerillas and their military exercises. These other forces are still in Greece and still, behaving reasonably an example which might well be followed by those people who are at the moment committing considerable depredations in Greece and are fighting against our troops.

§Mr. Vernon Bartlett (Bridgwater)

Just to clear up a misunderstanding, may I ask the hon. and gallant Gentleman, if in fact nearly all the E.L.A.S. troops are the sort of bandits he suggests, how he explains that there is a considerable war going on in Athens at the present time?

§Lieut.-Colonel Wise

I do not see how the question whether they are bandits or not prevents them fighting a civil war in Athens.

§Mr. Bartlett

They must have the support of the vast mass of the people.

§Lieut.-Colonel Wise

An interruption of that sort is too juvenile for words. The 1886 hon. Member should return to a more gullible public on the air.

§Mr. Cocks (Broxtowe)

If what the hon. and gallant Member says is true, will he explain why we still have a British Military Mission at the E.L.A.S. military headquarters?

§Lieut.-Colonel Wise

I imagine that it is for the best possible reasons and I take my hat off to those extremely brave men. I should like to offer one or two observations, going rather further back in this matter. One of the remarks made by the right hon. Member for Wakefield—I made a note of it—was that we were faced in Greece not with a military problem but with a political one. That is not strictly true. It is British soldiers and not British politicians who are being shot at at the moment. It is a war in the Balkans and not a debate which is going on. We are responsible for pressing forward, as our contribution to the war in the Balkans, on the heels of the retreating Germans. We are responsible for rallying all the forces there are in Greece who are prepared to continue, and are capable of continuing, the war, and to carry on the pursuit of those Germans, in order that we may drive them into the net which is being formed by the Russian advance in the East and North. That is a military and not a political problem.

I want to urge that the first and paramount consideration which must be in the mind of the Government to-day is, What does the military situation demand? Whatever political aspect there may be to these problems must wait for some more reasonable time to be fought out. Nobody disagrees that ultimately Greece must have its own form of government, and nobody presumably disagrees that some form of government must now be established which must maintain our military communications in Greece. If the existing Greek Government can do it, well and good, with our assistance; if they cannot, it looks very much as though His Majesty's Government must be forced to say, "All right, we will do it ourselves." The immediate military needs require military government, unless the various parties in Greece are prepared to reach a proper accommodation.

The most important remark of the right hon. Member for Wakefield, which I again noted, was that we must find some solution which would redound to British [1887](#) honour. That is a sentiment which can be warmly endorsed on all sides of the House. There may be some difference of opinion about what constitutes British honour, but I do not believe there

can be a very wide doubt. The first solution which does not redound to British honour would be any symptom of weakness now. Long ago, a great Roman, besieged by rebels, which E.A.M. are, was invited to come to a compromise in order that he might evacuate his forces. He replied: "The Romans never negotiate with enemies in arms." That I regard as a very reasonable motto for General Scobie's own troops.

§Mr. Cocks

Also for E.L.A.S. troops. Why should the Greeks lay down their arms? The Earl of Chatham said, during the War of Independence, that if he was an American, as he was an Englishman, he would "never surrender—never, never." I would say the same if I were a Greek.

§Lieut.-Colonel Wise

What the hon. Member might do if he were a Greek—I wish he were—is entirely his own business. I feel that his orations on the steps of the Acropolis, even without a pebble in his mouth, would be as distinguished as those of Demosthenes. A negotiation with people who have taken up arms against us before they have laid down those arms would not redound to British honour, nor would redound—
[Laughter]. The hon. Member for South Ayrshire (Mr. Sloan) laughs loudly. He is undoubtedly a special custodian of British honour.

§Mr. Pritt (Hammersmith, North)

He is better than the hon. and gallant Member, anyway.

§Lieut.-Colonel Wise

The hon. and learned Member is a custodian of the honour of any country but his own.

§Mr. Pritt

I accept that with gratitude from a gentleman who was for so long a most distinguished supporter of Hitler and Franco.

[§Lieut.-Colonel Wise](#)

The hon. and learned Member has fallen back on the first rule of his profession—the least creditable part of his profession—"When in doubt, abuse the other side's attorney."

§Mr. Pritt rose—

[1888](#)

[§Mr. Deputy-Speaker](#)

The Debate had better proceed without any further of these exchanges.

[§Lieut.-Colonel Wise](#)

The Government are at the moment pursuing the only course which they can pursue. They must insist upon the authority of the British Forces being respected. Whether or not the Greeks can reach a compromise themselves is for them to decide, if some means of bringing the various political parties together can be found. We did, at one time, succeed in bringing them together and got an agreement which was signed by all parties, but unfortunately the E.A.M. Ministers walked out after they had signed it. That makes matters difficult for the future. Our military security must in no sense be imperilled. Our pressure on the Germans must be continued by all means and our Imperial lines of communication must be maintained. We must do it with whatever forces we are able to spare. That is the only message which any British Government can send to all those of its officers who are entrusted with the job in the Aegean to-day.

§4.57 p.m.

[§Mr. Vernon Bartlett \(Bridgwater\)](#)

Perhaps the hon. Gentleman who has just sat down will forgive me if I do not follow him very much, because I have not sufficient respect for his political past to want to argue with him. I have had the good fortune in the last two or

three months to visit four countries in Europe. I hope no hon. Member will be so unsporting as to remind the Home Secretary of that fact. In all those countries I found exactly the same symptom, which I think goes a long way to explain what is happening in Greece and elsewhere. It is for that reason that I propose to follow my right hon. Friend who opened the Debate, and to try to deal with wider issues than the Greek campaign itself.

In the three countries which have been liberated or partly liberated, Holland, Belgium and France, and in the fourth country, which is Spain, I found very much the same symptoms at work. I would develop the illustration in regard to Spain if I were not afraid of taking up too much of the time of the House. The factor which is at work is that all of us have under-estimated the extent to which the nationals of those countries who went into exile have got out of touch with the resistance movements inside their countries. I spoke of Spain because, to some extent, the same sort of feeling exists there about the Republicans who went into exile. In this country we have had more to do with those exiled Governments and have made friends among them, so that our sympathies are apt to be with them when they go back to their own countries. I believe that the troubles inside Europe at the present time come very greatly from this fact that the people inside those countries do not care very much for the people who went outside, with the exception of General de Gaulle, I think he is the only exception.

What I want to do to-day is to suggest that these resistance movements deserve a great deal more sympathetic attention from the British Government and the British people than I think they are getting. They are rough. There is obviously a certain gangster element in them all. There always is, when law breaks down. There was even in this country, in this city, during the blitz, but we all know that during the blitz the people of this city were a very fine bunch of people. Even in this House we had a greater feeling of co-operation after Dunkirk and during the blitz than we have ever had at any time before or since. I suggest we are

giving much too much attention to those lawless elements which are found in all the resistance movements, and far too little to the magnificent services they have rendered to their country.

I have recently been to France—

[§Mr. Pickthorn \(Cambridge University\)](#)

We do not go to France.

[§Mr. Bartlett](#)

The hon. Gentleman may manage to get there when the Home Secretary is looking the other way. If one goes to Rouen or Le Havre, Toulouse or Paris—those are the only places to which I have been—the préfets and the mayors and so on are nearly all people who for three or four years have been living in hiding. Many of them have suffered torture. They are people who deserve our greatest respect. These same people have the very greatest admiration for this country, because it was from this country that there came, at the worst possible moment, words of hope and courage to them. My belief is that we shall destroy the admiration of these people if we show so little understanding of the good qualities behind their rough exteriors. The other day I voted against the Government, in many ways reluctantly, above all because I think that for the Prime Minister to refer to some of those Greeks as gangs of bandits from the mountains and so on is not only unfair to the Greek people, whom we were very glad to claim as our Allies a little time ago, but it is very bad for our prestige in all the countries with resistance movements. The reaction of the resistance movements in every country as far as one can check it has been in favour of E.L.A.S. and E.A.M.

There is no doubt that the Government are not sufficiently well informed about the developments of these movements. On 5th December the diplomatic correspondent of "The Times," who is a very responsible journalist indeed, wrote: There is every confidence in London that the firm attitude General Scobie has taken will soon bring an

improvement in the situation. That was as far back as 5th December. The situation cannot be said to have improved very much. On the same day a British spokesman in Athens said that the Greek Government had very wide support, and that that Sunday demonstration was staged by a very small and noisy minority. I interrupted the hon. Gentleman just now because I cannot quite understand how it is, if in fact it is only a very small and noisy minority that is causing all the trouble, that we should have this very serious war going on inside Greece, and that when you have liberated Athens you may find yourselves compelled to fight large-scale guerilla warfare—

§Lieut.-Colonel Wise

The hon. Member has only to cast his mind back to 1919 and see what the Sinn Fein movement did in Ireland, to see what minorities can do.

§Mr. Bartlett

I think Sinn Fein did so much because of the attitude of the British Government of that day. I do not want the same thing to happen to-day.

I want to end with this. I have a feeling that the Foreign Secretary is not as well informed by his representatives abroad as he should be, because they are not the sort of people who by training have much sympathy with these resistance movements, in the same way that certain people in Mayfair had little sympathy with the shelter marshals in London in the blitz, although they were performing a very valuable job indeed. I think that the Diplomatic Service at the present time—I say this with reluctance as I have many friends in it—is terribly out of touch with all these developments inside Europe. If it were not so we should not have so misjudged the Greek situation, and these other situations previously. For example, when Thorez, the French Communist leader, came back from Moscow the other day to Paris—I do not happen to be a Communist; I dislike Communism more and more; I think it is a growing danger and I am very much afraid our policy may be pushing

Europe more and more towards it—there was a meeting attended by some 30,000 people in the Velodrome d'Hiver. I wonder if any representative of the British Embassy was there to make a report.

[§Mr. Eden](#)

Yes, I had a very full and most interesting report.

[§Mr. Bartlett](#)

I am glad to hear that. I want to urge the Foreign Secretary to go ahead as soon as possible with the real reform of the Foreign Service. I know that he has not been able to do so hitherto during the war but he might begin to do so now. It does seem to me extremely important we should not so often find, if we go abroad, the man who can really give one a good picture of the country is not the professional diplomat, but the unofficial chap, the non-career chap, the Commercial Secretary, the Shipping Attaché, and so on. Those are the people who know what is happening inside the country. Therefore I maintain that there is something wrong with the Diplomatic Service.

I have suggested it before, and I suggest it again with great hesitation, because I think the present Foreign Secretary is the best Leader of the House we could possibly have with the present Government, that the time has really come when it is absolutely impossible even for a man who works so hard as he does, even for a man of such good stamina as he has got, to carry on these two jobs. The more I study the situation in Europe the more I feel we are not using to the extent that we should that immense prestige which was given to this country by the guts of the people of Britain in 1940.

[§5.9 p.m.](#)

[§Mr. Gallacher \(Fife, West\)](#)

I wish to begin with a recognised truism, that is, that the Prime Minister owes his position in this House, in the

country and throughout the world, to the support of the progressives in this country and generally in Europe. Right up to the last moment the great mass of the Tories on the other side gave a vote of confidence to the late Prime Minister, when the Progressives, against the mass of the Tories, were forcing the present Prime Minister on them. Why do I say that? Because the Prime Minister of this country is strong as long as he marches with the progressive forces. When he goes against the progressive forces, we have an exhibition such as we had yesterday morning.

Never did a weaker man stand at that Box than the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister is facing ruin and disaster when he places his fate, not in the Progressives, but in the gang behind him, including the hon. and gallant Member for Smethwick (Lieut.-Colonel Wise). Such unspeakable hypocrisy as that of the hon. and gallant Member I have never listened to. How is it possible for a Member with his record to stand up in this House and say that a party that prevents food going into the country, thereby starving its own people, is not worth regarding? That is the gist of what he said. I am not misquoting him. He gave every conceivable support to Franco, who was sinking British ships that were carrying food to the starving people of Spain. Will he deny it? There is a word that is not allowed in this House, so I will not use it; but if it were permissible, I would add it to the term "confirmed hypocrite." I will leave it at that. He should never get up in this House and speak again after the speech he made to-day.

Of course, much noise was made about the hon. Member for Ebbw Vale (Mr. Bevan) talking about the guerillas foraging. There never was a guerilla band anywhere which did not forage. De Wet had guerillas in South Africa. Where did De Wet and his guerillas forage? Off the villagers? Where did he get their ammunition and guns? Off the villagers? No, off the British Army. Where did the guerillas in Russia get their arms and their food? Off the Germans. Where did the guerillas in Yugoslavia get their arms and their food? From the villagers? No, from the Germans. The Yugoslav guerillas were fighting for more than a year, with the British

Government supporting the traitor Mihailovitch against them. Every gun they had was taken from the Germans, and their food was taken from the Germans. If the guerillas in Greece came into an area for food and ammunition and clothing, did they go to the starving villagers? No, they went to the Germans; and the Germans set up the security police to protect their stores. Does anybody deny that?

§Captain Alan Graham (The Wirral)

May I interrupt the hon. Member?

§Mr. Gallacher

No. I want to come to what has occurred in Greece. First, let me say that the hon. Member for Dumbarton Burghs (Mr. Kirkwood) and I, and perhaps other Members, are receiving telegrams day by day from mass meetings of factory workers. On Thursday I had a deputation from the Clyde and Rosyth, representing masses of workers, demanding an end to this disastrous policy in Greece. Of course, when a deputation comes down about housing it is the Communists who have organised it; when a deputation comes down about Greece, it is the Communists who have organised it; if anything happens anywhere, it is the Communists who have organised it. At some times the Communists seem to be supermen; and at other times, according to some hon. Members, they are almost sub-human. Most of the people instinctively understand that the Government have taken a disastrous line.

On thing that the Foreign Secretary carefully avoided mentioning in his very careful speech last Friday, was the demonstration, and how that demonstration came about. The members of the Committee of National Liberation agreed to demobilisation and disarmament. Then the Mountain Brigade and the Sacred Battalion, handpicked in Cairo, were brought back. The Army that fought against the Italians, the Army that fought against the Germans, mutinied in Cairo; and the British Army had to suppress the mutiny. The Mountain Brigade and the Sacred Battalion were handpicked and organised to prepare the way for the

coming back to Greece of the sacred person of His Majesty the Hohenzollern King George. When the Committee of National Liberation agreed to [1894](#)the demobilisation, the Fascist forces, the Mountain Brigade and the Sacred Battalion, were brought from Italy to Athens, and the men who had done the fighting all through the years with the Germans were faced with the fact that they were to be disarmed, while the men who had come back were to be left in possession of their arms. However, there was still a possibility of agreement. On Friday night several members of the Committee went to see Papandreou about a demonstration in Athens, and Papandreou agreed. Everything was in order. There was to be a demonstration. Word was sent out around Athens. Then, late on Saturday night, as a result of somebody whispering in his ear—perhaps Members would like me to give the name—Papandreou banned the demonstration and went into hiding, so that the members of the Committee could not get in touch with him. I ask the Foreign Secretary if that is correct. I ask him if he dare deny it.

The demonstration took place. The Fascist police fired on it. British officers tried to stop them, but they kept on firing for an hour. The Prime Minister said that it was deplorable that women and children should be killed, but he added that it was also deplorable that women and children should be called out to demonstrate on the streets in a city which was crowded with armed men. When the Foreign Secretary went to Athens, there was a demonstration. Thousands of women and children on the streets of a city crowded with armed men. But in that case there was not the slightest danger of the progressive forces of the Left doing any firing. When the people came out for a peaceful demonstration about the demobilisation of all the forces, the trial of the traitors, and effective distribution of food, where was the danger? Not from the progressive forces; not from the Left, but from the Fascist police, who opened fire on women and children. We were told on the last occasion, by the Prime Minister, that German forces were left in E.L.A.S. Where did the Prime Minister get that statement? Did he think it out in Downing Street? Who sent him that word from Greece? Who was

responsible for getting the military men removed from Greece? Will the Foreign Secretary tell us? If there is one grain of intelligence in the minds of hon. Members on the other side they will speak with disgust of such a phrase coming from the Prime Minister. [1895](#) Why? Look at the Foreign Secretary. When he was parading through the streets of Athens, when the streets were packed with cheering men, women and children, there was a heaven-sent opportunity for the Germans who were left behind—if they had been left behind—to create the utmost disunity, dismay and terror. I say to this House—and I challenge the Foreign Secretary—that lies, distortions and slanders have been sent across from Greece. What is wanted is a declaration from the Foreign Secretary: "Cease fire." Then demobilise all the forces, and let the police, the national guard and the army be made up of groups called up according to their ages; let there be immediate trial of the traitors, and an opportunity for a national Government that will represent, in every sense, the masses of the people in Greece.

[§The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs \(Mr. Eden\)](#)

I do not think it would be reasonable, at this stage of the discussion. There has been no representation and no Government spokesman has intervened until now.

I do not wish to abandon the wisely uncontroversial line adopted by the right hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. A. Greenwood) and by the hon. and gallant Member for Windsor (Major Mott-Radclyffe) in a truly remarkable speech, but I must deal with one charge which an hon. Gentleman has just made against me for not giving an account of the circumstances which took place in Athens just previous to these unhappy events. If the hon. Member will read my speech again, I think he will find that I did deal with the very points which he has just asserted I omitted. He said that the whole issue has been raised by the Sacred Battalion and Mountain Brigade, whom he has described as Fascist.

[1896](#)

§Mr. Gallacher

The right hon. Gentleman dealt with that.

§Mr. Eden

I am going to deal with it again. I do not know what the hon. Member means by a Fascist brigade. The Mountain Brigade fought with very great gallantry in the desert, and I prefer to regard them as our Allies. The point is, as I explained last time, the Sacred Battalion has never been in Attica and is at present engaged with some German remnants in the Greek islands. The matter of the Mountain Brigade was never raised in the Debate until a late stage of the discussion. They arrived back in Athens and were cheered by the Greek people and had a tremendous reception from everybody. This question was raised at a very late hour in the Debate, and, as I explained, an offer was made by the Greek Cabinet that the Mountain Brigade should remain and that also a force of E.A.M. of equivalent strength, and one of E.D.E.S. of proportionate strength, should remain, so it is quite wrong to say that this Brigade has for long been a source of trouble.

The hon. Gentleman also gave an account of the events of Saturday night. He said there was going to be a demonstration which had been agreed by the Papandreou Government, and that, late at night, somebody whispered something in his ear. The impression the hon. Member gave was that some British Minister whispered in his ear. I assure him that that is absolutely untrue. I think we could more properly be censured for not having interfered, so far as law and order were concerned, at an earlier stage. The facts are that we had been advised that a general strike was declared at that time, and, as a result of the declaration of the general strike, the Greek Cabinet felt that the demonstration ought not to take place, though they had previously allowed it. I am not saying whether they were right or wrong. What I am denying is that a British Minister whispered in anybody's ear on that point.

Now I come to the points raised in the Debate, and I shall do my best, in this very unhappy business, as we all feel it to be, not to make matters worse, because I am very conscious that anything I say, if I am not careful in the choice of my words, may make matters worse rather than better. My object is to make them better, and if I speak with more [1897](#)caution than usual, I hope the House will make allowances, because this is a situation which all of us, whatever our feelings, want to see resolved.

I think the right hon. Gentleman the Member for Wakefield was a little unfair, if I may say so, in his otherwise careful speech, in what he said about the Prime Minister. He did not quite correctly quote the Prime Minister about E.L.A.S. I have looked up his words. The Prime Minister said: Meanwhile the forces of E.L.A.S. which is the military instrument of E.A.M. were planning a descent on Athens as a military and political operation and the seizure of power by armed force. E.L.A.S. is a mixed body and it would be unfair to stigmatise them all as being entirely self-seeking in their aims and actions."—[OFFICIAL REPORT, 8th Dec., 1944; Vol. 406, c. 942.] The right hon. Gentleman said they were a mixed body. [Interruption.] Oh, yes, that is the quotation.

[§Mr. G. Strauss \(Lambeth, North\)](#)

My right hon. Friend does not give a fair picture. The Prime Minister talked about ... a fairly well organised plot or plan by which E.L.A.S. should march down upon Athens and seize it by armed force and establish a reign of terror. ..."— [OFFICIAL REPORT, 8th Dec., 1944; Vol. 406, c. 943.]

[§Mr. Eden](#)

What I am dealing with is the hon. Gentleman's statement that everything about E.L.A.S. was utterly bad. That is what he said, so I produced this quotation showing that the Prime Minister said it was a mixed body. I do not want to emphasise that, but to pass on to a remark of the right hon. Member for South-West Bethnal Green (Sir P. Harris), who asked why there was not more collaboration between the Allies over this business. The right hon. Gentleman asked

what, above all, was the European Advisory Commission doing. The European Advisory Commission was set up on our initiative to agree plans for surrender terms to Germany and for post-occupation plans for Germany. That is the task upon which it has been engaged.

§Sir P. Harris

Not on the immediate situation?

§Mr. Eden

No, on these plans. As regards the general machinery of international collaboration, I spoke on this matter only a fortnight ago, and there is nothing that we should welcome more than machinery for closer collaboration [1898](#) than there is now. We would welcome quarterly meetings of the Foreign Secretaries of the great Powers, as we used to have before to deal with some of these matters. I have said over and over again that we will go anywhere and take any steps to further such a result. I really do not think, whatever hon. Members' feelings may be, that the charge can lie against us that we have not tried to promote this machinery and get it going more satisfactorily.

So far as the decision to go to Greece is concerned, I am bound to say, after listening to this Debate, that I cannot see what other decision we could have taken in the circumstances. I admit there were risks. We knew there were risks; but I still think the decision was right. Before we took that decision, as my right hon. Friend said a fortnight ago, we did consult the United States. We went there with their agreement, and we conveyed our decision to go to Greece to our Soviet Allies and they also approved that decision. There is no question, therefore, of our having done this without consulting our Allies. The only criticism which the hon. Gentleman may make is that we might have brought others with us, but the Government did not foresee that matters would turn out as they have done, and in a fashion which we all so deeply deplore.

It is also true to say that, for reasons of operational security, we did not, before we went to Greece, describe in detail our plans and intentions to our Greek Allies. The result was that we could not give them a clear answer to the many appeals which they were making—this then being a government of all the parties—to us to go into Greece, appeals made because they saw the situation developing and wanted us to drive the remnants of the Germans out. We were unable to explain and we did not want to reveal the details of our military plans. As we got nearer the day for our actual entry we did tell them of our plans to some extent and did also invite their co-operation in respect of these military bands in Greece. The two representatives—General Zervas and General Sarafis, the E.L.A.S. Commander-in-Chief—were invited to come to Caserta and meet the Supreme Commander, and there was drawn up and agreed formally between them, what is known as the Caserta Agreement.

I do not want to weary the House but I must draw attention to one or two items in the Agreement which shows that immense trouble was taken to try and get an agreed decision, and an agreement between all parties in the Greek Government and the Greek military leaders before we went into Greece at all. This was agreed to by M. Papandreou, the Prime Minister and leader of the Government which was composed of all the parties. It was signed in the presence of all the leaders by the commander of the E.L.A.S. forces and of E.A.M. This was the conference presided over by the supreme Commander in the Mediterranean theatre, at which the Greek President of the Council, with other members of the Greek Government—I ask the House to remember that at that moment all the parties were in the Greek Government—and the Greek military leaders, General Zervas and General Sarafis, were present. The following decisions were agreed as having been accepted unanimously: All guerilla forces operating in Greece place themselves under orders to the Greek Government of National unity. The Greek Government places these forces under the orders of General Scobie, who has been nominated by the Supreme Allied Commander as General-

Officer-Commanding forces in Greece. That is what was agreed, and then next—

§Mr. Gallacher

This is very important. It is clear from that first point, that there was no Greek Army to which the guerillas could be allocated and they were, therefore, allocated to the British Army. It was the bringing in of these other brigades from outside.

§Mr. Eden

The hon. Gentleman said at the beginning of his speech that the whole thing turned on bringing the Mountain Brigade into Greece. That matter was only raised some time after the Greek Government arrived, and when it was raised—this was before the breakdown of everything—they offered E.L.A.S. another brigade if they desired to counter it. I do not think it is true to say that this one brigade has been the cause of all the trouble, but, if so, it might well have been raised at an earlier stage when E.L.A.S. was in the Government. They were in the Government and as far as we know they never said one word against General Zervas. If the hon. Member has [1900](#)other evidence that they protested against their arrival in Athens, I shall be glad to hear about it, as I have not seen it. The agreement goes on: In accordance with the proclamation issued by the Greek Government, the Greek guerilla leaders declare that they will forbid any attempt by any units under their command to take the law into their own hands. Such action to be treated as a crime and will be punished accordingly. As regards Athens, no action is to be taken save under the direct orders of General Scobie, General-Officer-Commanding forces in Greece. Security battalions are considered as instruments of the enemy. Unless they surrender according to orders issued by General-Officer-Commanding they will be treated as enemy formations. That has been done. All Greek guerilla forces in order to put an end to past rivalries, declare that they will form a national union in order to co-ordinate their activities in the best interests of the common struggle. In accordance with the

powers conferred on him by the Supreme Allied Commander after agreement with the Greek Government, General Scobie has issued attached operational orders. Then followed the orders for the division of stores between the various forces. I am sorry to weary the House by reading all that text, but I do it deliberately because it shows that a great deal of trouble was taken before we went into Greece, first, to get a government of all parties, and secondly, over and above that, to gain complete agreement between the guerrilla leaders and the Government. I suggest that the document I have read out does show that we could not have done more to try and deal with the events which have so unhappily come upon us.

[§Mr. Godfrey Nicholson \(Farnham\)](#)

What date was that?

[§Mr. Eden](#)

The date of this document was, I think, 25th September.

[§Dr. Haden Guest \(Islington, North\)](#)

Did that agreement lay down that the Athens police were to be removed? Were they not to be disarmed?

[§Mr. Eden](#)

There is nothing whatever about the Athens police in the Agreement that I have read out. If that was the trouble, there were six or seven E.A.M. Ministers in the Government for many weeks and surely they would have said that this was an issue, and as far as I know they never said it.

[1901](#)

[§Dr. Haden Guest](#)

Was it in the Agreement at all?

[§Mr. Eden](#)

No, Sir, there was nothing in the Agreement about the police at all, nor do I know of any reason why there should have been anything on that subject in the Agreement. I also remind the House that it was about that time, as I stated the other day—actually 10 days before the Agreement was signed—that Mr. Sophoulis, leader of the E.A.M. representatives in the Government, saw M. Papandreou on behalf of all his E.A.M. colleagues in the Government and expressed his confidence in the Government and his desire to continue in office under M. Papandreou as Prime Minister, if they could get to Greece, until an election could be held. All I am trying to say to the House is that on this date, before the actual entry into Greece, there was no issue which divided the Greek Ministers amongst themselves and no issue which divided us from any part of our Greek friends. That was a step forward.

So I come to the next step. What was our purpose in going to Greece? Here I answer a speech made earlier in the Debate. We seek nothing for ourselves in Greece at all. We seek neither strategic advantages nor economic advantages nor any other advantages of that kind at all. There is nothing in the least inconsistent in what my right hon. Friend has said and what I am saying now. In this action we are taking we have no ulterior motive whatever. We really have not. I do not see why hon. Members are so eager to think we have some sinister purpose.

[§Mr. Shinwell \(Seaham\)](#)

I am very sorry to have to interrupt. My right hon. Friend may have taken note of the fact that the Minister of Labour, at the Labour Party Conference, did refer to the Mediterranean position.

[§Mr. Eden](#)

Of course, it is true we have an interest in the Mediterranean. That has never been denied by anyone, but I say that we took this action above all, and only, to try to bring food and supplies to Greece, because we knew of the condition in which we should find Greece. We had no ulterior

motive. I should like to try to show a little of what we have been doing. Let me say this. If Greece had been largely a self-supporting country, if she had been in a condition where she could have provided her own people with food, it is quite likely we should not have done it. We might have said, "We will help chase the Germans out," but certainly we should not have gone in with this vast organisation to try to supply food for the people of Greece. But we knew that in normal conditions Greece was quite unable to feed herself. We knew that the harbours and all means of transport had been utterly destroyed and that unless we could get food and supplies in there was no chance of the Greek people escaping starvation and of allowing Greek industry to be restarted.

Those are the reasons why we went into Greece and I do not think they are reasons of which anyone could complain. Suppose we had not done that. We did weigh the alternatives. We knew there were some risks because of disturbed conditions, and the story of the Metaxas regime, and all that went before it; but if we had not gone in, what would have happened? Suppose there had been civil strife—Greeks against Greeks—as a result of which no food could have been got in. Without our help in clearing the ports and our lorries to carry the food, there would have been no food for them, there would have been for certain mass starvation all over Greece, and I am sure, and rightly, hon. Members would have come to the British Government and asked, "What are you doing about this? Are not these people your Allies? Why have you not made an effort to go and help them?" And we should, I think, have been blamed for that. [An HON. MEMBER: "Could not U.N.R.R.A. have done it?"] U.N.R.R.A. was coming in to help us in the matter and, unfortunately, U.N.R.R.A. has had to pull out, as the hon. Gentleman will see.

I want to give the House some little account, very shortly, of the amount of supplies we have put in and the work we have done, because this has been largely our own effort—stock piles, for instance, built up in the Middle East in conditions of some difficulty to meet this food situation

which we knew existed. I shall only give the figures for one week, 18th to 24th November. I have not specially chosen it as being particularly good or otherwise. We unloaded in that week in the Piraeus alone over 20,000 tons of food, in Kalamata over 4,000, in Patras over 4,000, in Mytilene over 7,000, in Chios over 2,700, and so on. In the same time we delivered—I would ask for the attention of the House for these figures because I think they are important—in all regions clothing and footwear 14,000 pieces to Euboea, to Lamia 24,000 pieces, to Tripolis 25,000 pieces, to Patras 30,000, to Volos 24,300, and so on down the list. We did so because one of the greatest problems for Greece this winter was the lack of clothing and the cold of the Greek winter and the lack of boots—problems all of which we had more or less worked out before. The hon. Gentleman asked "Why not leave it to U.N.R.R.A.?" But we have prepared this and I only give these details to show the House that our purpose had been planned, and carefully prepared at some considerable effort to ourselves, and that the chief of U.N.R.R.A. agriculture arrived at that time and consultations were initiated with him. I could go on, though I do not want to weary the House. [An HON. MEMBER: "Why?"] It is quite important. We have tried to help these people.

Now, I come to an important matter which has been raised in this Debate by the right hon. Gentleman the Member for Wakefield—terms for an armistice. What is the position? It is, as I have already explained in reading the Caserta Agreement, that E.L.A.S. Forces undertook to obey General Scobie's orders by that Agreement. He has asked that E.L.A.S. supporters in Athens and the Piraeus must cease resistance, and hand in their arms—E.L.A.S. supporters in Athens, and the Piraeus must hand in their arms. I emphasise those words, because it is limited to that area; he has not asked that E.L.A.S. supporters outside who have withdrawn from Athens should hand in their arms. Why is that provision there? I fear that it must be there. It is the minimum which must be asked, because, if arms are left in the hands of numbers of people in civilian clothes—as, of course, many of them are—in Athens for a long period, even when this immediate emergency is over, the moment

political tension rises again you will get the risk of this same thing happening again and people using these weapons again. I think the terms are the minimum because, it is only, I repeat, in that area. We have not said that everybody bearing arms must get out of Athens and the Piraeus because we realise very well that some of those who are using those arms are the local population and have nowhere else to move. Where they can withdraw with their arms we have said withdraw; where they cannot, in Athens and the Piraeus, we have asked them to hand in their arms.

§Mr. Bevan

What does the declaration mean? I am sorry, but the right hon. Gentleman has occupied over 20 minutes on what was not said in this Debate at all. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] What is meant by the ultimatum that the civilian population should withdraw within 500 metres or wherever hostilities might be taking place to-morrow? How can they tell what is 500 metres?

§Mr. Eden

If the hon. Gentleman is referring to the Reuter message, I am coming to that in a moment. We have not asked that the disarmament of the guerrilla bands outside the Athens area should be done otherwise than by agreement subsequent to the cessation of hostilities, and there is no question of leaving security battalions in the possession of their arms, nor any Right-Wing organisation in Athens either. I ought to tell the House—in fairness they should know this—that General Scobie, some little time ago, refused assistance offered to him by Right-Wing organisations against E.L.A.S. There was one of these organisations known as Organisation X—I think I have General Scobie's telegram here, at any rate I remember its purport, in which he said that these men had offered to join with our Forces against E.L.A.S. and he had refused and had disarmed them.

§Mr. Shinwell

May I ask if any of the Right-Wing elements in Athens, on General Scobie's declaration, handed over their arms?

§Mr. Eden

Yes, Sir, actually Organisation X, which tried to joint with our Forces against E.A.M., was disarmed by our own Forces.

§Mr. Granville

Will the right hon. Gentleman make it absolutely clear that if General Scobie's order is complied with it means that Right-Wing Forces will have laid down their arms?

§Mr. Eden

All we desire is that all should lay down their arms. We are not trying to impose a Right-Wing Government or a Left-Wing Government. It is not our purpose to do so. What we wish, if we can get it, is that the ship shall be on an even keel. That is what we wish and we are against—I repeat what I said at Question Time—reprisals by one side or the other after this event is over, and we shall do everything we can to stop that. One hon. Gentleman said he thought the fear of reprisals was an element in continuing this fight. I think he may be right, and I would like to assure him that the position of His Majesty's Government is that we shall do all we can to stop reprisals after this event has taken place.

§Dr. Haden Guest

Will the police of Athens who started the shooting be disarmed?

§Mr. Eden

I cannot answer a question like that straight away. What I say is that we shall do all we can to preserve order, and we ask that everyone concerned shall lay down their arms. I really think that is a reasonably broad proposition. I will just read General Scobie's message, because I have it here, dated 8th December: Armed members of the Right-Wing X organisation who attempted to join forces with British troops

are being disarmed by the latter as they are acting contrary to the orders issued by the prevailing Government and General Scobie regarding the carriage of arms by irregular forces. That was the telegram on 8th December showing the action taken.

Then the hon. Gentleman referred to Reuters message which he said he had just read on the tape, and I must say I was a little disturbed by the account, as he gave it, of what was happening.

§Mr. Bevan

I said I understood it was also on the tape.

§Mr. Eden

I see. Well, anyhow, the hon. Gentleman gave an impression of something he had gathered from somewhere. It was to the effect that suddenly to-morrow a very heavy bombardment—and I got the impression an indiscriminate bombardment—is going to be opened on Athens. I have the message and I had better read it to the House: Aircraft to-day dropped leaflets containing a warning from General Scobie, General Officer Commanding Greece, to civilians in and around Athens and in the Piraeus, that rebel guns still firing after 9 a.m. to-morrow will be attacked with all the arms at my disposal.

§Mr. Bevan

How does the right hon. Gentleman suppose he is going to do it? In any case the message has been abbreviated. He proposed to use these on Athens and around.

Hon. Members

Withdraw.

§Mr. Eden

I am not seeking to make a debating point. All I wish to say is that I do not think, if the hon. Gentleman will read his

own account in HANSARD to-morrow, he will find that it squares with General Scobie's statement. The hon. Member need not be so angry. These guns have for some time been firing at the centre of Athens; General Scobie has said he would attack them, and warned the civil population to get out of the way before he does so. I do not think that that is at all the picture which the hon. Gentleman gave. I must say, in justice to our commanders, that I am absolutely convinced that they have used every possible means they can to avoid unnecessary loss of life, and have probably done so at considerable cost to themselves in the conduct of very difficult and delicate operations.

§Mr. Stokes (Ipswich)

Is that the whole message?

§Mr. Eden

That is all the message I have, but if there are any more I should be glad to have them. Now I come to answer the hon. Gentleman on the subject of the King. He said that we were trying to impose the King on the Greek people. That really is not so. I must tell the House one factor which may perhaps carry weight, even with the hon. Gentleman. We all know perfectly well that the King is in this country. It was on the advice of the Prime Minister and myself, given personally, that the King is still in this country. It is very likely that he would have taken that decision on his own account—I cannot say—but our advice was strongly that he should remain in this country, because we were perfectly conscious that his arrival in Greece might certainly be the cause of a political controversy which we wanted to avoid. That is not imposing the King, with British bayonets, on the Greek people. I want to go a little further, and I hope the hon. Gentleman will do me the courtesy of listening.

§Mr. Bevan

I am listening.

§Mr. Eden

The hon. Gentleman said that the British Government were throw-the weight of British Ministers against a Regency. The answer is that we are not; we are not against a Regency, and we are not throwing our weight against a Refency.

§Mr. Shinwell rose—

§Mr. Eden

Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will let me develop my speech. I did not intend to reveal this, but I think that in fairness I should. Many harsh things have been said about our Ambassador in Athens. Some Members suggested that the question of the establishment of a Regency had been a spontaneous suggestion from Greek Ministers, or something of that kind. But in point of fact the first suggestion for a Regency was made by His Majesty's Ambassador in Athens. He put it forward, and when my right hon. Friend the Member for Stockton-on-Tees (Mr. Macmillan) reached there, he confirmed the judgment of the Ambassador. What is the position of the King? As I understand it it is this. He feels that before he can make a decision on a matter of this kind he must get recommendations from the leaders of the parties in Greece. [Laughter.] The hon. Member laughs, but does he want this to be constitutional or not? The King says, "Before I can decide I would like to know the views of the political parties in Greece."

§Mr. Shinwell

This is a matter of major importance. If the King declares that he is willing to consider the possibility of setting up of a Regency after consulting leaders in Greece the opinion of the E.A.M. must be taken into account. How could they be excluded?

§Mr. Eden

E.A.M. walked out of the Government.

§Mr. Shinwell indicated dissent.

§Mr. Eden

As I understand the position, the King will be guided by the advice of his Ministers. If this is the desire in Athens then the expression of the desire can come back to the King.

§Mr. James Griffiths (Llanelly)

I gather that the British Government advised the King of Greece to stay in this country. That being so, will the Government advise the King of Greece not to stand in the way of a Regency?

§Mr. Eden

We are not at all opposed to a Regency; on the contrary, it may be the best solution, but I think the Ministers themselves and the leaders of the political parties in Greece have the right to express their own opinion, and to express it to the King. I understand the King will then take a decision on their advice.

§Mr. Shinwell

Will we give any advice?

§Mr. Eden

I have said that the initiative came from our Ambassador.

§Mr. Bevan

Do we favour a Regency now?

§Mr. Eden

I have said that we have not the least objection to a Regency if that is going to provide a solution, but we would like to feel that it is going to provide a solution. But on that we must get advice from the Greeks themselves.

Mr. Driherg (Maldon)

If the Government can give advice to the King of Greece about remaining in this country, cannot they also advise him

against sending messages to Athens in a form which can hardly be likely to promote reconciliation?

§Mr. Eden

I do not think that that is a reasonable request. I have put the position. We are not against a Regency; if that might provide a solution, we would like the Greeks themselves to say that they think it is a solution. I am not in favour of it if it does not commend itself to the Greeks themselves.

§Dr. Haden Guest

Is it worth while spending the life of, or wounding, one British soldier to defend the King's prerogative?

§Mr. Eden

The hon. Gentleman is most unfair. In this matter the King has behaved with complete constitutional propriety. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] Hon. Members might let me finish. He has not gone to Greece, at our request. He awaits the advice of his Ministers, and so far as I am aware if they give that advice he will take it. I have tried to avoid importing controversy into this Debate, and I am sorry if I have done so at any stage.

Let me try to sum up. We want to bring the present conflict to an end as speedily as possible, by whatever means can be devised. Apart from the tragedy of the loss of life, we must bring it to an end, otherwise we cannot get supplies to Greece and there will be the tragedy of starvation. We are trying to get food into Greece. With the help of the Red Cross some supplies have been sent in, but they are pitifully small and they will not be enough if the present situation continues much longer. A population of 1,500,000 to 2,000,000 in Athens will be faced by the serious threat of starvation and disease. The rest of Greece is in great need of supplies which cannot reach there because of the present disturbed conditions. So, we shall use all the means at our disposal to try to bring this conflict to an end. We shall use all the means at our disposal to ensure that this conflict is

not made the excuse for a lasting vendetta, either of the Right against the Left, or of the Left against the Right, and that when the conflict is over neither side shall be allowed to try to eliminate the other. Our aim is to maintain law and order and establish a Greek Government broadly representative of all opinion in Greece, including E.A.M., and enable that Government to establish its authority throughout the country. Our desire is to see such a Government re-formed at the earliest possible date. The first task of that Government will be to get relief going again, and food for their people. The second task will be to organise a free and fair election. If our help is needed it will be available, and if our Allies will come and help that help will be valuable. We ask nothing of the Greeks. It is our wish to bring our troops away as soon as is practically possible. We only ask that order shall be established so that the people shall be fed with supplies, the greater part of which we have ourselves collected. This is an unhappy phase in Anglo-Greek relations. I hope that this chapter will soon be closed, that there will be once again that friendship in which we have taken a pride and that the Greek people and our own people will be united together.

§ It being Six o'clock, the Motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

§ Motion made, and Question proposed, "That this House do now adjourn."—[Major A. S. L. Young.]

HC Deb 21 December 1944

vol 406 cc1938-9

Monarchy

49. **Mr. Driberg**

asked the Prime Minister if, with a view to restoring peace in Athens, he will invite the King of the Hellenes to state publicly that he has no intention of returning to Greece until

after the question of the monarchy has been settled by free plebiscite of the Greek people, and that he is willing, meanwhile, that a Regent acceptable to all parties should be appointed.

§Mr. Attlee

I have nothing to add to the statement made by the Foreign Secretary yesterday in the course of the Debate.

§Mr. Driberg

Will the right hon. Gentleman bear in mind that, as the Foreign Secretary can confirm, he did not deal yesterday with the particular point in the first part of the Question; and, while there is universal agreement that there should be a free plebiscite on the question of the Monarchy, is there not a danger that that might be prejudiced by the premature return of the King?

§Mr. Quintin Hogg

Will the right hon. Gentleman give an assurance that the Conservative candidate for Maldon will not be allowed to address his constituents until after the result of the election is known?

§Mr. Shinwell

May I ask my right hon. Friend whether he has taken note of the fact that last night a statement was made on the radio of the fact that M. Papandreou had declared that the decision to establish a Regency in Greece had been communicated to the King as a unanimous decision of the Greek Cabinet, and if that is true, what is the obstacle which stands in the way?

§Mr. Attlee

I am afraid I did not hear the radio and, therefore, I have had no time to consider that matter.

§Dr. Edith Summerskill

Is it proposed that the wishes of one man, the King of Greece, shall be allowed to stand in the way of a settlement of this problem?

§Sir J. Wardlaw-Milne

May I ask the right hon. Gentleman whether it is not the case, however desirable the objects which the hon. Gentleman who put this Question down may have in view, that to take the action he suggests would be [1939](#) a most unwarranted interference in the affairs of the Greek people?

§Mr. Driberg

It is unwarranted interference to foist this King on them.

§Mr. G. Strauss

Is it the fact that the King has never agreed to the unanimous demands of the Cabinet not to return to Greece until after an election has been held, nor has he agreed, as far as we know, to the recent demand of the Cabinet to appoint a Regency? May I ask whether these are the facts and, if so, is it not a time when His Majesty's Government could interfere with great benefit in the Greek situation?

§Mr. Attlee

A very full opportunity was given for a Debate on these matters yesterday. [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] The Foreign Secretary made a statement and I really cannot go into these detailed arguments of the hon. Member at the present time.

Elections

78. **Mr. Edmund Harvey**

asked the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs whether with a view to promoting a satisfactory settlement in Greece, consideration will be given to the appointment of an

international electoral commission to ensure fair elections and the proper representation of all parties.

§The Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (Mr. George Hall)

As my right hon. Friend declared to the House yesterday, we shall be prepared to give any assistance in our power in the conduct of elections in Greece if we are invited to do so, and we should welcome the assistance of any of our Allies in this task.

§Mr. Harvey

In view of the fact that our Minister has already made valuable suggestions to the Greek Government, could he not make a suggestion for an international commission of this kind to ensure an impartial election?

§Mr. Hall

A very full statement was made yesterday. I think the hon. Member should leave it there.

§Mr. Cocks

Could the Foreign Secretary use his very great influence and see if he could not secure a Christmas truce, so that the right hon. Gentleman the Member for Stockton (Mr. Macmillan) can. [1940](#) get on with his work, unimpaired by ultimatums and bombs?

Air Operations (Historic Buildings)

§Mr. Driberg

(by Private Notice) asked the Secretary of State for Air, if he will issue an instruction that, in any air operations that may take place over Athens and other ancient Greek cities, the utmost care is to be taken to avoid causing further damage

to the Parthenon and other monuments of special historic importance.

**§The Joint Under-Secretary of State for Air
(Commander Brabner)**

Yes, Sir, subject to the necessities of operations.

GREECE

2.24 p.m.

§LORD FARINGDON rose to move to resolve, That this House regrets the policy of His Majesty's Government in Greece which has had the shameful result of military action against our Greek Allies. The noble Lord said: My Lords, it is with a very deep sense of responsibility that I have put on the Paper the Motion which stands in my name. I am told that there is a certain feeling that the wording of the Motion may perhaps give rise to some misunderstanding. Your Lordships will have noticed a word which possibly occurs seldom on your Lordships' Order Paper, the word "shameful." By that I wish⁵⁰¹ to imply the very deep feeling which I myself have, and which I believe is shared by the vast majority of Englishmen, at the happenings in Greece—a feeling of shame and of humiliation—much the same feeling as I recollect having when on fairly frequent occasions I addressed your Lordships' House during the Spanish War, a feeling that we were being committed to, or were paying the price for, a policy of which we profoundly disapproved and of which we felt that there was nothing or little that one could do to avert the, effects. It is therefore as an expression of my personal feeling and, as I say, of the feeling which I believe to be shared by the majority of my fellow-countrymen, that I have used this particular word.

§I wish to make it quite clear that I appreciate the enormous difficulties of His Majesty's Government in circumstances like the present. In a country which has been liberated and in which previous to liberation you have, by all

the powers of propaganda and of suasion and of the highest possible praise, encouraged the activities of guerrillas, there must inevitably ensue after liberation a period of the greatest difficulty. I believe I should not be wrong if I said that rather a similar experience was met with, to bring the matter very near home, by Mr. de Valera in Ireland. This is a problem which of course clearly occurred to His Majesty's Government before any countries were in fact liberated. I have no doubt that the Foreign Office gave the problem its very deepest consideration, but the fact is that as yet we do not seem to have found anything like a satisfactory solution. There was not, as your Lordships are aware, the solution of Amgot. Perhaps some unduly hard things have been said of Amgot, but on the other hand it cannot be said to have been an unqualified success; and in any case it has now been decided to abandon that particular solution. Then there is the solution which we are at the moment attempting in Greece, and the solution which has been employed in Belgium. It is the solution of a more or less constitutional Government which was carried over from the earlier period and which we can bring back into its own country to carry on the forms of government during a period of interregnum. I can see very well the attraction of that idea. It appeals to all [502](#) of us who are constitutionalists, as I hope we all are in this House. But it does give rise to very considerable difficulties and in their most exaggerated form we are experiencing those difficulties to-day in Greece.

§ There is, I suggest, a third method of coping with this particular situation or problem, the solution which would appear to be about to be used and which is to some extent already in operation in Yugoslavia. It is the recognition of the resistance movement in any country as the effective de facto Government in that country. I think His Majesty's Government are to be congratulated on their handling of the Yugoslav situation. They have contrived that the effective power shall be exercised—as quite clearly it was going to be exercised in Yugoslavia—by Marshal Tito. They have arranged that there shall be a temporary relationship between the Government of the exiled King and of the Marshal who is holding actual power in that country; and I

believe that it is probably along those lines that in the future the solution of this undoubtedly extremely difficult problem will be found. I may say in passing that a rather similar solution is quite clearly envisaged by the Dutch Government. What the Prime Minister meant, when speaking on Greece last Friday week in another place, by his reference to Holland I do not understand, and I confess that it has caused a certain amount of alarm to people to whom I have talked about it. But what is proposed by the Dutch Prime Minister is that on the liberation of Holland he shall resign and the Queen shall send for a member of the resistance movement in Holland to form a Government, on the ground, as Mr. Gerbrandy himself has put it, that he and his Government, having been out of the country so long, are out of touch with what is going on and with the ideas which have developed within the country. That is a point of view which I consider to be that of a fair-minded and a very generous-minded politician, and one which, I am sure, will bring him the highest possible credit, and should have the result of bringing about a peaceful transition in his own country. I recommend, therefore, this solution to His Majesty's Government.

§ Now I think this desire to have a consecutive policy, to have a Government in the liberated country with whom His [503](#)Majesty's Government can deal, has been responsible for the policy of His Majesty's Government, which has been based essentially upon the recognition of the King as the head of the Greek Government and of his Government as the central authority in Greece. I suggest, with respect, and I am not speaking only in the light of events—it is an opinion which many of us held long before Greece was liberated—that the King of Greece did not deserve and was an unsuitable recipient of the respect and authority with which His Majesty's Government invested him. We have all been informed, and I think there can be no possible doubt, that the King has hardly any personal support in Greece. The Greek people inevitably hold against him that it was he who brought in the dictatorship in Greece and who maintained the dictator Metaxas in power. The Greek dictatorship did not receive the same publicity that

other dictatorships have had, but I know the country well and I can assure your Lordships that under the Greek dictatorship of Metaxas, life in Greece had all those elements of cruelty, of oppression and, above all, of spiritual repression of which the noble Viscount, Lord Templewood, in your Lordships' House the day before yesterday, spoke so feelingly.

§ The Greek dictatorship had all those characteristics just as any other dictatorship had, and for that dictatorship the King was held responsible by his subjects. He is therefore, I suggest, wholly in-acceptable to all except an infinitesimal minority of the Greek people. I suggest that had the King been worthy of any trust he could not have permitted events to develop in Greece in the way that they have. Much of the present situation has been due to repeated intervention in Greek affairs by the King of Greece. The last intervention was that of the day before yesterday, I think, when, if reports in the Press are to be believed, he telegraphed to his Ministers that they should in no circumstances accept a Regency. It seems to me unlikely that at this juncture, however irresponsible the King of Greece may be, he would have sent a telegram of that sort had the British Government made it clear to him that such an intervention on his part would be wholly in-acceptable. We have heard recently a good deal about the establishment of a [504](#)Regency in Athens as a possible way out of our difficulties, and there does seem to be a very good possibility that that would in fact enormously help the present situation. It has been suggested that the Archbishop of Athens, Archbishop Damaskinos, should accept the position of Regent, and I understand that he is willing to do so. I am told that he is acceptable to all parties, and that during the occupation he obtained the respect of his flock by his attitude to the invader. It would seem to me that he, or he with a Council, would help enormously to settle this extremely difficult problem.

§ But the Regency is not a new suggestion. Such a suggestion has been repeatedly raised by the liberation movements through their envoys, ever since, I think, 1943,

when the emissaries of the liberation movements came to Cairo and, amongst other things, requested the formation of a Regency. I am given to understand that at that time negotiations were very nearly brought to a satisfactory conclusion, and they in fact came to disaster just on this question of a Regency. The constitutional position was found to be incapable of a satisfactory solution again at the Lebanon Conference, just on this particular question of a Regency. It has been suggested again and again. It was suggested just before the Government returned to Athens that a Regency should be formed. It has been suggested so often that I do hope that now at last, if the King's consent cannot be obtained to a Regency, His Majesty's Government will give the necessary backing to Mr. Papandreou in order that a Regency may be set up. Such a Council or such a person in Athens, if he had the necessary standing as I understand, for example, the Archbishop has—and he may not be the only person who can fill this position; no doubt His Majesty's Government would be well advised on that point—would be able to act as umpire and so to bring the parties together and stop this appalling slaughter in Athens.

§ It is not my intention to go carefully year by year, month by month, week by week, and day by day over the events of the past. I made out for myself a chronological list of events since September last. I thought it might be of interest to some of your Lordships because Greek affairs, when one sees them merely from day to day in the Press, [505](#) seem very confusing. However, having compiled my list I decided that the patience of your Lordships, however great your interest may be, would not stand quite such a long catalogue. If, therefore, the noble Viscount in replying should raise points of chronology and so on, I shall take it up when closing the debate, but it is not my intention to rehash the whole of these unhappy last few months. It is true that my Motion to-day appears as a somewhat unconstructive one. It regrets His Majesty's Government's policy, but, by implication, it is a request for a different policy. It is a request for a change of policy along the lines which I have outlined and shall develop in a minute. That being so, it is not my wish or intention to rehash the past.

My wish is, if I can, to suggest what seem to me to be possible lines along which His Majesty's Government should go at present in order to bring about the result which I believe we all desire—the immediate cessation of fighting in Greece.

§ Quite clearly the first thing under that head must be an armistice. In this connexion I would suggest most earnestly to His Majesty's Government that the proposed conditions of an armistice that have been put forward by General Scobie are not armistice terms. They are clearly unacceptable as armistice terms. They are terms of surrender. I hope that General Scobie may be directed to withdraw those terms and to offer terms which are more acceptable. Your Lordships will, I think, agree with me that if fighting can be stopped it does take a great deal of exacerbation to reopen it. There is a general disinclination to restart the flow of blood. If an armistice is made, negotiators are under a moral and psychological compulsion to come to an agreement, if possible. I believe therefore that an armistice would in fact be likely to lead to an agreement. Most armistices are in fact an agreement to cease fire.

§ It will be replied that, in a war like the present war in Athens, a war which is being waged largely by civilians—I understand that there are few E.L.A.S. uniformed forces in Athens—it is excessively difficult to make an armistice of the kind I suggest. You will wish, of course, having made your armistice, that affairs should continue in Athens, that business [506](#) should start again and that food should be distributed. Clearly it will be suspected, if that is done, that one side or the other will seize the opportunity to take up positions more advantageous from which it will be difficult, supposing negotiations broke down, to dislodge them. That is quite obviously true. I would, however, point out that in daylight a rifle is not a very easy thing to carry unnoticed. It does not even go down your trouser leg without being rather conspicuous. I feel that if bank clerks of Athens were found to have their legs in splints the situation would be sufficiently noticeable to be dealt with. Nor is a sub-machine gun a thing which you can hope to put inconspicuously into

your pocket. Revolvers, I admit, you can put into your pocket, but the revolver danger is not, in itself, I suggest, a very great one from the military point of view. It will be said that these objections I have put forward would not hold in the hours of darkness, that it would be quite easy then for men or women to have an agreed meeting point, and to come there bringing their arms. Might not that possibility be met by a curfew? I suggest that it might be quite possible to allow life to start again in the day time and to close it down at night.

§ These are my suggestions. I do not believe that an unconditional surrender of arms can conceivably form the basis for an armistice. After all, it leaves one party quite unable to continue the discussion should the negotiations break down. It means that one party in the negotiations is in a wholly disproportionately strong position and therefore I do not believe that along lines such as these we can possibly hope for an armistice. I hope His Majesty's Government will try to bring about a cessation of fighting even if, perhaps, it entails some small risk.

§ I think it is worth while to call your Lordships' attention to a telegram which appears to have been received by General Scobie on December 8 from General Serafis, which, apparently had not been published until the 18th. I have a copy of it which I will venture to read to your Lordships because it is, I suggest, important in that it does define very clearly the attitude of E.L.A.S. and E.A.M. to the British Government. This is naturally a compilation from, and to some extent an adaptation of, the telegram to General Scobie: [507](#) It was British policy that prevented the unity of the resistance movement. New and independent bands were created, and British support was generously given to all those which were opposed to E.L.A.S. That, we may believe, and I sincerely hope, is not true, but it is an impression which is commonly current among E.A.M. owing to the fact that in 1942 and 1943 fairly large quantities of arms were in fact sent to E.L.A.S., and at the time when the Germans were passing their troops through Greece E.L.A.S. did give quite invaluable aid to the Allies. There were, at that time,

as your Lordships remember, constant tributes to the efforts of E.L.A.S. Subsequent to that time it was felt by E.L.A.S. that support for them had been withdrawn and it was at any rate true that considerable support was given to many other bodies, some of them so small that one would hardly have thought they justified the attention they were receiving. That is the basis on which I have no doubt this particular complaint is made by General Serafis.

§ I mention it, not because I am saying it is true, but because I think it is important that we should all understand what the attitude of E.A.M. and E.L.A.S. in this matter is. The telegram goes on: Before and since the liberation of Athens E.L.A.S. had maintained complete order throughout Greece. That has been confirmed by reports from Salonika and elsewhere. From the time the Greek Government was established in Athens, conditions were created bordering on anarchy because of the employment of people and officials who were notorious collaborationists. No action against collaborators was undertaken, possibly because some members of the Government had collaborated in conjunction with the Quisling Government in the creation of the Security Battalions. I do not know if there is any basis at all for that charge; I sincerely hope there is not. The Government insisted that the Mountain Brigade and the Sacred Battalion should be retained as units of the Regular Army. This led to the resignation of E.A.M. Ministers and the subsequent break in national unity. An appeal had been made to General Scobie to remain impartial. If he were not, then E.L.A.S. must continue the struggle as its sacred duty. I have read that telegram because it does define the position of E.A.M. and E.L.A.S. It is important that we should appreciate the anxieties which they have, [508](#) because if peace is to be made those anxieties must be set at rest.

§ The question of the Mountain Brigade has already been mentioned. It is referred to in the telegram. I am not going to rake up the past—whether the Mountain Brigade should, or should not, have been brought back to Greece or whether it is, or is not, the reactionary body which the E.L.A.S. people believe it to be. I am not going to raise that, though

I cannot resist saying in passing that perhaps some colour is given to the belief in its reactionary nature from the fact that its commanding officer was an official in the Ministry of Defence under the first Quisling Government after the arrival of the Germans in Athens. Whether or not the Mountain Brigade is a reactionary force seems to me to be somewhat unimportant. The really important fact is that it is believed so to be. If this is a stumbling block, then I suggest it should be removed. Either the Brigade should be disbanded or, as suggested in one of the so very nearly successful compromises, given extended leave. Alternatively, if it has proved in Italy a valuable fighting force and it is felt that it should not be lost to the Allies, then it might be sent back to Italy where it could be useful in the prosecution of the war against the real enemy.

§ I have spoken longer than I had intended, but I have tried to keep my speech this afternoon to the shortest possible limits. I cannot, however, resist making some reference to the very unfortunate effect this minor war which we have started in Greece is likely to have, and indeed certainly is having, upon our Allies. Our Russian Allies are unlikely to be enthusiastic about a war against people whom we, or at any rate our newspapers, are calling Communists. My own view is that what we are doing in Greece is making Communists. I had the happiness in peace-time to know Greece fairly well and while it is true that none of our knowledge of European countries in present circumstances can be up to date, as far as my knowledge goes there was in Greece a very small body of organized Communists. Small peasant proprietors do not lend themselves to such organization. So far as my information went there was no concentration of Communists except perhaps a small number in Kavalla. We are really making Communists where [509](#) originally very few existed. However that may be, our Russian Allies are not likely to be enthusiastic when we describe the reason for intervention in Greece as an attempt to prevent Communists taking forcible possession of the government.

§ Our American Allies, as your Lordships are aware, have been extremely critical of the Greek situation and I am

going to quote one passage from an American publication which is called the Army and Navy Journal and therefore is to some extent, I presume, an official publication. It says: Since D-day in France...greater preoccupation has been shown...by Great Britain in Italy, Greece and Albania to protect her lifeline through the Mediterranean than in an achievement of the prime objective of our armies—prompt defeat of Germany.

VISCOUNT ELIBANK

Nonsense.

LORD FARINGDON

That statement was made and I say that that is the impression that our policy is making on our Allies.

VISCOUNT ELIBANK

The editor of one journal.

LORD FARINGDON

It is not one journal. I wish to God it were. That is the, impression that is being given and I do suggest that no effort is too great and no risk is too great to be taken to prevent that happening. I am not a military expert and I cannot say what the military view of Greek events is likely to be, but I would suspect and I believe any layman would feel that our Commanders in Italy and in France must feel very bitterly at seeing reserves, which we have been told again and again are none too plentiful, being drained off to go to Greece. We all heard, and heard with satisfaction, of the fall of Faenza, but a day or two later our troops had been driven back and out of part of the town. I wonder whether that could not have been prevented if reinforcements sent to Greece had gone instead to Italy.

I feel that not only are British lives being lost in Greece, not only are Greek lives being lost in Greece, but British and Allied lives are being lost all over the world because of this Greek affair. I believe that owing to the withdrawal of

supplies and of reinforcements the war may be protracted weeks or months owing to this Greek imbroglio. If that is so, then the lives of our men in every theatre of war are being lost and the lives of our [510](#)Allies also. I have received a number of letters from members of the Forces since I made a small remark about Greece last week and I have no doubt of the feeling of all those members of the Forces who are politically conscious. I admit that all my letters so far have come from men in England, possibly because either your Lordships' debates are not so fully reported in places abroad or there has not yet been time to receive comment from abroad, but I do not believe that all the politically conscious, democratically minded men in our Army are in England. I should not be surprised if military commanders had met cases of men who showed the greatest reluctance to fight the Greeks and may indeed have refused to bomb them. It may be that we shall have a mutiny amongst our men in Greece, a refusal to fight the Greeks.

[§THE MINISTER of RECONSTRUCTION \(LORD WOOLTON\)](#)

Monstrous.

LORD FARINGDON

It is not beyond the bounds of possibility. It is not nonsense.

[§LORD WOOLTON](#)

"Monstrous" was the word I used.

LORD FARINGDON

I think it is possible that our people throughout the country feel that this is a wrong thing and, as I say, it is possible that these feelings may be shared to the extremest point. It is possible, and I believe the Government should take account of that feeling. I beg to move.

[§](#)Moved to Resolve, That this House regrets the policy of His Majesty's Government in Greece which has had the

shameful result of military action against our Greek Allies.—
(Lord Faringdon.)

§LORD SOUTHWOOD

My Lords, may I be allowed to intervene for a moment to say that in the remarks made by the noble Lord, Lord Faringdon, he is not necessarily expressing the views of his Party?

LORD FARINGDON

My Lords, with permission I should apologize to your Lordships and to my noble friend that I omitted to make that statement when I was speaking.

§2.58 p.m.

§VISCOUNT SAMUEL

My Lords, whatever view may be taken of the greater part of the speech of the noble Lord, Lord Faringdon, I am sure that in all quarters of your Lordships' House there will be [511](#) universal condemnation of the final passage of his speech—his reference to the possible feeling among the troops and the very important consequences which he envisaged. Such language ought not to be used in your Lordships' House, and I am sure that on further consideration the noble Lord will regret that he was betrayed into these remarks.

As to the question in general, whatever difference of view there may be on the merits of the situation in Greece there will be universal agreement on one point in your Lordships' House and throughout the country—namely, that this conflict is deeply to be deplored. We have had in Great Britain long and happy connexions with the Greek people, a close historic friendship which has hitherto been unbroken, and we may hope that this may be a passing interlude and that friendship may be fully restored. Surely we have enough to do fighting our enemies without beginning to fight with our friends. I think the origins of this unhappy conflict,

certainly its extent, have a harmful effect upon British prestige, for our prestige does not rest, like the prestige of Germany, upon mere military might and force, but upon our reputation as a Power which seeks the good will and the welfare of other countries, which is striving in this war to promote liberty and independence and not to impose our own views upon other people. Now we seem to be in the false position of taking sides in a domestic quarrel, and also, it appears in the eyes of many of us, to be fighting on the wrong side. The situation was somewhat out of hand from the beginning, and this was partly because there appears to have been no civilian authority on the spot sufficiently responsible to be able to take effective action.

And it cannot be too often remarked that this quarrel is not really a military quarrel but a political quarrel. At the moment when the troubles began there was in authority in Athens a General Officer of distinction, but it is very rare for any soldier to be able to deal effectively with a tangled political situation in a foreign country. The British Ambassador was there. I have no knowledge of his special qualifications, and if I had I should say nothing about them for it is well recognized to be improper to do so. But it is a fact well known that, apparently, our Ambassador in Greece does not command a sufficiently universal authority for him to be regarded as an arbitrator, so to speak, among all the various Parties in Greece.

The civilian authority in that part of Europe was the Minister Resident in the Central Mediterranean, Mr. Macmillan, but he has to concern himself not only with Greece but also with all problems of Italy, and it happened, most unfortunately, that at that moment he was in neither of those countries but was on his way to some business—no doubt very necessary business—in the United States. The consequence was that the direct management of the affair fell upon the already heavily-burdened shoulders of the Prime Minister, who had to give instructions, as to day-to-day action, from Downing Street. I do not propose to criticize in any degree the action of the Prime Minister. He has upon his shoulders an immense burden. His efforts are unceasing, and they have

been attended with remarkable success in the two matters that are most important—namely, securing military victory and Allied solidarity. The Prime Minister has here got into a bad patch of difficult country, and the business of all of us, I think, should be to help him to get out of it, and not merely to seize the opportunity to rebuke him for having got into it.

Nor is it fair to throw all the blame on the shoulders of His Majesty's Government. The course taken by the E.L.A.S. forces may be considered to have been marked by very great ingratitude. They have hastily taken up arms and engaged in serious fighting with the British Army who are there only in order to enable the Greek people to expel their German conquerors, to help them to redeem their financial system from complete collapse, and to bring in food and clothing for the starving and destitute population. I think we have the right to expect that the guerrilla forces of Greece would have exercised some restraint before being willing to embark on military conflict with those who come solely with the purpose of being their benefactors. They ought, surely, to have continued, until the last hour and the last moment, efforts to secure a settlement by negotiation rather than embark on a conflict of this nature. But guerrilla forces in Greece, [513](#)and perhaps everywhere, have the defects of their virtues. That heroism and self-sacrifice which they have been willing to show and have gloriously shown is frequently marked by a certain impulsiveness and impatience of deliberate negotiations which has been very conspicuous in this case.

No doubt some would say, though it is not a course that I would for a moment recommend or your Lordships would be willing to accept, that the British Government would be perfectly justified, in view of the situation, in withdrawing from Greece altogether, and using our much-needed ships, forces and supplies in other quarters. But there has been that long friendship with the Greek people of which I have spoken, and it would not be consistent with our duty to allow Greece, now that we are there, merely to fall into anarchy, and probably open civil war, with the result that our future relations with the Greeks would become almost

impossible and our reputation would suffer. Nor is it the case that all the Greeks are engaged. It is far from being the case that all the Greeks are engaged in this conflict with the British forces. If we were to withdraw and leave Greece to work out her own unhappy destiny in her own way, we should be deserting the general population who are, no doubt, animated by a sober desire for a peaceful policy in order that they may work for the restoration and regeneration of their country. The objects to be pursued were succinctly summarized in five words by The Times newspaper in a leading article yesterday as being disarmament, amnesty, regency, coalition and reconstruction. And it was represented that these five points were approved in substance by both sides in the domestic conflict in Greece. We have no desire to impose any settlement of our own, nor should we endeavour to obstruct any settlement proposed by the Greeks themselves unless it were the re-establishment of a totalitarian régime.

Our policy, in general, during this war has been to recognize, in the occupied territories the pre-war legitimate Governments. That has been done, I think, in every case. In the case of Greece, the King, who was a sovereign under a Constitution, found himself in this country, and he has been regarded as the head of the constitutional Government of Greece.⁵¹⁴ My knowledge of present-day Greek politics is not sufficient to know whether since the dictatorship of General Metaxas the King, who started and maintained that dictatorship, can still be regarded as a constitutional monarch. I am afraid that I do not know whether, having established a dictatorship in his own country, he can still be considered as guaranteed by the Constitution which was of a different character. During the three visits I have made to Greece in recent years, I have heard much of that dictatorship, and while it was less cruel and brutal than others in Europe, there is no doubt that it was maintained by force, by the suppression of all opposition and the imprisonment or exile of Opposition leaders. So I am not sure whether the general principle of recognition need necessarily apply in this particular case.

There is no reason of principle that I know of why Great Britain should be called upon to bear this burden alone. Why should it be only British soldiers and Indian soldiers who risk, and sometimes lose, their lives, in order to bring pacification to Greece and to establish order? By the force of circumstances it happened that it was British troops who were there, and British shipping which was available in the Mediterranean. There is also our old connexion with Greece, dating back to the days of Byron and Gladstone, and our great friendship with the Greek people and their friendship with us. Further, there was the fact that it was our officers who had helped (perhaps owing to that old connexion) the Greek guerrillas to fight against the Germans. All these facts led Britain to her intervention in Athens.

Our great Ally the United States has, of course; enough to do in the Pacific without wishing to be troubled with affairs in the Mediterranean. Russian Forces are not within reach, and Russia would not wish to divert them from the gigantic campaigns in which she is now engaged. Consequently, we found ourselves in Greece. Being there, it would no doubt be better at this moment if we could settle the question ourselves, without the delays and complications of bringing in other Powers; but if our present efforts fail we cannot contemplate the alternative of a prolonged campaign, lasting perhaps for months, in difficult country, involving a drain on our resources and much loss of life, together with a legacy of hatred after- [515](#)wards between ourselves and the Greek people. That would be a detestable situation for this country to find itself in, and consequently, if some alternative has to be found, we might perhaps be compelled to have recourse to some form of inter-Allied action. There is the Council of Europe, representing the Allied Nations, which has not so far intervened in this matter. If the present deadlock is not surmounted within a reasonable time, it may be necessary to endeavour to circumvent it by a different approach, rather than by carrying the conflict to a bitter end in pursuit of inflexible military demands.

[§3.14](#) p.m.

[§VISCOUNT LONG](#)

My Lords, I crave your indulgence upon this occasion, the first time that it has been my privilege and honour to address your Lordships. I am sure that you will grant it to me, as you have done to so many "new boys" in the past. My task in rising to intervene in this debate, which I do with some hesitation, is made no easier by the fact that I have succeeded to your Lordships' House on the death in action, in North-West Europe, of a very gallant officer and gentleman, my nephew, and secondly that it is my honour to bear a name which is well known as that of one who, a quarter of a century ago, played a great part in the Party political strife of those days.

The noble Lord, Lord Faringdon, who introduced this Motion to-day, began by saying that he had a feeling of shame. I have not a feeling of shame, but I must say that I have a feeling of frustration, that after five years of war, in which I have had the honour and privilege of myself participating in command of troops, not abroad but on active service on the East Coast of this country, I find at this time, when all our attention should be focused on defeating our one enemy, the Hun, the occasion should be chosen to try to bully our Prime Minister and His Majesty's Government. I base my arguments to-day on the fact that there is one foe that we have to fight against, the Hun; but in another place, and among the public generally, there are sections of opinion—very small sections—who will take up any stick with which to beat the dog when it suits them. We have had the B.B.C. broadcasting a [516](#) meeting from Trafalgar Square. What must the world think of these things, when at this very moment on the Western Front we are confronted with one of the greatest attacks that the common enemy has ever made since D-day?

It has been said that public opinion generally is against this conflict which has arisen in Greece. I have had to travel about the country a good deal, and that is not my view; and I claim that I keep my ears and eyes just as open as any other member of your Lordships' House. On the contrary, I think that what the masses are saying is that we want to end this war, and that we trust the Prime Minister and the

Government to get it over as quickly as possible. While the public generally regret the tragic events in Greece, yet, tragic as those events are, they focus their attention on the common foe. The noble Lord who moved this Motion seemed to me to make an attack—perhaps he did not mean it as such—on His Majesty King George II of the Hellenes. Are our memories so short that we forget 1940 and 1941, when His Majesty, and his gallant country, declared and made war on the oppressor? We are now told that that was a dictatorship. It may well be so, but there was a common foe in the field, and, regardless of whether we supported Greece or not, her gallant King and her Prime Minister of the day declared war on the Italian nation, and afterwards on Germany. They were the admiration of the world for the fight which they put up in those years, and for that fight His Majesty the King of the Hellenes was awarded the Distinguished Service Order by His Gracious Majesty our King. That is the first time, I think, on which that honour has been conferred on any monarch in the world.

Now let me turn to one or two other points. I am told that a Regency is not constitutional in Greece. The noble Viscount opposite questioned whether it was constitutional. I am told that it cannot be set up. I am told that under the Constitution of Greece it is impossible. But, assuming that a Regency can be set up, I was interested to hear that the noble Lord, Lord Faringdon, thought that it was a good idea to make the Archbishop of Athens the Chief Regent. I am sure your Lordships will agree that we are all out to beat the common foe. I should like to [517](#)ask the noble Viscount who is to reply what happened to the Archbishop who was in office when the Germans entered Athens. What action was taken when the German Commandant walked into his room, and he kicked him out and said he would have nothing to do with the Hun? The result of that, I am informed on the very highest possible authority, was that he was deposed and the present Archbishop was put in his place. I leave your Lordships to draw your own conclusions as to the result of such an appointment to the position of Chief Regent, even if a Regency were possible.

I should like to say at once that, having served for three years in this war, I refute every suggestion that the noble Lord made about the British Army. I think it was an unpardonable thing to say in your Lordships' House, and I resent it personally, having had the honour to command. Take our troops in Epirus at this moment. Less than four days ago the association that stands for law and order in Greece, E.D.E.S., held meetings in public at Janina and other places in that neighbourhood. I assure your Lordships that our troops have been feted and have been acknowledged as the saviours of Greece wherever they have gone in those areas. I can see no signs of any disturbance between our troops and those properly constituted bodies who are out to maintain law and order—the law and order for which we are fighting at present throughout the world as against mob law, whether in Greece or any other country.

It may be of interest if I put this further question. We are aware that arms were dropped and that the Greeks were encouraged to take up guerrilla warfare, but the noble Viscount, I think it was, wondered whether it was the right policy to arm them. The regrettable fact, I believe, is that those arms fell into the wrong hands and these people were encouraged by Hun officers. I am only concerned in defeating the Hun. Wherever he rears his ugly head, so far as I am concerned, I shall do my best to crack it open and then stamp on it to the best of my ability. Unfortunately, as I said, these arms got into the wrong hands, and then there was a state of guerrilla warfare, not between the Greeks and the British, but between the very men who fought in Albania and Macedonia and suffered terrific casualties. [518](#) These gallant soldiers went to the mountains, and then unfortunately the arms instead of falling into their hands, so that they could be properly grouped together and disciplined again, fell into the hands of the guerrillas. It is a regrettable fact that thousands of these grand soldiers who were living in the mountains have been murdered by their own compatriots of E.A.M.

I have one suggestion to make to your Lordships, if I may. Could His Majesty's Government as soon as possible make a

frank statement as to what is happening, and then see that through the means of the radio a statement is broadcast throughout the world representing the official policy of His Majesty's Government? A last word in this humble effort that I have tried to contribute to the debate. I believe that there are only two of us in your Lordships' House who are directly descended from Lord Canning, who a hundred years ago gave Greece her freedom and her liberty; so I felt today that the least I could do in these difficult days was to stand up and thank the Prime Minister and His Majesty's Government for the valiant efforts they are making to support a grand country, a great and brave King, and above all to support the great object for which we are all fighting, freedom and justice throughout the world.

§3.25 p.m.

LORD STRABOLGI

My Lords, I am very glad to have the privilege of congratulating the noble Lord on a very sincere and moving speech. As one who, like many of your Lordships, had the privilege of the friendship of his distinguished kinsman, the first Lord Long, it gave me particular pleasure to hear the noble Lord speaking with such force and eloquence in your Lordships' House. He will permit me to suggest, however, that perhaps the information about the Archbishop needs checking, because apparently the Foreign Secretary in another place yesterday took great credit for the fact that His Majesty's Ambassador in Athens had recommended the present Archbishop of Athens as Regent.

LORD LONG

I should like to say that I checked that information this morning.

LORD STRABOLGI

I can only quote The Times correspondent, who I think has been accurate during these tragic events, [519](#) as saying that the present Archbishop earned the respect of all Parties in

Greece during the German occupation. He is reported to have offered himself as a hostage when the Germans were proceeding to shoot hostages. However, I must make it clear that, like my noble friend Lord Faringdon, I am not necessarily speaking to-day for all my colleagues in this House. May I also make another comment on the most admirable and interesting speech of the noble Lord? That is that it was because of the grave events on the Western Front, because of the grave news that we are getting, that some of us, at any rate on this side of the House, considered it very desirable that this debate should take place in your Lordships' House. There might be some excuse for these things if the war was nearing its end. Obviously there is a great deal of fighting still going on and for that very reason I think there is justification for this debate.

May I comment also very briefly on the most interesting speech of the Leader of the Liberal Party and take the opportunity of congratulating him publicly, as I have already done privately, on reaching that eminent position? He protested against the situation in Greece as became the political descendant of the great line of statesmen to whom he referred. But he found fault with the impatience of the E.L.A.S. in taking up arms. They have been under arms for about three years fighting the Germans. He omitted to say who started the shooting in this new conflict. When we landed there had not been a shot fired in Athens and until the Quisling police, the police who served in the dictatorship and who served the Germans, fired on a procession of demonstrators there had been no shooting. I suggest that impatience was on the part of the police and I think that is generally admitted. While agreeing with so much of the noble Viscount's speech, I regret very much that he sought to bring in other Allies to support this policy of intervention. I do not think he will succeed in drawing our Allies into this affair. The only Ally that we might possibly bring in is Franco's Spain; you will get no Allies from anywhere else I can assure the noble Viscount. Judging from the comments in the American Press and statements by Congressmen, the American public will not support intervention in Greece.

[520](#)This Greek episode cannot really be taken by itself, and may I particularly make this comment to the noble Viscount who I understand is going to reply for the Government? It is not only in the matter of Greece. Right through our policy and in some cases American policy a thread is becoming visible. In France there was the attempt to support the Darlan, Giraud and Peyrouton régimes and the extraordinary reluctance to recognize the Provisional Government and the Committee of National Liberation.

That happily has been settled. Thank goodness there was in France a man who had been the head and front -of the resistance movement, who had also been abroad and was acclaimed as a great hero by the French people—General de Gaulle. I am glad of this because the actions of His Majesty's Government, their hesitation in giving General de Gaulle his full due, helped to build him up in French eyes as a French patriot. Now you have the resistance forces of France, who were armed rather slowly—and General de Gaulle has complained about that publicly—fighting with great gallantry on the Western Front.

VISCOUNT CRANBORNE

In the national forces—the Regular Army.

LORD STRABOLGI

Certainly; that was what was done. There was a difficult situation for a time. The solution in France was to make a number of the most respected resistance leaders Cabinet Ministers and to incorporate the French Forces of the Interior into the national Army. But that was a French affair. The same thread of British policy has been visible in Belgium and I have explained what I think this thread leads to. I have in my hand here a dispatch from Brussels from the correspondent of the Daily Sketch. I am very glad to quote a Camrose paper for a change, or at least a Berry paper—I do not delve much in that stable. The quotation reads: A delegation of the 'resistance front,' headed by M. de Many, the former Resistance Minister, was yesterday received by M. Auguste Schrijver, the Deputy Prime Minister. The

delegation formally conveyed to the Government the wish of all members of the resistance movement to be mobilized at once and placed at the disposal of the Belgian and Allied authorities. That, I understand, was always the request of the Belgian underground resistance movement. [521](#)M. Schrijver replied that the Government's point of view was identical with that expressed yesterday by General Erskine, i.e., that the plan already in existence for the mobilization of the Belgian Armies should be proceeded with. Of course General Erskine would carry out his orders, and because I mention his name there is no kind of reflection on the head of the British Military Mission in Belgium. But panzer divisions and German motorized infantry are driving deep into Belgium. They have occupied a number of Belgian towns, slaughtered the unfortunate inhabitants and established a reign of terror in the parts reoccupied. What a pity it is that the Belgian resisters have not been treated in the same way as the French Forces of the Interior in helping to defend their own homes. And we have, as my noble friend reminds me, had a hint of the same policy in regard to Holland. There is no trouble there at all, so far as I know. As my noble friend pointed out to your Lordships, the attitude of the Royal Dutch Government is perfectly plain. The emigré Government intends to resign and the Queen will call on members of the resistance movement to form a new Government, and there should be no trouble in Holland. But why this threat by the Prime Minister in his speech of December 8? Why bring in Holland? Because I say the same thread of policy runs through the whole of these countries and it is most clearly visible in Greece. Incidentally, as I have mentioned Belgium because it is very relevant, I notice that the Prime Minister's account in another place—I will not trouble your Lordships with it—of the imminent coup d'état, has been completely demolished by reputable eye-witnesses whose accounts have been published in the British newspapers.

Now, my Lords, where does this thread of policy lead to? I am going to hazard the opinion that the real object is to make a kind of new Holy Alliance. The Holy Alliance of Castlereagh, Metternich and the Tsar of Russia was an

attempt to hold the march of political democracy by underpinning and supporting everywhere the monarchical institutions of Europe. To-day the same attempt is being made, not to hold back political democracy but to hold back economic democracy. But unfortunately—or quite possibly fortunately—it is being done by the same methods that Castlereagh and Metternich used. This is not the nineteenth [522](#)but the twentieth century and the propping up of unpopular Kings on their thrones is not going to keep back the march of either political or economic democracy. Furthermore, this is not an alliance. Castlereagh, the Foreign Minister of the day, was able to say that he had powerful Allies and helpers in the matter, but we are alone in this business; we have no helpers. Lord Samuel deplored it, but Lord Faringdon gave the reason. You might get an Anglo-American Holy Alliance to keep back the march of economic democracy but you will not get the Americans to use these methods of propping up the tottering thrones of unpopular Kings.

This is a personal policy under which we are suffering, and it is a lone policy. I hope I shall not hurt the feelings of the noble Lord opposite who made such an interesting speech, but I am attacking the Prime Minister. This is what we are here for—we are criticizing the Government. I think his actions were best summed up by the very brilliant American correspondent in London, Mr. Daniels of the New York Times. Referring to the trouble in Greece, Italy, Belgium and so on, he said: The trouble is that the Prime Minister of Great Britain is trying to fight a twentieth-century war with a nineteenth-century mind for eighteenth-century aims. I think that is the exact position in a sentence, and we have the example of it in Greece.

Now the Council of Europe was mentioned by Viscount Samuel. That Council includes France to-day, but I see that the Council of Europe is at present officially occupied in dealing only with questions arising out of the conquest of Germany. May I respectfully reinforce the plea of the noble Viscount that the Council of Europe might widen the scope of its activities, especially now that the French Government

is represented upon it? I wonder if the noble Viscount who is going to reply for the Government, Lord Cranborne, has had brought to his attention the Drew Pearson charges in the United States. I do not know whether they are true or not, but he is a columnist who is read by 5,000,000 readers and those particular charges are being discussed from the Atlantic to the Pacific Oceans throughout the Union. He claimed to print a copy of the dispatch sent by the American Ambassador in [523](#)Rome to the State Department detailing instructions given by the present Prime Minister of Great Britain from Downing Street to General Scobie, and those instructions made perfectly clear that when the British troops were sent to Greece they expected trouble. They did not go there to fight the Germans. I hope Lord Long appreciates that. That is admitted—the Germans were a hundred miles away before we went to Athens, which had been liberated by E.L.A.S. before we went there. According to Mr. Eden, the Foreign Secretary himself, we went there only to supervise the distribution of food.

LORD LONG

I do not know whether' the noble Lord is asking me. All I know is that the British troops were asked by the Greek Government to go there.

LORD STRABOLGI

I did not mean to address the noble Lord personally; he touched me so much by his plea about fighting Germans which I entirely support. These troops did not go into Greece to fight Germans but to fight E.L.A.S., the Army of the Greek Committee of National Liberation. From this account issued by Mr. Pearson, which has been a matter of very keen discussion in the United States, there is no doubt these troops did not go there to distribute food. They went, apparently, if these charges are true, either to overawe the armed forces of E.A.M. or, if necessary, to teach them a lesson or, as his wording says, if necessary to shoot. I do think we should not forget that in any case our troops are not in Greece to fight Germans.

My noble friend has referred to E.A.M. and has described it. I am relying here on The Times account of E.A.M. before the present shooting began. Its correspondent in Athens then declared that 80 per cent. of the people of Greece supported E.A.M. I venture to guess that now, as always happens when you have a Power intervening in a country, the supporters of E.A.M. probably number 90 per cent. I understand that the noble Viscount, Lord Elibank, is to take part in this debate. He will remember, as I do, what happened when we intervened in Russia. The Bolshevik Government was immensely strengthened by the very fact of foreign military intervention from outside, and the effect of our intervention will, I submit, only be to strengthen E.A.M. I should have thought that some [524](#) of our Ministers would have learnt the lesson from what happened in Russia twenty-five years ago following intervention. The noble Viscount, Lord Samuel, spoke of the future. What is going to be the next development? If we do not get an armistice and peace, if we do not get the settlement we all want, how many troops shall we have to send to Greece? The Germans did not succeed in occupying the whole of Greece with ten divisions numbering, I suppose, 150,000 men, though they used methods of cruelty and ruthlessness which we should never dream of using or be permitted to use. They only managed to hold the cities and railways and some towns. The interior mountain masses were held by E.L.A.S. forces. Where are we to get ten divisions from to carry this thing through, for that is what it comes to if we do not get a settlement in Greece which is acceptable to the Greek people, who, for reasons I have suggested, are represented by E.A.M.? We shall have to occupy the whole country if we do not get this settlement.

Actually, what has happened now is that British troops with great difficulty are holding a small area in the middle of Athens, the Pæus and the Acropolis. The whole of the rest of Greece is under the effective control of E.A.M. There are British troops at Salonika. My information is that fortunately there has been no trouble there and that food delivery is going on, while the British Commander is co-operating with the E.A.M. authorities. We have withdrawn the Indian troops

from Missolonghi where they came to blows with the Greeks. I wonder if that was within sight of the tomb of Byron. We have withdrawn apparently also from other points where we had landed troops of various categories. The whole of the rest of the country is under E.L.A.S. and the administration of E.A.M. I do not know what has happened to the Forces called E.D.E.S. Colonel Napoleon Zervas commanding them was sent, I believe deliberately, from Cairo by the British authorities there to form a separate guerrilla band. He was a notorious coup d'état man who had been mixed up in all the intrigues and revolutions and counter-revolutions in Greece for years. On this occasion he declared for the King and he was plentifully supplied with arms and money and formed a small band in the West of [525](#)Greece. I do not know what has happened to him. But apart from his force the whole country is occupied by E.A.M. and the armed forces of E.L.A.S.

If we are to attempt to coerce—pacify I suppose is the word—the whole of Greece, we shall have to use troops, tanks, motor transport, shipping, aeroplanes, guns, and above all, precious men that we cannot spare from the other fighting fronts. The Foreign Minister, in another place, declared that we did not go to Greece for any ulterior motive. He suggested that we went neither for strategical advantages nor economic advantages, nor any advantages of that kind. Further on he said that of course it was true that we had an interest in Greece and the Greek islands because of their strategical importance in the Mediterranean. That has never been denied by anyone. But we had no ulterior motive, he said. I heard a very powerful speech by Mr. Ernest Bevin last week at our Labour Party Conference. He was perfectly frank and he said we had strategical interests in the Eastern Mediterranean and therefore could not be indifferent to the Government in Greece. That is perfectly true. I make no complaint about that. We have strategical interests in the Eastern Mediterranean. Mr. Bevin's words were heard by some of your Lordships and I do not think I have in any way misrepresented them. We have strategical interests in the Mediterranean, and we do need a friendly people in Greece.

My complaint is not that we are looking after our life-lines through the Mediterranean; I think that may be necessary. I do not think our Allies will object if we defend our strategic position until we have a better system by means of the Dumbarton Oaks charter or in some other way. Until we have a better strategic position we must have in Greece and the Greek islands a people that is friendly to us. I suggest that what we are now doing is not a way to get Greek friendship and support. I hope Lord Cranborne, if he is interested in strategy, is also considering the other side of the Mediterranean. Palestine is of far greater strategic importance to us than Greece ever was, and it always will be of more strategic importance than Greece ever was or the Greek islands. It is very important to have a friendly population in Palestine as well as in Greece, [526](#) but I only throw that out in passing because I think it is very important.

I want to deal with only one other matter and it is this. We are told repeatedly, and will be told again by the noble Viscount who speaks for the Government, that we only went to Greece to distribute food, and that if this policy is insisted on now of unconditional surrender and it does not succeed food cannot go on being distributed and so on. I have here a dispatch which appeared in the Washington Post of December 16 sent by their correspondent in Athens, Mr. Weller. This account is very remarkable. Nothing of this has appeared in the British papers. Your Lordships will be aware that U.N.R.R.A. has been functioning in Greece and that the part of U.N.R.R.A. which is in Greece happens to be under American direction. No doubt our part of U.N.R.R.A. is operating somewhere else, but in Greece it is an American unit which is operating.

This is what Mr. Weller says about U.N.R.R.A. in Greece: "U.N.R.R.A. disassociates itself from military liaison for the duration of the Greek civil war"— May I say that I regret that I did not send notice of this beforehand to the noble Viscount, but I only came by train an hour ago from Yorkshire and I did not have an opportunity of doing so. My train was late too. The dispatch goes on: declaring it

impossible to feed people while subordinate to General Scobie. I am making no complaint about General Scobie, he is carrying out his strict orders as a soldier. I complain about the people who issue orders to General Scobie. The dispatch goes on: Formal announcement says 'We find ourselves unavoidably associated with an organization of force and discrimination.' U.N.R.R.A. sees no end in sight for crisis. U.N.R.R.A. executive braved R.A.F.'s intense strafing and bombing of Piræus to find Republican hospital well provided and U.N.R.R.A. food stores in E.L.A.S. controlled area untouched, but E.L.A.S. officers averred that the starving population would probably force use of food mainly of American origin and American purchase and to which E.L.A.S. considered they have as much right as the Athenian garrison. That is taken from the Washington Post of December 16. No doubt a copy is in the Foreign Office ready for the noble Viscount to check if he wishes to do so. I think that is a very grave and im-[527](#)portant statement. It may be entirely untrue. It only comes, of course, from the correspondent in Athens of the Washington Post.

VISCOUNT CRANBORNE

If it is so grave and important the noble Lord might have given me notice.

LORD STRABOLGI

I did apologize, but I only arrived from Yorkshire just before this debate and I had not time to give the noble Viscount notice. What has induced me to speak in this debate is the same feeling as has induced other noble Lords on this side. We have a feeling of shame. I would not have used the word in the Motion if I had drawn it, but I feel it is shameful that the Acropolis, which contains I suppose some of the greatest treasures which the whole of humanity has inherited, which we warned the Germans to refrain from damaging on a threat of bombing Rome, and which they did not damage apart from the moral damage of hoisting the Swastika over it, should be made into a fortress by British troops against the people of Athens. This ghastly situation, however it arose, we must find some means of ending.

The other point I want to make is this. There is a shortage of men on the United Nations battle fronts. Russia has been much more clever in her methods than we have in dealing with Rumania and Bulgaria, both ex-enemy countries. They have managed to enlist large forces of Rumanian and Bulgarian soldiers and have got them to the front line. Except in the case of France we have not succeeded in doing that in the countries we have liberated. I believe the number of armed trained soldiers in the ranks of E.L.A.S. in Greece is between 60,000 and 80,000. Probably it could be very greatly increased, and I suppose we could raise an army of several divisions from Greek manhood. They want to be fighting the Germans, I want them to be fighting the Germans, my noble friends want them to be doing that. We do not want them to be killing British soldiers or British soldiers killing them. Whatever constitutional proprieties stand in the way, whosoever's prestige stands in the way, efforts must be made to stop this horrible and shameful fighting that is going on between two Allies. It is a gift for the Germans, a gift for Goebbels and [528](#) for his propaganda machine. He has only to say, as he is saying, to the German people, "We told you to hold on, to resist a little longer and the Allies would be quarrelling among themselves. Now you have the British and Greeks fighting each other." It is a terrible thing from that point of view. I am not satisfied that a real effort has been made to bring this horrible situation to an end and that is why I support my noble friend.

[§3.43](#) p.m.

VISCOUNT ELIBANK

My Lords, I listened to the speech of the noble Lord who introduced this Motion and practically the whole of it consisted not in an attack upon His Majesty's Government for the policy they have pursued in this matter but in urging measures to enable His Majesty's Government to get out of what I agree is a very unfortunate position. He ended up with a statement which, like all others in your Lordships' House, I greatly deplored, making certain suggestions with regard to our troops. I hope we shall never hear again an expression of that kind come from the noble Lord. I think

that the debate as far as it has gone was summed up by the noble Viscount, Lord Samuel, when he said we all deplore the conditions which exist in Greece to-day. Everyone deplores the conditions under which our troops are engaged in fighting with a section of the Greek people, but so far as I am concerned I have no quarrel with His Majesty's Government or with the measures which they have taken which have led up to this unfortunate position. I do not see how the Prime Minister or his Government could have pursued a different policy. I am not so conversant with the conditions in Greece and the percentages of those who are on one side or the other as the noble Lord, Lord Strabolgi, but I am not prepared to accept the percentages which he has stated unless they are confirmed by the noble Viscount who is going to reply to this debate.

I think the noble Lord, Lord Faringdon, suggested that our troops should withdraw from Greece. What position would that leave? The noble Lord, Lord Faringdon, suggested that we should have an armistice and stop fighting. It takes two sides to stop fighting. Suppose we stopped fighting and came out of Greece we should leave E.A.M.—or the E.L.A.S., who are the actual troops—in the position of going on fighting and overwhelming the [529](#) other side of the Grecian people against whom they have a grudge or with whom they do not agree. I cannot see that that is the way in which we are going to get peace and the ballot box in Greece. Both sides have to stop fighting, but E.L.A.S. has shown no indication that they are prepared to stop fighting or even that they are prepared to accept any of the proposals which have been made to them by their own people or by our officer commanding the troops in Greece.

These E.L.A.S. people are not the nice respectable people which the two noble Lords would suggest they are. I will give your Lordships an experience which has come to my notice quite recently. There was a certain British property in Greece, an agricultural property aggregating some 60,000 acres of land, which was farmed in a mixed manner. When the Germans came into Greece they took possession of that property. There were certain British managers who, of

course, had left. The Germans ousted the Grecian manager who had been put in charge and they put in his place a man belonging to the E.L.A.S. persuasion. The Germans had that property cultivated to their advantage and they took all the crops. So soon as the Germans retired from Greece, what happened? This agent of E.L.A.S. persuasion who had been put in charge by them immediately got together a number of others of his own kind. They ousted all the other Grecian employees, the peasants on this property, they brought in members of the E.L.A.S. group who proceeded to pillage and rob it, to cut down the crops and, generally, to make havoc of the place. Those are the kind of people to whom I refer. I do not say they are all like that, but that shows the type of mind against which we are contesting to-day.

I do not want to call these people Communists. It is no concern of mine whether Greece is ruled by Communist people or by Liberal people. That is not our concern at all. Our concern is to establish a peaceful position which will enable the Grecian people to go forward and recover their prosperity along democratic lines. What I should like to ask the noble Viscount, Lord Cranborne, is to what extent are the Germans, the Nazis, behind this movement of the E.L.A.S. and E.A.M. in Greece? Some time ago—I cannot remember how long, there have been so many debates and so many ques- [530](#)tions and answers in the other House on this question—it was suggested by one of the Ministers, I think, in the House of Commons that there were German officers fighting with the E.L.A.S. forces and that the movement had a German backing.

LORD STRABOLGI

My Lords, would the noble Earl permit me to intervene for a moment? He surely is aware that there are also German soldiers fighting in the British Army, and doing very good service, but that does not mean that any of our forces are under German control.

VISCOUNT ELIBANK

I am asking the noble Earl a question. I am not asking about what are called good Germans. I am asking about what are called Nazis or bad Germans. They are the subject of my anxiety to-day. I should like to ask the noble Earl whether there is any evidence, any real knowledge, or any good grounds for suspecting that these E.L.A.S. troops are in any way backed, supported, influenced or helped by the Nazis in any way whatsoever. If that is the case then—as Lord Long said in his admirable speech, upon which I have great pleasure in congratulating him—we are not only fighting the E.L.A.S. in Greece, but we are fighting the slimy reptile that has drawn its trail all over Europe—namely, the Nazi, and if we do not get rid of this reptile now it will continue to leave its effects after the war wherever it goes. That was my main reason for rising to speak, and I did not intend to make so long a speech. I shall be glad to know if the noble Earl can satisfy your Lordships that there is no influence of the sort to which I have alluded connected with the E.L.A.S. or other troops in Greece.

§4.4 p.m.

§THE EARL OF HUNTINGDON

My Lords, I should like to join with other noble Lords who have spoken in congratulating the noble Lord, Lord Long, on his maiden speech. I think it was an extremely eloquent one, and I hope that we shall have the pleasure of hearing him very often in this House in the future. I should also like to say that in taking part in this debate I am not necessarily speaking on behalf of all the noble Lords who sit on these Benches. A most tragic situation has developed in Greece. We are all agreed on that point. It is a great responsibility to speak at [531](#) such a critical time. On the other hand, I have also felt that it is evading responsibility, possibly, not to speak and, as this debate has been initiated, I feel myself obliged by my conscience to support my noble friend who has brought forward this Motion.

I think that the one desire we all have in this House is to find a solution to this problem—a way out of what no one can help describing as a dreadful and unfortunate situation.

In order to discover this way out I think it might be wise—if your Lordships will have patience with me—to try to find out to some extent what are the facts behind the situation as it really is. I read with great attention the report of the debate in another place on the subject of Greece and, as far as I could make out, the Government's claim was, roughly, that the British Forces had arrived in Greece in order to assist in the final expulsion of the Germans.

§THE PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WAR (LORD CROFT)

And to feed the starving population.

§THE EARL OF HUNTINGDON

And it was the intention, I understood, that our Forces should stay there to maintain law and order until a Government should be elected by fair and free election. There were no other motives, and our people were to act with strict impartiality in all matters. I do not know whether that is a fair representation of the Government case, but that is how it struck me. How far actually do the facts, as we know them, coincide with or support this claim? Was the only intention of the British Government, after the Germans had been expelled from the mainland, that their armed Forces should impartially support a Government of national unity which we had brought in under M. Papandreou until a Government could be chosen by free and popular election? Was there no other motive at all? I must say that I think the Prime Minister in another place has partly answered this question.

I would like shortly to quote his words on this subject. Speaking about the hiatus, as I think he called it, in Athens when the Germans had left, he said: It was very likely that the E.A.M. and the Communist extremists would attempt to seize the city"— [532](#)he was referring to Athens— and crush all forms of Greek expression but their own. He then went on to say that to counter this he proposed to gather forces to enter Greece—but I will not go on with his speech; you will find the report of it in Hansard. The point I wish to make

is that it was envisaged right from the start, before we went into Greece, that British troops might be used to prevent a seizure of power by the E.A.M. or by Communist extremists, but you will notice that nothing was said about British troops being used to prevent attempted seizure of power by the Royalists or any of the Right Wing extremists. It is only the Left Wing people to whom reference was made. It will, no doubt, leap to your Lordships' minds that it would be a very unlikely thing to happen that the Right Wing Government under M. Papandreou would start using force or would try to bring in a Government illegally; but I think I must submit that the opposite may be true. We have seen already in Spain, after elections where the democratic Liberal Left Wing succeeded in obtaining a majority, that the Right Wing felt themselves forced to try to gain power by force of arms, and with the support of Germany and Italy they succeeded in doing so. The motives in this case are much more likely to influence the Right Wing rather than the Left Wing to use force. As far as we can gather, E.A.M. had undoubtedly an overwhelming majority of support in Greece in their terrific resistance to the Germans, and there was no need for them to falsify the elections. The Royalist movement was a very small group, and there would be every motive for them either to set up a dictatorship by underhand or violent methods or, worse still, to try to start up violence in the hope that the British troops would restore order and themselves at the same time. We cannot fail to note that there might be this very strong motive on the Royalist side.

That this is not a dream or a wild imagining of mine is shown by the fact that M. Papandreou, who remained in power in the Government after E.A.M. had left it, in a broadcast on November 28 accused the Right—what he then called "the ruling class"—of provoking civil war. Both the National Liberation movement and the Communists were very much alive to this danger of trouble being [533](#) caused by the Right, and they consistently urged Mr. Papandreou to get rid of collaborationists and of those whom they called Fascists and of Fascist influence from the Government and from the Athens Police Force. M. Papandreou promised to do this, but it was never done, and, as we know, these

elements remained both in the police and in the Government.

I submit that this is the whole trouble behind the present Greek situation. The National Liberation movement seems to have behind it the overwhelming support of the people of Greece. As the noble Viscount, Lord Elibank, says, it is difficult to give exact figures, but on the Paris radio recently its membership was put at about two millions, which as a Party membership is enormous. In any case, its effective force, the E.L.A.S., controls the mainland of Greece, except for a tiny area in the north-west where Colonel Zervas's forces still hold sway, and apart from the British troops in Athens.

This E.A.M. Party, which comprises all shades of opinion from Liberal to Communist—almost all republican and democratic opinion—is really frightened. How far its fears are justified I do not know, but it is genuinely frightened that the Right Wing element is going to attempt a restoration of the Greek King, and hence a repetition of the dictatorship under some man chosen by the King. I must say that our Government have done nothing to relieve this fear, and, in fact, very much the reverse. It seems almost as though we have come, through unfortunate circumstances, to frustrate agreement even when it seems to have been on the point of being made. For instance, on October 18 an agreement was apparently reached after much discussion and argument, on the disbanding of E.L.A.S. and E.D.E.S. and on the formation of a neutral National Guard, but the value of this agreement was completely wiped out when the Mountain Brigade and the Sacred Battalion, which are looked upon in Greece, as the noble Lord, Lord Strabolgi, told us, as completely Royalist and Right Wing troops, were brought to Greece. As a result of that, E.A.M., who had consented to the original agreement, said that it was not fair to bring them in, that the whole balance of power was upset, and that the whole position must be reconsidered. I⁵³⁴ should like to know why these regiments were brought to Greece. It seems strange that when an agreement was so near it should have been

upset in that way. The disbandment of these regiments was asked for by E.A.M., but I understand that the Government, with the support of General Scobie, refused to do this.

Another attempt to reach a solution was made by the different parties, by the Right Wing Papandreou Government and the E.A.M. Ministers. It was that E.L.A.S. should retain a number of men equal to the Sacred Battalion and the Mountain Brigade. I think that the police were to be disbanded. It was said in another place that an E.A.M. Minister apparently visited General Scobie and explained the whole agreement which had been reached. Soon after this, M. Papandreou, who had become apparently, for some reason or other, very much more a supporter of the Right, issued a decree by which all guerrilla forces were to be disbanded, but there was no mention of the disbandment of the Mountain Brigade or of the Sacred Battalion, which E.A.M. wanted, and there was the unfortunate incident of leaflets being dropped at the same time as the decree demanding the unconditional disbandment of all guerrilla forces. Here again we have an example of agreement between the Greeks being stopped presumably by the Papandreou Government. How far they were influenced by our Government it is difficult to say.

Finally, we come to the unfortunate incident of the Athens police firing on the demonstration. This demonstration was, I understand, first allowed and then forbidden by M. Papandreou. It consisted of unarmed civilians, women and children as well as men. I shall not dwell on the terrible events which happened when the Athens police opened fire on these wretched people for an hour or more. What is worse, no effort was made by the British troops to stop it. Why that was so I do not know; British tanks were in the vicinity. You can imagine the state of mind of the people of Athens the day after such an appalling event. There must have been terrible feeling, and it is not surprising that when some of our troops went to disband some of the E.L.A.S. people they were fired on. It is regrettable, but I think that it is understandable. Then we had the British Forces immediately going into action with [535](#) guns, tanks and

everything else against E.L.A.S. troops in Athens, and since then the fighting has continued.

We had, however, one last chance of peace. An old Liberal, M. Sophoulis, volunteered to form a Government of all Parties, including E.A.M. and the Right Wing, and as far as is known E.A.M. said they were agreeable to serve under him. For some extraordinary reason, apparently, our Prime Minister would not allow Mr. Sophoulis even to attempt to form a Government and secure a peaceful settlement. Instead of that, an ultimatum was issued from General Scobie's headquarters telling the people of Athens that they must lay down their arms. There was no offer of an armistice and no talk of an amnesty, as far as I know, and no guarantees given; it was a question of unconditional surrender and hoping for the best. One can hardly be surprised if the E.L.A.S. forces preferred to keep their arms.

If I have been critical it is with the intention of clearing the ground, and seeing if something cannot be done to break this dreadful deadlock. I do not know why we have really been supporting the Right Wing and the King of the Hellenes. I do not think that any advantage we should get from that would be as great as the advantage of having the friendship of the Greek people. If the present fighting at Athens develops into a full-scale affair it certainly would be disastrous on every account. There are reports from Athens of conversations going on, and I am very glad to hear it. It is an encouraging sign, and I hope that His Majesty's Government will make every possible effort not just to demand unconditional surrender but to try to arrange an armistice and get some arrangement working.

I would suggest that something on these lines might be acceptable to both sides in this dispute: First, that all hostilities should cease. Secondly, that there should be a complete amnesty for both sides, because it is immensely important, if you want these people to agree, to have a guaranteed amnesty for both sides. Thirdly, that free and fair elections should be held. The fear of the E.A.M. is that in such an election the people of Greece will not be allowed to express themselves. They have experience of what crooked

elections mean. [536](#) Would it not be possible to have an inter-Allied election commission, or something of the kind, in which representatives of the U.S.S.R. and the U.S.A. would be invited to participate, and which would guarantee the holding of free elections at the earliest possible stage? The fourth point is that the E.A.M. should be invited after the armistice to join a Government of National Unity, and it has been suggested that the Patriarch of Athens should act as Regent and appoint someone under him as head of the Government. I think that would produce good results.

Then we come to the fifth point, the most thorny and difficult question of all, and that is the question of disarming the different Parties. I would suggest, if nothing better could be thought of, that once the Government of National Unity has been formed discussions should be entered on to arrange for the disarming of supporters of Right and Left, so that neither side may feel that it has been fraudulently dealt with. On the other hand, if such an agreement cannot now be reached after the bitterness of the last few days in Greece, I would suggest that both sides keep their arms. You would still have a balance, but fighting would have stopped. Then both sides must promise to deliver up all arms as soon as the National Government has been elected. In the meantime a National Army could be formed which would by then have strength enough to maintain peace. The British Government could also guarantee that British Forces would support the selected Government, whether of the Right or of the Left. I suggest that terms on that sort of basis would be acceptable to all Parties in Greece. In any case, it is worth while to attempt to get out of this terrible fighting between Allies, which might well turn into an ideological war which would blaze from one end of Europe to the other in the liberated countries. No nation has fought more heroically against the Fascists and Nazis than the Greeks, no nation has suffered more. Do not let our country add to their injury and their suffering.

[§](#)4.25 p.m.

VISCOUNT CRANBORNE

My Lords, we are always accustomed to use so far as we can extremely temperate language in your Lordships' House, but I feel bound to say in all due seriousness, and [537](#)with all due deference to the noble Lord, Lord Faringdon, who is responsible for this Motion, that in the form in which it is put before your Lordships and in the wording which is placed before the House it is ill-judged, ill-timed and ill-drafted. The speech which he made to your Lordships this afternoon, I fully agree, showed far greater restraint, except for one passage at the end which we should all wish to forget. Had he tabled his Motion with a moderate wording, had he urged that a settlement should be reached as soon as possible, and that our troops should be withdrawn from Greece, I think 'that would have been entirely legitimate. For, in fact, that is the aim and object of all of us as soon as it is possible to achieve it; we all want to see an end to this miserable business. But the noble Lord has chosen to table a Motion in a form which, I am bound to say, is not merely offensive in itself, as I think it is, but which amounts to a censure on a Government containing all the main leaders of the three Parties; and this he has done at a moment of very great delicacy, when it is essential that everyone should weigh his words with the greatest care. I can imagine nothing more irresponsible than that. I am not very much surprised that he found the noble Lord, Lord Strabolgi, at his side. The noble Lord, if he will forgive my saying so, is always irresponsible, and here in this House we do not take him too seriously. But he was, perhaps, a little more reckless this afternoon than I have known him for a long time. Indeed, his speech was such a tissue of misstatements that I cannot attempt, however long I speak to your Lordships, to answer them all.

I am not complaining for one moment that this Motion should have been put down. In fact, I think the noble Lord, Lord Southwood, will confirm me when I say that when Lord Addison a few days ago—a week or so—told me that the Labour Party might wish to raise this subject, I said I should be very willing to find time for it. That is absolutely true. I am merely complaining of the form of this Motion; and for that lapse of judgment, and, as I think, of taste. I am glad

to feel that the noble Lord himself is alone responsible. His Motion speaks of the "shameful" result of the policy of His Majesty's Government. He has explained to us this afternoon that it does [538](#) not really mean what it appears to say. He has explained that it means that he is personally ashamed of the results of the policy that is being followed; he does not mean that that policy is a discreditable one. But that is exactly what it will be taken to mean all over the country, and in other countries too. The Motion puts on this country the whole responsibility for these unhappy events which have occurred, and in the light of information which has already been given by the Foreign Secretary in another place—and which the noble Lord must have seen—that really is a travesty of the facts. Whatever may be said of the policy of His Majesty's Government in Greece, whether in all respects it may be approved or not approved, I should have thought that one thing is certain, that nobody questions the purity of our motives or suggests that we have any sinister or ulterior motive. His Majesty's Government have absolutely nothing to hide in regard to their Greek policy. Their conscience is clear, and I am very glad myself to have the opportunity to give a correct and full account of the events that have led up to the present plight of Greece.

I should like, if I may, to go back—I shall be as brief as I possibly can—to last May, when the Lebanon Conference was held. That conference, as your Lordships already know, was promoted by His Majesty's Government for the express purpose of ensuring that all sections of Greek opinion, including E.A.M., were brought into the Greek Government. The conference was successful. Agreement was reached between the leaders of all the Parties and a statement of policy was issued which is known as the Lebanon Charter. Certain delays followed—I do not complain of those delays—as the representatives of E.A.M. failed to get the endorsement of their leaders to the decisions of the conference. But, as I say, I am not attempting to make a point of that or to complain of it in any way. Eventually, however, the E.A.M. representatives did agree to join the Government on the basis of the Lebanon Charter, and that

Government, after they had joined, was as representative a Government as any Greek Government could be.

Now Lord Faringdon this afternoon praised the Yugoslav settlement. He said, what a splendid thing it was that they had [539](#) now got an administration combining the Royal Government and the resistance leaders. That is exactly what M. Papandreou's Government was before E.A.M. left it. On 6th September the Greek Government moved from Cairo to Caserta in order to be ready to enter Greece as soon as the Germans moved out, and while they were there, M. Svolos, one of the representatives of E.A.M., assured M. Papandreou on behalf of the E.A.M. Ministers that they were perfectly satisfied with the Government as it was then constituted and he hoped that the Government would stay in office under M. Papandreou until elections could be held. That was the statement by the E.A.M. Minister. Before the liberation of Greece, at the end of September, General Wilson asked General Zervas, one of the guerrilla leaders, and General Serafis, the leader of E.A.M., to come to Caserta in order to concert plans for the time when the Germans began to move out.

On September 25 an agreement was reached with the two guerrilla leaders and with the Greek Government, under which all the guerrilla forces were placed under General Scobie. That agreement was known as the Caserta Agreement. There is nothing secret about it; it was published in The Times on December 18. But I would like to remind your Lordships of one or two of the clauses of that Agreement. They were actually quoted in another place yesterday, but they are so relevant that I hope your Lordships will forgive me if I recall them to you again. Clause 1 said: All guerrilla forces operating in Greece place themselves under orders to the Greek Government of National Unity. Clause 2 said: The Greek Government places these forces under the orders of General Scobie, who has been nominated by the Supreme Allied Commander as General-Officer-Commanding forces in Greece. Clause 3 said: In accordance with the proclamation issued by the Greek Government, the Greek guerrilla leaders declare that

they will forbid any attempt by any units under their command to take the law into their own hands. That is a very relevant clause. Such action will be treated as a crime and will be punished accordingly. Clause 4 said: As regards Athens, no action is to be taken save under the direct orders of General Scobie. [540](#) Clause 5 said: Security Battalions are considered as instruments of the enemy. Unless they surrender according to orders issued by the General-Officer-Commanding they will be treated as enemy formations. Those were the Security Battalions which have now been disbanded. Clause 6 was: All Greek guerrilla forces, in order to put an end to past rivalries, declare that they will form a national union in order to co-ordinate their activities in the best interests of the common struggle. Now those, my Lords, were the main features of the Caserta Agreement. I think it is an admirable document. I think we shall all agree it is an admirable document. It was calculated to avoid all the troubles that have since occurred. The House will note that it was signed by General Serafis, the Commander of E.A.M., and it was in the light of that Agreement that General Scobie and the British troops went to Greece. On October 18 the great day arrived and the Greek Government returned to Greece. On the same day M. Papandreou, the Prime Minister, defined their policy in a speech in Athens, and the E.A.M. Ministers subsequently assured my right honourable friend the Foreign Secretary—personally assured him—that they concurred in that speech, which included the provision for replacing the guerrillas by national forces. At the same time, British troops entered Greece for the sole purpose of helping to chase out the Germans, of keeping order, and of ensuring the distribution of food supplies. They did that—and I would emphasize this—not by unilateral action but at the express invitation of the Greek Prime Minister, with the full knowledge and agreement of the Greek Government containing members of E.A.M. His Majesty's Government also took the precaution of consulting the United States and Soviet Governments and both of those Governments approved the action we were taking. The noble Lord, Lord Faringdon, quoted an American paper which was critical of our having gone into Greece.

Personally, I still prefer the view of the United States Government itself.

Negotiations then began as to the exact method by which the guerrillas should be disbanded. By November 19 the whole Government, including the E.A.M. members, had agreed in principle on the following plan. I hope your Lordships will forgive my going so fully into this [541](#) matter, but it is important. First, they agreed that the E.A.M. police established in Athens and other towns should be disbanded on December 1, and replaced by a National Guard composed of men of the 1936 Class. Secondly, it was agreed that all guerrillas—E.A.M. and E.D.E.S.—the whole lot—should be demobilized on December 10 and replaced by a National Army, which was formed, or was to be formed, by calling up three more groups. Now to this decision the E.A.M. Ministers were party.

The noble Earl, Lord Huntingdon, raised the question of the Mountain Brigade. The Mountain Brigade was at that time, I think, already in Greece, and no question was raised by the E.A.M. Ministers with regard to the Mountain Brigade. The Government decision did not provide for the demobilization of the Mountain Brigade nor of the Sacred Squadron. That is perfectly true, and after all, it was entirely in accordance with the procedure adopted by all other Governments of countries which have been liberated from the German yoke. In France and Belgium the Regular forces have been kept under arms. The object in all these liberated countries has been not to demobilize the Regular forces, but only to disarm the private armies and incorporate them in the National forces of the State. I should have thought that was the obvious policy for any Government in the position of these Governments to adopt. It is perfectly true to say that the E.A.M. leaders soon began to agitate for the demobilization of the Regular forces as well. Eventually, however, at the request of the Prime Minister, M. Papandreou, the E.A.M. Ministers themselves produced a compromise. It was E.A.M.'s own compromise in the form of a draft decree under which the Greek Regular forces were not to be demobilized, and E.L.A.S. was to be allowed to

retain one brigade. That was the compromise suggested by E.A.M. Ministers. It was their own proposal. It was, in fact, accepted by M. Papandreou and the other Ministers, and the trouble seemed over. But, at the last moment, E.A.M. insisted on the demobilization of the Regular forces, and it was on that that the final break came.

As a result of these difficulties between the E.A.M. Ministers and other Ministers, the Greek Government's final decision was [542](#) postponed and on December 1, owing to these difficulties, the decree still remained unsigned. The House will remember that the policy agreed upon on November 19, to which I have already referred, envisaged two stages. The first stage was that E.A.M. police should hand in their arms on December 1, and, so far as I know, and I believe so far as is known anywhere in this country, the E.A.M. Ministers never questioned this step of the disarmament of the E.A.M. police, to which they themselves agreed. It had nothing whatever to do with the draft decree which had led to difficulties and which was concerned with the general demobilization of the guerrillas that was to take place later, on December 10. M. Papandreou therefore circulated a decree designed to bring into force the Government's decision that the E.A.M. police should hand in their arms on December 1. The E.A.M. Ministers, who at that time were still members of the Government, refused to sign that decree and resigned.

On the morning of December 1, it became known that E.A.M. were intending to call a general strike. On December 2, E.A.M. announced the incorporation of the E.A.M. police in the E.L.A.S. forces and they also reconstituted E.L.A.S. as an autonomous force outside the authority both of the Greek Government and of General Scobie. That was a direct breach of the Caserta Agreement which had been signed by General Serafis. By December 2, information began to come in that large E.L.A.S. forces were moving on Athens, and on December 3 the unhappy and unfortunate fracas occurred in connexion with the procession to which reference has been made in this debate, and in which a number of people were

killed and wounded. That set the torch to the tinder, and a conflagration flared up.

There was, I think, in the speech of the noble Earl, Lord Huntingdon, a suggestion that this fracas was entirely caused by the brutality of the police. He gave a picture of an entirely peaceful procession proceeding through the streets and suddenly being shot at by what I think he called Quisling police, and implied that these police alone were responsible for the subsequent events. He suggested that, but for this, there would have been no further difficulty. I think it will be seen from the story which I have told your Lordships—I am afraid at great length— [543](#) that that is an absolute travesty of the facts. Wherever else responsibility may arise for these first shots, I would say to Lord Strabolgi that the evidence does not support the contention that the police were responsible. The evidence we have been able to obtain goes to show that the crowd had already roughly handled the police and disarmed a number of them before any shots were fired. But whatever the facts are about that incident, it was not the main cause of the trouble which ensued. It was merely the spark which set fire to the touchwood. The ultimate causes were far more deep-seated than that.

LORD STRABOLGI

The noble Viscount has referred to me. I would like to point out that I was answering my noble friend on my right, Lord Samuel, who complained of the hastiness of E.L.A.S. in taking arms. I said the first shots were fired by the police.

VISCOUNT CRANBORNE

If the noble Lord did not, certainly Lord Huntingdon did give that impression to the House. He certainly gave me the impression—and I think the rest of the House—that it was a totally unprovoked attack by the police on a peaceful crowd. I have pointed out that many of the police had already been disarmed. I do not wish to put too much emphasis on that, because I say that to my mind that was only the occasion for the outbreak, not its cause. What I would put to your

Lordships as undeniable is this: the Greek Government and the British authorities at that moment saw that a definite attempt was being made to achieve a coup d'état and seize power by force. M. Sophoulis, to whom reference was made by the noble Earl, Lord Huntingdon, this afternoon, in an interview reported in the Daily Telegraph, on December 15, said: Every Greek knows that E.A.M. would have revolted, even if the Government had accepted all its demands. I think that is an important statement by M. Sophoulis, who I understood from Lord Huntingdon was the man whom he himself would have chosen to bring all the different Parties together. It is a curious thing, in those circumstances, that to-day E.A.M. is trying to represent itself to the outside world as a democratic organization claiming that it has [544](#)the support of the police, the Air Force, and the Navy, and yet it dare not put those claims before the Greek people. I am not the authority for the statement I have just quoted; the Daily Telegraph is the authority for it. But it is an interesting and significant account of the position.

What I am trying to make clear to your Lordships is this: the march of E.L.A.S. upon Athens which brought about the present situation must be regarded as a deliberate attack upon the free institutions of Greece, and it is to protect those free institutions and to ensure a fair distribution of foodstuffs to the suffering people that British forces are now being used. Those are our sole motives for going to Greece, and our sole motives for being there. I am not concerned to attack the character of E.A.M. I think various speakers have described them as the saviours of their country, and I am very ready to believe that large numbers of E.A.M. fought extremely well against the Germans. I do not want to blacken their character. I have no reason to think—and I say this in answer to the noble Viscount, Lord Elibank—that E.A.M. are under the control of the Nazis; they may be, or they may not be. But I have no reason to suppose that they are, and I think it only fair to say that probably, like everyone else, some E.A.M. are good and some are bad. But I am sure one thing will be agreed, that their methods were certainly extremely unfortunate on this occasion of the 3rd December.

Subsequent events of the unhappy affair have already been fully described by my right honourable friend the Foreign Secretary, and it is not necessary for me to elaborate them further. I do not wish to weary the House. I would only add this. Our object throughout has been to find some means of composing the differences between the various sections of Greek opinion and of recreating a Government which may be able to heal this deplorable division and allow free institutions to function again. There has been a reference to the King of Greece, and perhaps I ought to say a word or two about that. The noble Lord, Lord Faringdon, said that the King has no support in Greece. It is not for me to pronounce what support the King has in Greece. It will be very easy, if they are allowed to do so, for the Greek people [545](#)themselves to pronounce upon it by ballot. At any rate, there was, if he will allow me to say it, no justification for his stating that the King was not worthy of trust. The King's position has been an extremely difficult one during this period, and I know from what I have heard that His Majesty, whatever views he has taken and whatever steps he may have taken, has been entirely actuated by motives of public duty. I think it is only fair to the King to say this to your Lordships.

There is no more advantage to my mind in attempting to blacken the character of the King than in attempting to blacken the character of E.A.M. As the noble Lord, Lord Long, said in his most admirable maiden speech, we owe much to the King for his courageous leadership in the dark days of 1940. There has been a suggestion—I think there was more of it in the speech of the noble Lord, Lord Strabolgi, than in any other speech this afternoon—that His Majesty's Government have been in favour of the King. I really do not know on what it is based; certainly it is not based on the facts. It was His Majesty's Government who after the Lebanon Conference was largely responsible for the formation of the Government; it was His Majesty's Government who, as the Foreign Secretary said in another place yesterday, advised the King not to return to Greece at the present time; it was the British Ambassador who took the initiative in putting forward the suggestion that the

Archbishop of Athens might become Regent. We are neither pro-King nor anti-King in Greece. That is a matter for the Greek people; it is not a matter for us. But we are interested, if I may use the Foreign Secretary's words, to see that the country is put on an even keel so that relief can be carried through. We are also interested as a member of the United Nations in seeing that a solution should not be imposed by force on the Greek people with arms supplied by us to fight the Germans.

LORD STRABOLGI

With the noble Viscount's permission, may I ask a question?

VISCOUNT CRANBORNE

Certainly.

LORD STRABOLGI

This is an important matter affecting British lives. [546](#)The noble Viscount has been good enough to give way. If we are neither pro-King nor anti-King and if the Regency which we ourselves have suggested through our Ambassador is held up by the King's veto, this business may go on, and entail very great loss and misery.

VISCOUNT CRANBORNE

If my noble friend will give me his attention for a moment, I am just coming to that. We are interested, as I have said, that a solution should not be imposed by force. We want to see an end of fighting. Indeed, as has been said this afternoon, General Scobie has put forward proposals for an armistice. These proposals have been criticized, I think by the noble Lord, Lord Faringdon—certainly by the noble Earl, Lord Huntingdon. I do not in fact find that they are such unreasonable terms. Let us look at the terms. The first main point is that E.L.A.S. forces should obey General Scobie's orders and clear out of Attica. That is quite in accordance with the Caserta Agreement which has already been signed.

The second is that E.L.A.S. forces in Athens, the Piræus and the district around should cease their resistance and hand in their arms. That second point is what I may call a local condition. It is to ensure that trouble should not recur in Athens and in the neighbourhood. The noble Lord, Lord Faringdon, said he did not really think there was much danger of that; that when people stopped fighting they did not begin again. I am not so optimistic as the noble Lord. I should not like to see a situation where Athens was full of armed men going about and able at any moment, if there was a sudden wave of political feeling, to break the peace, as has been done before. Nor I think is it true, as was said this afternoon, that the effect of these terms is to put one side—that is the Right—in a strong position. The Right Wing are to be disarmed just as much as the Left Wing, and it is British troops who are going to keep order in this area. There is going to be no differentiation between Right and Left.

LORD FARINGDON

May I ask a question? I think it is apposite. The noble Viscount says both sides will be disarmed, and only British troops will be left in control in Athens. Would that extend to the Mountain Brigade?

[547](#)

VISCOUNT CRANBORNE

No, of course it would not, for the reasons I explained earlier. The differentiation is between the Regular forces of the State and private armies. What I have said applies to all the private armies of the Right as well as to the private organizations of the Left. In these circumstances, these are really not very unfair armistice terms; in fact, they seem to me equally fair to one side and the other in this dispute. Let me add that, in fact, no use is being made, or so far as I know has been made, by General Scobie or the Greek Government of any Right Wing organization.

I now come to the point raised by the noble Lord, Lord Strabolgi. He asked what was the position about the

Regency, what were the prospects of the Regency? I really do not know. I will be quite frank with the House—I do not know. It depends entirely on the measure of support which the proposal has in Greece. The noble Lord, Lord Faringdon, stated that there appeared to be evidence that the King was the only snag in the way. I do not think the noble Lord can have read or read very carefully the speech which my right honourable friend the Foreign Secretary made in another place yesterday afternoon, because my right honourable friend made it perfectly clear that it would be untrue to say that the King would be unalterably opposed to a Regency.

LORD FARINGDON

Then was the telegram that appeared in the Press incorrect?

VISCOUNT CRANBORNE

I can only deem it incorrect. The noble Lord must accept the statement of the Foreign Secretary. As I understand it, the position of the King is that he cannot come to a definite decision except on the advice of his Ministers, and I understand he has doubt as to what their attitude and advice will be. Apart from the King altogether, it seems to me equally important and essential from our point of view, that we should know whether the Regency is likely to be generally acceptable, because, if not, and if a Regency were set up and that device failed, then the situation would be worse than before. I would only say this afternoon that His Majesty's Government are not against a Regency, but they want to make certain that a [548](#)Regency is a practicable proposition. An attempt has been made in certain quarters to represent this trouble which is going on in Greece as a struggle between the Right and the Left, and to suggest that we are intervening to protect the Right, or what the noble Viscount, Lord Samuel, called "the wrong side." The noble Viscount, as I understood him, did not state that as his view, but merely said it was a view which was held. I hope that what I have said to your Lordships this afternoon disproves any such suggestion.

Let me make this clear once and for all to the noble Lord, Lord Strabolgi, to the noble Earl, Lord Huntingdon, and other noble Lords who have supported the noble Lord, Lord Faringdon, and who seemed to harbour such dark suspicions of our intentions. It is no concern of ours—that is the view of His Majesty's Government—whether the Greek people have a Government of the Right or a Government of the Left. That is a matter for the Greek people themselves, and it is perfectly open to E.A.M., if they think they represent a majority of the Greek people, to test the feeling of the people through the ballot box. It is the concern of ourselves and of all the United Nations that power should not be seized by militant minorities, because if military dictatorship either of the Right or of the Left should be set up all over Europe, we might have beaten Germany, but we should have lost the war. We have no desire to intervene in the internal affairs of Greece—no desire at all.

The noble Lord, Lord Strabolgi, at the end of his speech, raised one or two questions of which he was not able to give me notice. I am aware of the reasons for that, and I think he will accept it if I say that for the same reason I am not able to give him very complete answers. He referred to an article by Mr. Drew Pearson in the American Press. I have not seen the article quoted and I had no notice that this matter was to be raised. But if, as I understand from the noble Lord, the charge which is made by Mr. Drew Pearson is that British troops had not been sent to Greece to distribute food, but to over-awe the population, the answer is that that charge is utterly and fantastically untrue. They went to Greece to supply food and to produce conditions in which a free election could take place, and for no other reason. I [549](#)am glad it has not been suggested in the House that the British troops should clear out of Greece at once, but it has been suggested, as your Lordships know, in some quarters. His Majesty's Government are very ready that our troops should leave Greece, and I am sure everybody in this country would agree that they should do so as soon as the conditions are favourable.

They went there to help and succour the Greek people. But noble Lords and the House should realize quite clearly what would happen if they left now. As the noble Viscount, Lord Samuel, said, there would be general massacre and utter destruction of liberty. Is that what the noble Lord, Lord Faringdon, wants? Is that what the House wants? Or is that what the country wants? I am quite certain that it is not. In my view we are in honour bound to stay in Greece until order is restored and free institutions resume their sway. We must make every effort to bring that situation about. When that has been done then, by all means, let the Greek people choose a monarchy, a republic, or what they will, and let the British troops leave. Lord Samuel suggested that the matter might properly be submitted to the European Advisory Committee. That Committee was instituted to deal specifically with the instrument of surrender of Germany and certain other post-war questions. I do not think its terms of reference would enable it to deal with this matter. But the Government are always ready to consider any method that may be suggested of ending this trouble.

My Lords, I am not here to stand in a white sheet with regard to our policy towards Greece. Let me make that quite clear. We had two alternatives. The first was to leave her to stew in her own juice. That would have been the easier policy to follow but it would have meant chaos and misery for the common people for whom the noble Lord, Lord Faringdon, professes to speak. The second alternative was to go in, as asked by the Greek Prime Minister, and drive out the Germans, maintain law and order and relieve the necessities of the population. There can be no doubt which of those two alternative policies was the right one. The noble Lord, Lord Faringdon, said, I think, that he had letters from men in the Forces who were [550](#)worried and troubled about this campaign. Well, of course, we all recognize that there is misunderstanding about affairs in Greece. But the purpose of debates, such as this should be to remove those misunderstandings, and I hope that the debate this afternoon may help to have that effect. As a great Power we are bound, as was said in the debate earlier this week, to assume responsibilities which often involve risks. If we failed

to shoulder this responsibility, then, indeed, our policy might be described as "shameful" and we should deserve the reprobation which it would undoubtedly earn from this House, from the British people, and from the world.

§5.5 P.m.

LORD FARINGDON

My Lords, of course all of us who are accustomed to hearing the noble Viscount, the Leader of the House, would expect that he would make of any case the best possible case, and we have certainly suffered from no disappointment to-day. I would like, before referring to what he said, to join with other speakers in offering my congratulations to Lord Long on his maiden speech. It seems to me probable that the noble Lord and I will seldom find ourselves in agreement, but it will always be a pleasure to hear even contrary views expressed as eloquently as Lord Long has expressed his to-day. It is not very often that one can make the complimentary speeches which are customary in your Lordships' House on these occasions with such complete sincerity as I know those speeches have been made to-day.

It is not my intention to keep your Lordships while I go through the various points made in the debate. It is always a pleasure to listen to my noble friend Viscount Samuel. His ideas are always as invaluable as they are original. I think that my noble friend Viscount Elibank mistook me in one connexion, if I may say so. In talking about the question of an armistice, I did not suggest the immediate withdrawal of British troops. Nor am I under any illusion about the necessity for an armistice being two-sided. Naturally, my hope was to obtain terms that would persuade the other side to stop firing. The noble Viscount gave a description of an unfortunate experience on a certain estate in Greece. Episodes of that sort illustrate one of the dangers of guerrilla warfare. I have met really enthusiastic and sincere [551](#) anti-Fascist Greeks who have deplored the encouragement of guerrilla warfare in their country. Of course, in view of the well-known and extremely important aid that our troops obtained elsewhere, by the tying down of German troops in

Greece, that is a view that would not be likely to be accepted here. But so strongly do some of the people to whom I have referred feel about this particular form of warfare that they do hold these views.

I thought that the noble Viscount the Leader of the House—who was partly joking, no doubt—was, if I may say so, almost discourteous to my noble friend Lord Strabolgi. He said, I think, that he never took my noble friend seriously. I think that Lord Strabolgi's record, both in your Lordships' House and in another place, should have prevented the noble Viscount from giving vent to quite such a drastic expression of attitude. Lord Strabolgi's nautical robustness, shall we say, of expression, has, to me at any rate, as agreeable a savour in your Lordships' House as it has to his very large audiences all over the country outside. For the noble Viscount to say that he cannot take the noble Lord's intervention—was it seriously he said? I forget.

VISCOUNT CRANBORNE

I think I said "too seriously."

LORD STRABOLGI

I am delighted; I take it as a compliment.

LORD FARINGDON

Well, if the noble Lord is satisfied that is all right. May I say that the noble Earl, Lord Huntingdon, has asked me to apologize to the noble Viscount for his absence now, as he has been called away? The noble Viscount took us through the list of events and I have no quarrel with his account of the various dates. But even allowing for those dates, there are certain points which are sometimes not quite clear. My complaint against His Majesty's Government is not that they have not always tried their best, but they seem always to have tried with one hand tied behind their backs. They have always had certain hypotheses, prejudices, and predilections which seem to have prevented them from achieving a solution.

The noble Viscount said that I had praised the solution reached in the case of Yugoslavia. We have not returned to Yugoslavia an emigré Government [552](#) without support in its own country, or so far as we know without support. What has happened, as I understand, is that the equivalent of E.L.A.S. is taking over the country. It has quite friendly relations with the emigré Government outside, and in due course it intends to hold elections and to decide what its constitution will be in the future. I suggest that had His Majesty's Government recognized E.L.A.S. in the same way as they recognized General Tito, if the emigré Government had remained outside Greece and had had on it representatives of the liberation movement, that would have been an equivalent development of affairs. I am not so pessimistic about the effects of a withdrawal of the British from Greece. These fearsome assassinations have not taken place elsewhere. It is agreed that E.L.A.S. controls the greater part of Greece, and it is only in Attica that this trouble is going on.

I do not want to take your Lordships through the whole position again, but I was a little unhappy about what the noble Viscount, the Leader of the House, said about the question of a Regency. It brings us back again to the deeply-rooted prejudice which His Majesty's Government seem to entertain. I am not talking about a prejudice against the Left, or anything of that kind; I think His Majesty's Government's influence has in many cases been used to liberalize and widen the emigré Governments which are here amongst us. We have to realize, however, that it is His Majesty's Government who have adopted the original emigré Government, though they may have widened its basis, and the essential element in the Government in this case is the King. The noble Viscount said that the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs dealt with this matter in the House of Commons yesterday. He did, but nothing alters the fact that the King has sent a telegram to his Prime Minister, M. Papandreou, refusing the setting up of a Regency. I submit that in those circumstances His Majesty's Government should bring their influence to bear.

VISCOUNT CRANBORNE

That may have been in the Press, but I have not seen it anywhere else. I am not questioning it, but I do not accept it without qualification.

LORD FARINGDON

It was very definitely in the Press, and so far as I [553](#) know it has not been denied. It was not denied by the Secretary of State yesterday, as I think it would have been had it been untrue. I have detained your Lordships for too long. I thank you for your patience, and I should like to say a word of apology for having offended your Lordships. In your Lordships' House I have always spoken as I have felt, and I believe that your Lordships respect other people's convictions as you expect your own to be respected. I have stated what I conceive to be the truth and what I think are the possibilities, and if what I said gave offence I am sorry, particularly because it may have covered up more important points which arose in the debate. However that may be, I always regret to call down on myself the condemnation of your Lordships' House, [554](#) and in particular of the noble Viscount, the Leader of the House. I regret that he should have described my Motion as being in bad taste. I think that that was perhaps a little unfair. He seemed to think that I ought to put down a Motion which would fall in perfectly with Government policy, but as my Motion was a complaint against Government policy I think that he was asking too much. We have had an interesting debate. While the noble Viscount, the Leader of the House, has made a very good case from his material, and while I agree that the situation is very difficult, I do not feel that it has been dealt with as it should have been.

[§](#)On Question, Motion negatived.

[§](#)House adjourned at a quarter past five o'clock.

HC Deb 16 January 1945

Situation

vol 407 cc27-927

§47. [Mr. Hugh Lawson](#)

asked the Prime Minister if he has any statement to make on the situation in Greece.

[28](#)

§52. [Mr. Martin](#)

asked the Prime Minister whether, in view of the fact that British forces appear now to be the only effective police authority in Greece, His Majesty's Government will assume responsibility for the holding of elections as early as practicable in Greece and for ensuring that they shall be as free as possible from all forms of intimidation or corruption.

§57. [Mr. Driberg](#)

asked the Prime Minister if he will advise General Plastiras that the plebiscite on the question of the Greek monarchy should be held before, and separately from, the general election; and if he will endeavour to secure effective United Nations supervision of this plebiscite as well as of the election, with the particular object of preventing interference with voters by known royalist sympathisers, who have been permitted, for whatever reason, to retain arms.

[§The Prime Minister](#)

I should be glad if hon. Members would be good enough to await the statements which will be made on behalf of the Government in the course of the coming Debate.

[§Mr. Shinwell](#)

As there are some urgent issues which require to be dealt with immediately, is the right hon. Gentleman taking note of

the declaration by General Plastiras on two occasions that it is the intention of his Government to clear out the E.L.A.S. Forces from Greece; and do the British Government support him in that policy and intend that British troops and British arms should be used for that purpose?

§The Prime Minister

I have indicated that I think it is better to await the discussion, when these matters can be dealt with in their proper setting.

§Mr. Driberg

Will the right hon. Gentleman be good enough to give us some assurance that the specific points raised in the Questions on the Order Paper to-day will be covered in his statement? Otherwise it would be necessary to ask supplementary questions to-day.

§The Prime Minister

It would be very difficult to ask supplementary questions when the answer that has been given is a request that the matter may be postponed till to-morrow. Therefore I will not be drawn into it.

§Mr. Shinwell

As there is no guarantee that the right hon. Gentleman will deal with all the points involved in the Greek [29](#)affair, is it not permissible to put points to him now? Does he intend in the course of the Debate to deal with the declaration made by General Scobie with regard to the position of minorities in Greece, and was General Scobie entitled as a military officer to deal with political affairs?

§The Prime Minister

I think he has done admirably. I read what he said and his impromptu remarks seem to have been singularly well chosen when replying to the applause of the enormous crowds that passed his headquarters.

§Mr. Gallacher

Can we take it that the right hon. Gentleman's statement will be better balanced and more reliable than the one we had from him before the Recess?

§The Prime Minister

The hon. Member must not get too excited about these matters or he will fall into the danger of a Trotskyite deviation to the Left.

E.L.A.S. Representatives (Interviews)

§51. Mr. John Dugdale

asked the Prime Minister on whose authority instructions have been issued that newspaper correspondents may not interview any members of E.L.A.S. forces.

§58. Mr. Driberg

asked the Prime Minister why newspaper correspondents in Athens were forbidden by General Scobie to interview spokesmen of the E.L.A.S. forces, although their opponents were permitted at the same time to circulate anti E.L.A.S. propaganda; and if he will urge all those now in authority in Athens, whether British or Greek, to endeavour in their public statements to promote a spirit of conciliation.

§The Prime Minister

When delegates come through the lines they are guaranteed safe conduct by the Commander-in-Chief and it would therefore be quite irregular for him to allow them to see any persons other than himself or his duly authorised representatives. Such delegates remain under guard until their return to their own lines. While fighting is in progress it would obviously be undesirable for persons to cross into E.L.A.S. territory and in fact only International Red Cross representatives were allowed to do so.

§Mr. Dugdale

In view of the right hon. Gentleman's not inconsiderable experience as a war correspondent himself, why [30](#) does he not trust British war correspondents to report fully, frankly and with a due sense of responsibility?

§The Prime Minister

I am really not going to attempt to give a general measure of complete confidence to all war correspondents wherever they may be and from whatever country they may derive. I am always doubtful about correspondents who go from one side to the other, writing articles.

§Mr. Driberg

How is it possible to reconcile the admirable sentiments expressed by the Foreign Secretary, who desired to see a democratic Government of all parties in Greece, including E.A.M., with the truculent remarks of General Plastiras about clearing E.L.A.S. out of Greece altogether?

§The Prime Minister

I cannot be responsible for the day-to-day remarks which are made by the Greek Prime Minister. The head of the Greek Government is the Regent, Archbishop Damaskinos, and while I read the various opinions that are put in the newspapers from time to time, I cannot undertake to have the information available to comment accurately upon the statements of the Greek Prime Minister. I have every reason to believe that the present Government, the present dispensation, in Greece is extremely democratic; as a matter of fact, it is composed almost entirely of Republicans.

§Mr. Shinwell

Has not my right hon. Friend encouraged General Plastiras to make these observations by his own truculent observations about bandits and all the rest of it?

§The Prime Minister

I have sometimes been provoked, I admit, when I have seen the efforts made by some people in this House greatly to add to the difficulties of our troops.

British Casualties

§56. Mr. Bowles

asked the Prime Minister the number of British casualties suffered in Greece since the Government used British troops in fighting Greeks.

§The Prime Minister

The total casualties suffered in Greece between December 3 and January 6 (the latest date for which figures are available) were 2,101, of which 237 were fatal.

31

§Mr. Bowles

Will my right hon. Friend remember that that is seven times as much as the British casualties in fighting the Germans in Greece last year?

§The Prime Minister

Will the hon. Gentleman repeat the question?

§Mr. Bowles

Does my hon. Friend realise that the British casualties he has just mentioned sustained in fighting the Greeks, are just about seven times as much as the British casualties sustained in fighting the Germans in Greece last year?

§The Prime Minister

Our troops have been engaged in preventing a hideous massacre and have succeeded in doing it.

HC Deb 17 January 1945

British Forces

[§17. Mr. G. Strauss](#)

asked the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs whether it is now the intention of His Majesty's Government to use British troops and supplies against E.L.A.S. forces outside Attica.

[§Mr. Eden](#)

As my hon. Friend will be aware, a truce has now been signed between General Scobie and E.L.A.S. which will, I trust put an end to fighting between British troops and E.L.A.S. forces.

[§Mr. Strauss](#)

While we all hope that that truce will put an end to all fighting, may I ask the right hon. Gentleman whether, in view of the threats of General Plastiras to purge all Greece of E.L.A.S. elements, we can have an undertaking now, that neither British men nor British arms will be employed in such a way?

[§Mr. Eden](#)

As I said a short while ago, there are wider issues and I must ask the House to await to-morrow's statement.

[§Mr. Shinwell](#)

Will the right hon. Gentleman make it unmistakably clear to General Plastiras that, if it is his intention, as has been stated, to clear the E.L.A.S. forces out of Greece and to destroy the E.L.A.S. forces, he will have to do it without any reliance upon British troops or British arms? Will he make that perfectly clear?

[§Mr. Eden](#)

I will repeat what I said just now, that my right hon. Friend will make a statement on this whole situation to-morrow, and I think it is not unreasonable to ask the House to await it.

§Mr. Shinwell

Will the right hon. Gentleman understand that unless some such declaration is made, he will meet, and his Government will meet, with the full hostility of Members on this side of the House?

141

§Mr. Eden

Our position has been made absolutely clear in this matter and our position has not varied, is not varied and will not be varied—

§Mr. Shinwell

It is not clear—

§Mr. Eden

—whatever the hon. Gentleman says.

§Mr. Shinwell

rose—

§Mr. Speaker

I am calling the next Question.

§50. Mr. Lipson

asked the Prime Minister, if, in view of the cessation of fighting in Athens, British Forces are now to be withdrawn from Greece and sent to other battle fronts.

§The Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Attlee)

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has no statement to make about the movements of British Forces.

§Mr. Lipson

Can my right hon. Friend say that the state of the war against Germany and the state of our man-power are such that we can afford at this juncture to tie up substantial forces in Greece?

§Sir Herbert Williams

Is it not a fact that there are substantial German Forces still on Greek territory?

Regent and Prime Minister (Powers)

18. **Mr. G. Strauss**

asked the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs whether any undertaking was given by His Majesty's Government to the King of the Hellenes in connection with his appointment of the Regency; and whether any military or other undertaking was given to the Regent or to General Plastiras in connection with their assumption of office.

§Mr. Eden

I assume that my hon. Friend has in mind the reports, which are, I believe, current both in Athens and in this country, that before the Archbishop of Athens was appointed Regent undertakings were given to the King of the Hellenes that the powers which the Archbishop would exercise if he were made Regent would be in some way limited. I can give a complete assurance that these reports are unfounded. On the contrary, when the Prime Minister and I spoke to His Majesty on this matter we made it quite clear that in our view the Archbishop must be given a completely free [142](#)hand to deal with the situation as he saw fit. When the Archbishop assumed office as Regent he was assured that His Majesty's Government would support him to the full

in his efforts to find a speedy solution to the conflict in Greece. He was also aware of our declared intention to restore order in Attica. Apart from this, no undertakings whether military or otherwise were given to him. When General Plastiras became Prime Minister he accepted office without making any previous conditions and no promises were made to him by His Majesty's Government.

§Mr. Gallacher

Will the Foreign Secretary be good enough to tell us how giving the Regent a free hand to deal with the situation as he sees fit, coincides with the promise made here that no advantage would be taken of the situation in dealing with opponents? Is it not quite clear, from what the Archbishop and Plastiras have said, that they will take very savage action against the representatives of E.L.A.S.?

§Mr. Eden

No, Sir, the recommendation we made in respect of the Regent was as a result of our conviction that the Archbishop was the best possible man to fulfil that difficult task. I may say that it was a recommendation which was strongly urged upon me from the benches opposite before the Recess

National Forces (Arms and Equipment)

20. Mr. Lipson

asked the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs if arms and equipment are being supplied to the Greek Army by His Majesty's Government, and if he will give an assurance that no more arms and equipment will henceforth be sent for the Greek Army till the requirements of the French Army have been fully met.

§Mr. Eden

Certain decisions have already been taken for the supply of arms and equipment to the Greek national forces, but the fulfilment of this commitment will not interfere with the supply of arms and equipment to the French army.

[§Mr. Lipson](#)

May I ask my right hon. Friend if that means that priority will be given to the supply of arms and equipment to the French Army? Does he not agree that, for the purpose of the war against Germany, arms and equipment supplied to the French Army are likely to be of more use?

[143](#)

[§Mr. Eden](#)

That is if both commitments can be fulfilled.

[§Mr. Shinwell](#)

Is it not better that we should use British troops and British arms to win the war against Germany, rather than against Left-Wing forces in Greece?

[§Mr. Eden](#)

I thought the hon. Gentleman shared with me the pleasure that there was a truce in Greece.

[§Mr. Gallacher](#)

Is it not the case that the War Cabinet in this country had its attention concentrated on Greece, when Rundstedt was making his offensive in the West?

Trade Union Leaders (Representations)

26. Miss Ward

asked the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs whether he can give any further information on the representations of Greek trades union leaders to His Majesty's Ambassador to Greece.

[§Mr. Eden](#)

The trades unionists who visited His Majesty's Ambassador to Greece claimed to be the legitimate and duly elected

officials of the General Confederation of Workers of Greece. I cannot at present add anything to this statement.

Miss Ward

My right hon. Friend does not feel, I am sure, that there was anything lacking in their bona fides?

§Mr. Eden

The House will understand that these questions are difficult for us to assess. [An HON. MEMBER: "Dodging."] I try to be fair. I say they are difficult to assess in a country in which trade unions have been suppressed for many years, but I have not the slightest doubt that His Majesty's Ambassador is doing all he can to check the information, and to give us the truest and fullest report.

§Mr. Shinwell

If these questions are difficult to assess, as the right hon. Gentleman says, how does he account for the fact that the B.B.C., in their news service, declared that these trade union leaders were bona-fide representatives of 170,000 Greek workers when, in fact, they represented nobody but themselves?

§Mr. Eden

The hon. Gentleman asserts a knowledge and I do not know how he comes to possess it at all. I presume that what the B.B.C. gave was the report which was made available to us, and [144](#) which was checked, as far as it was possible to check it in the circumstances of the present time.

§Mr. Shinwell

Did not the right hon. Gentleman use it as propaganda?

§Mr. Cocks

Is it not a fact that the leading trade union signatory was a leading Quisling under the German Government?

§Mr. Eden

The hon. Gentleman asks me about the record of a signatory. I say I do not know the record of all these individual Greeks, and I am moved and surprised at the deep knowledge which hon. Gentlemen have.

§Mr. Cocks

Was not the right hon. Gentleman equally surprised about the knowledge I had of German rearmament, when he was on the other side of the House?

§Mr. Eden

I think the hon. Gentleman had better look up his own record.

§Mr. G. Strauss

Is not the right hon. Gentleman aware that some of us have often been shocked by the little knowledge possessed by the British authorities in Greece, who have sent over information without checking it?

§Mr. Eden

It is difficult to approach these matters without prejudice, and if I may say so the hon. Gentleman has not been a shining example in that respect.

GREECE (CIVIL WAR CASUALTIES)

Mr. De Chair

asked the Secretary of State for War if he can give the figures of the casualties of British and Greek Government troops and of E.L.A.S. troops in the recent fighting in Greece from the outbreak of the civil war until the cease fire.

§Mr. A. Henderson

I would refer my hon. Friend to the reply given yesterday by the Prime Minister to my hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton (Mr. Bowles). I regret that no figures of casualties suffered by the Greek Government or by the E.L.A.S. forces are available.

Deb 23 January 1945

Wireless Sets (Greece)

24. [Mr. Douglas](#)

asked the Secretary of State for War whether his attention has been drawn to the lack of newspapers, the need for wireless sets capable of picking up home broadcasts and the delay in the receipt of mails for some of the British Forces in Greece; and what is being done to remedy this.

[§Sir J. Grigg](#)

British Forces in Greece receive 6,000 copies of the Army newspaper "Union Jack" daily by air from Italy. Arrangements will shortly be completed for the production of "Union Jack" in Athens. An allocation of wireless sets has been made to our Forces in Greece by the Army headquarters in Italy on the same scale as for troops in Italy. These sets have proved satisfactory, and reception in Greece is in fact better than was the case with the same or similar sets in Italy. As regards mails I would refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Mr. Parker) on 17th January.

[§Mr. Douglas](#)

Is my right hon. Friend aware that the complaint is not about the quality of the sets but about their scarcity?

[§Sir J. Grigg](#)

I have just pointed out that the sets are issued on the same scale as in Italy.

GREEK EXTERNAL DEBT (INTEREST)

56. Mr. Craven-Ellis

asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the Government will take steps which will result in a reduction of the present high rate of interest, 8 per cent., now chargeable upon the Greek External National Debt, as this might be a contributing factor to the present disunity in Greece.

§Sir J. Anderson

I think my hon. Friend's Question must be based on a misconception, since it is not the case that a rate of interest of 8 per cent. is chargeable upon the Greek External Debt. I should perhaps remind the hon. Member that in January, 1940, as a result of negotiations between the Greek Government on the one hand and the Council of Foreign Bondholders and the League Loans Committee on the other hand, the Greek Government undertook to pay over a proportion of the interest on its external debt for the period from 1st April, 1940, until the end of the war, a moratorium being granted in respect of the remaining amounts due. As a result of the occupation of Greece by the enemy, the Greek Government was forced to suspend the service of its external debt in April, 1941, but in March, 1942, the Greek Government informed the Council of Foreign Bondholders and the League Loans Committee that it would carefully re-examine the question with them as soon as possible after the liberation of Greece and the establishment of a measure of recovery in her economic life, in order to reach a just and equitable settlement. It has not yet been possible for such re-examination to take place.

§Mr. Craven-Ellis

While the rate may not be exactly 8 per cent., it is a very excessive rate. Does the right hon. Gentleman not think that these heavy rates of interest are likely to cause discontent in the minds of the Greek people?

§Mr. Edgar Granville

Can the Chancellor say whether the Treasury expert who is at the present time in Greece dealing with questions of currency and so on, has discussed with members of the present Greek Government the question of converting Greek loans to a lower rate of interest?

§Sir J. Anderson

It is fruitless to go on discussing this on a basis of complete misapprehension. There are numerous outstanding loans ranging from 2½ per cent. to 7 per cent., which is the highest. The overall figure is far below that of 8 per cent.

GREECE (EXTERNAL LOANS)

Mr. Barstow

asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the figure of £17,750,000 represents the total amount of the outstanding holdings of the United Kingdom of pre-war Greek Government loans.

§Sir J. Anderson

The figure of £17,750,000 given in the reply which I made to a Question by the hon. Member on 19th December represents the total nominal value of the estimated holding in the United Kingdom of these loans, and not the total amount of these loans at present outstanding, which is larger. [671W](#)I take the opportunity to add with reference to the reply which I gave on 19th December that while the United Kingdom holdings of the Greek Loans issued in the last war are smaller than the United Kingdom holdings of the Reconstruction Loans, the outstanding amount of the loans issued before the last war is larger in the aggregate than the outstanding amount of the later Reconstruction Loans.

Deb 24 January 1945

Hostages (British Subjects)

9. [Mrs. Cazalet Keir](#)

asked the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs if he can state the circumstances in which Mr. Reginald Henderson met his death in Greece.

[§Mr. Eden](#)

Mr. and Mrs. Henderson were taken from their house at Kephissia near Athens on about 10th December as hostages by E.L.A.S. They were awoken at 11.30 p.m. by E.L.A.S. troops, and were forced to march to a village some 10 miles north of Kephissia. They were allowed to take one quilt and a minimum of clothing. They remained at this village for a few days receiving very little food and sleeping on the ground. They were then sent on to Thebes where their food consisted of a small portion of bread and black olives. For two days they received no food at all. From Thebes the Hendersons and a large number of other hostages were forced to march to Atalante, a distance of about 30 miles, and it was here that Mr. Henderson, who was 69 years old, died of privation and exposure. I am sure the House would wish me to express their sympathy to Mr. Henderson's relatives at this brutal treatment of Mr. and Mrs. Henderson, who could have had no conceivable connection with the hostilities which were taking place in Athens.

[§Mrs. Keir](#)

Are the Government going to see that those responsible for this crime are punished? May I also ask if there are any other British citizens being treated in this way?

[§Mr. Eden](#)

The information we have is that, as far as I know, although it is difficult to check it up, these were the only British subjects concerned. There cannot be an undertaking

because we have not the fullest information, but I can assure my hon. Friend that this matter has caused much distress and concern and I would rather not go beyond that at this stage.

§Mr. Bowles

Although everybody in the House and the country deplores these alleged atrocities, may I ask the right hon. Gentleman to explain how he knows all these things in such detail?

§Mr. Eden

I thought the statement I made was a very reserved statement in all the circumstances. I made it so deliberately, not because of doubt about the information, but because of the circumstances which we all know at the present time. The information I have given was given by Mrs. Henderson herself.

§Mr. Driberg

While everybody, I agree, must deplore this incident, will the right hon. Gentleman bear in mind that the first British officer to be returned by the E.L.A.S. Forces this week bore testimony to the fact that he had been perfectly well treated and that he saw no ill treatment of prisoners?

§Mr. Eden

The hon. Member seems to suggest that I answered this Question in a way to try and point political sympathy one way or another. I have not done anything of the kind. I have given the absolute bare facts of what happened to a British subject.

§Colonel Sir A. Lambert Ward

Cannot the right hon. Gentleman inform the House what steps the Government propose to take to punish the perpetrators of this atrocity?

§Mr. Eden

The first thing for us to do is to find out who the perpetrators were

Trials (Penal Code)

13. [Mr. Driberg](#)

asked the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs what penal code is to be used in the definition and trial of crimes alleged against persons in Greece to whom, if they are found guilty, [...]promised amnesty will not apply.

[§Mr. Eden](#)

I assume that the penal code will be the Greek Penal Code and that the normal processes of Greek law will be followed.

[793](#)

[§Mr. Driberg](#)

When the right hon. Gentleman says "the Greek Penal Code" does he mean the code that obtained under the Metaxas régime, or what?

[§Mr. Eden](#)

I mean the present Greek Penal Code. I am afraid that I do not carry in my head the date of its origin. It might go back a long way further.

[§Mr. Driberg](#)

If it dates from the régime of Metaxas—which was a dictatorship—is there not a danger that it might include penalties for political offences, such as penalties for holding certain opinions?

[§Mr. Eden](#)

I think it has been made as clear as language can make it that the offence of bearing arms against the State in these circumstances will not be included among the charges tried.

Deb 07 February 1945

Documents (Publication)

9. [Mr. Hugh Lawson](#)

asked the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs if he will publish as a White Paper all the documents relative to events in Greece during the period November, 1944, to January, 1945.

[2052](#)

[§Mr. Law](#)

His Majesty's Government have given this question careful consideration but do not feel that the present would be an opportune moment for publishing all the documents in their possession regarding this period.

[§Mr. Lawson](#)

May I ask two questions? The first is whether it is not essential, in order to have a true picture of the situation, that the documents dating from November, 1944, to January, 1945, should be published. The second is whether the right hon. Gentleman will include statements made by British troops who were taken prisoner by the regular E.A.M. forces and who reported favourably on their treatment and not confine it to statements made by those who were taken by the irregulars.

[§Mr. Law](#)

I have no doubt that, in due course, all the facts of this tragic business will come out. In the meantime, I am quite sure that it would be extremely inadvisable at the present time, from the point of view of securing a settlement

between the contending factions in Greece, to add fuel to the flame by publishing a lot of statements which have been made in confidence, and which people never expected to be published.

§Sir Richard Acland

Would the right hon. Gentleman ask Mr. Leeper to supply further particulars of his first statement in the White Paper, about chaos and disorder in November, as it conflicts with all the statements made by Athens radio, and with the result of the investigations made by the then representatives of the Government?

§Mr. Law

I do not think that, at this time, any advantage would be served by raking over those embers. Our whole interest in this matter is to get a settlement in Greece. We seem to be on the way to a settlement. I have nothing to add to what I have said.

Conference (M. Tsirimokos)

§11. Mr. Cocks

asked the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs whether the objection of the Greek Government to the inclusion of M. Tsirimokos, General Secretary of E.L.D., Union of Popular Democrats, in the E.A.M. delegation for the purpose of discussing conditions of agreement, has the approval of His Majesty's Government.

§Mr. Law

As my hon. Friend will be aware, M. Tsirimokos is taking part in the conference.

§Mr. Cocks

Does that answer mean that the Government are now abandoning the fiction that E.L.D. have broken away from E.A.M.?

§Mr. Law

I think it simply means that Mr. Tsirimokos is negotiating with the Greek Government at this time. I do not think that we need draw any conclusions from that fact.

Press Correspondents (Interviews)

Mr. Driberg

asked the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs if British and American war correspondents in Athens are now permitted to interview spokesmen of E.A.M. and E.L.A.S.

§Mr. Law

It was decided that up to and during the period of negotiations correspondents should not be permitted to interview the delegates to the Conference. This decision was taken because it was felt that a series of statements to the Press by the delegates might well impede the course of negotiations or even prejudice their outcome. I hope that after the Conference it will be possible to make arrangements for a general Press conference at which full facilities will be given to Press correspondents to interview individual delegates.

§Mr. Driberg

Meanwhile, is it not the case that other British civilians, such as the T.U.C. delegates, have been allowed to interview E.A.M. and E.L.A.S. spokesmen? Since the Press correspondents are allowed to interview one side, the Plastiras side, would it not be advisable to allow them to give a complete picture?

§Mr. Law

I do not think the cases of the T.U.C. delegates and the Press correspondents are comparable. As to the general question, I think the House will appreciate that it would be

extremely difficult to get a settlement of this very difficult problem if there was a sort of competition, both sides appealing to their respective publics back at home. I am sure that no good purpose would be served by allowing these interviews now. After the conference is over, I hope that it may be possible to grant such interviews.

§Mr. A. Bevan

Since when has a fair presentation of the case of both sides [2054](#) come to be regarded as competition? Why should my right hon. Friend assume that it would prejudice the negotiations if publicity were given to the E.A.M. side, while it is facilitated and exclusively given to the Plastiras side?

§Mr. Law

I did not say anything about fair presentation. What I was trying to convey to the House was that it did not really seem to be a very good idea, from the point of view of getting agreement, if delegates came hot from the disputes in the conference room, and gave heated interviews to the Press.

Hon. Members

Only one side.

§Mr. McGovern

After all the propaganda that has been done by the Government against E.L.A.S., why should there be this special treatment for the other side? Is it not the case that the real reason for not allowing interviews is that they might conflict with what the Prime Minister said?

§Mr. Law

No, Sir, there is nothing whatever in the suggestion made by the hon. Member.

§Mr. McGovern

It is Churchill dictatorship, and nothing else.

Arms Bearing (Sentences)

§21. Mr. G. Strauss

asked the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs what steps he proposes to take in view of the sentences passed by High Courts in Greece against men accused of carrying arms against the State.

§22. Mr. Driberg

asked the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs if his attention has been called to the sentences imposed by a military court in Athens on persons accused of bearing arms against the State; and what steps he is taking to check this contravention of the assurance given by him that the act of bearing arms against the State would not be regarded as a crime in itself and would not be punished.

§Mr. Law

I understand that the Press reports on this particular case may not have given a full account of the proceedings of the court. His Majesty's Ambassador in Athens has been asked to furnish a full report, and, until this has been received, I should prefer to make no statement. I can assure the House that His [2055](#)Majesty's Government expect the Greek Government to honour the pledges which both we and they have given.

§Mr. McGovern

Is it not the case that a large number of political assassinations are going on in the name of legal justice, and that these are being carried out by both sides in all the released countries in Europe?

Deb 14 February 1945

GREECE (POLITICAL AGREEMENT)

§16. Mr. Driberg

asked the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs if he can make any statement on the progress of events in Greece; and if he has now received a reliable report on the trial of persons accused of bearing arms against the State and the application to such persons of the promised amnesty.

201

§Mr. Law

As the hon. Member will be aware, an agreement was signed between the Greek Government and E.L.A.S. on 12th February, and I am sure that the House will welcome this most satisfactory outcome to the recent negotiations. The agreement marks a notable advance towards a final and just solution of the differences with which Greece has been divided and tormented. The agreement reaffirms the pledges already given by the Greek Government that there will be an amnesty for all political crimes committed since the disturbances began on 3rd December. The amnesty law provides that the trials of those not covered by the amnesty will be by civil courts and that cases already tried by military courts will be retried by civil courts. No one will be prosecuted for bearing arms against the State.

§Mr. Driberg

Would it be possible to convey congratulations to the Minister Resident in the Mediterranean for the very statesmanlike way in which he has contributed to reconciliation in Greece by adopting most of the proposals put forward by the Labour Party Conference and the Government's critics in this House and in the Press?

§Sir A. Southby

May I ask my right hon. Friend whether he will at the same time convey to General Scobie and the British Army our appreciation of the fact that they made it possible for this happy solution to be reached?

[§Mr. Gallacher](#)

May I ask the Minister whether we can take it that the statements made against E.A.M. will now be withdrawn, as they have no application, in view of the agreement accomplished by E.A.M. representatives at the Conference?

Deb 15 February 1945

SIR WALTER CITRINE (VISIT TO GREECE)

21. Captain Duncan

asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what conditions Sir Walter Citrine was granted an exit permit to visit Greece.

[380](#)

[§Mr. H. Morrison](#)

It is not the general practice to attach conditions to the grant of exit permits, and no conditions were attached in this case.

Captain Duncan

In cases like this where an important delegation makes a visit abroad, and there is likely to be an important report, will the Minister, in future, consider attaching a condition to the permit that a copy of the report should be submitted to him, so that Members of Parliament can receive copies? At

present, it is impossible officially to obtain a copy of Sir Walter Citrine's report.

§Mr. Morrison

I will consider that. It would however, be very unusual, and would possibly elevate delegations into a rather too official position. But if my hon. and gallant Friend applies to the Trades Union Congress, I am sure that they will consider whether they can supply him with a copy of the report.

§Commander Sir Archibald Southby

Is it in order for Members of Parliament, other than those sitting on the other side of the House, to apply to Transport House for a copy?

Deb 28 February 1945

Dried Fruit, Greece

§57. Sir P. Harris

asked the Minister of Food whether he will grant the same facilities to Greece as have been applied to Turkey in the purchase of dried fruit.

§The Minister of Food (Colonel Llewelin)

I shall be glad to obtain dried fruit from Greece as soon as supplies suitable for this country become available.

<https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard>