

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

AS-11
Our Southern Neighbor

Birčaninova 28b
Belgrade, Yugoslavia
May 10, 1963

Mr. Richard H. Nolte
Institute of Current World Affairs
366 Madison Avenue, New York 17, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Nolte:

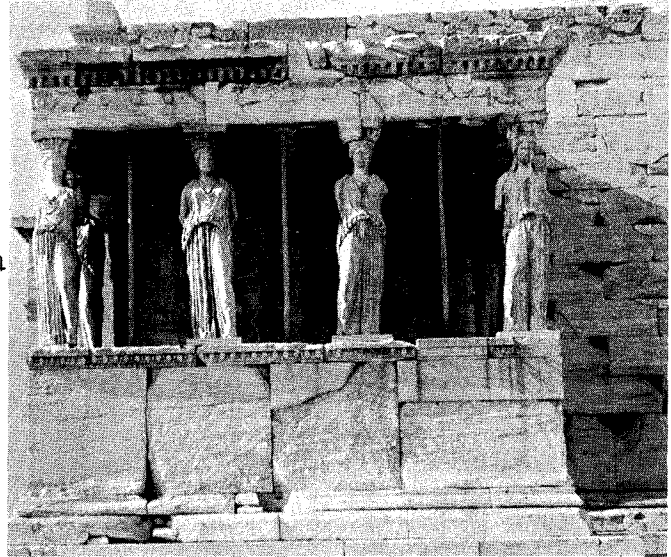
I must confess that we traveled down to Greece last month mainly to get some sense of how it all started -- a sense, in other words, of the origins of our common civilization. From that point of view, the trip was quite rewarding although somewhat depressing: for, inspecting the glories of Hellenic art and engineering, it was hard to escape the feeling that the human race has been going steadily downhill ever since. Nevertheless, although in theory we came with supposedly universal interests, in practice we found it difficult to view the Greek scene from any perspective except that of "our" southern neighbor, or rather the neighbor of the land -- Yugoslavia -- in which we have been living these many months. Indeed, the two countries are bound by more than geography: Greece and Serbia obtained independence from the Turks at roughly the same time, fought as allies in two Balkan wars and two world wars, and were both for long periods oriented toward the West (Britain and France) rather than Russia (the dubious friend) or Germany (the certain enemy). The two parted company after World War II, when the Allies permitted a Communist revolution in Yugoslavia but refused to permit one in Greece; but then, fifteen years ago, the expulsion of the Titoists from the Cominform and the defeat of the Greek rebellion permitted the two governments to establish and maintain more or less good relations.



Nevertheless, despite these and other congruities of history and policy, it was the differences between Greece and Yugoslavia which interested me most. Although I made no systematic effort to explore the concrete data of Greek internal development, some surface impressions may perhaps be of interest.

To begin with, the past. In Yugoslavia, it is a problem, a burden. Its Slavic peoples cannot properly claim the heritage of Roman Illyria; later still, there is the darkness of Turkish occupation; before and after that trauma, there are the separate na-

tionalisms of Serbs and Croats; in recent times, the newer nationalisms of Slovenia and Macedonia, and the movement for Yugoslav "integralism." It is not only that the Greeks are one nation with a language still relatively close to that of classic times, and a common religion (Orthodoxy) which flourished even under the Turks. It is that the Greeks have a usable past, while the Yugoslavs must virtually create one. In the political domain, Serb, Croat and Bosnian nationalists have had to stake their claims on the basis of transient medieval warrior-kingdoms; none of the claims are particularly impressive, and moreover they conflict with one another. In the cultural field, the strain is greater still. The Serbs have made a great effort to publicize their monastery art as a link between Byzantium and the Italian Renaissance; the Croats of Dalmatia have stressed their own achievements, under Venetian tutelage, before and during the Renaissance; Bosnia has studied its tenth-century Bogomil



THE ERECHTHEUM (Acropolis)

heresy as a precursor of the Albigensian and other pre-Reformation religious movements. Now all of these are interesting in their way, mostly as part of larger movements whose climactic developments came elsewhere; but none of them is that important to the history of Europe as a whole, or even necessarily relevant to the development of modern Yugoslavia. The strain involved in affirming a past may be illustrated by the case of the "Croatian" scientist Rudjer Bošković, a figure of the European Enlightenment. A nuclear institute is named after him nowadays, and textbooks claim him as a national hero. Yet in the museum at Dubrovnik one sees his papers, letters, seals, portraits -- in Italian and Latin.

By way of contrast, today's Greeks may not be the same Greeks, but their heritage is undeniable and clear, always easy to call upon. The stones proclaim it, as do such unchanged vistas as Delphi and Olympus. And it is -- let us face it -- a greater heritage. If the modern Greeks have yet to employ it in a manner befitting their ancestors, there is always the possibility that a new generation of Greeks may do so; it is there for the taking, and need neither be "explained" nor magnified, simply resumed.

It seems to me that this difference in the way Greeks and Yugoslavs confront their past explains to some extent the differing postures the two nations assume in the world. The Yugoslavs, because they must still in a sense create a national identity, are ever sensitive about encroachments on their "independence" and feel somehow they must cut a figure in the world. The Greeks, conscious that their identity can never be undone, are free to play a more modest role, to lean on Britain or America or the Common Market, to take



MODERN ATHENS FROM THE ACROPOLIS (Hadrian's Gate, foreground)

their place without anxiety in the modern world community of increasingly less independent nations.

The present day offers a contrast between two alternative forms of social development: Greece, with King and Church, a quasi-dictatorship of the quasi-Right, indubitably capitalist, solidly backed by the governments and private corporations of the West; Yugoslavia, secular and nominally republican, a Communist dictatorship which has however accepted Western aid of a limited kind. (I am oversimplifying both countries, to be sure.) It is, in fact, a kind of test match similar to that between India and China in Asia. And the Yugoslavs do not like to talk about it. For, with all the excesses of political reaction in Greece, and even allowing for the greater aid that nation has received from abroad, there seems little doubt that the Greeks have made greater economic progress with fewer natural resources. To be sure, Greek prosperity is not as evenly distributed; when one compares villages in Greek and in Yugoslav Macedonia, the Greek ones appear considerably poorer. Yet there is nothing in Yugoslavia to compare with Athens or even Salonika, and Athens (with the Piraeus) contains a fourth of the entire population of the country. It is more prosperous by far than any city I have seen east of Venice -- Vienna included; and travelers who last visited the city ten or even five years ago declare that the miracle has been wrought almost over-night. The figures for Greek economic "growth" have seemed spotty from year to year, mostly because of over-dependence on an olive crop which has been good one season, bad the next; but the Yugoslav economy has yet to regain the momentum attained in the late Fifties. If the Yugoslavs have a younger population, better supplied with doctors and teachers, the Greeks because of the stability of their foreign policy can count on steadier and more substantial infusions of the capital which both countries need. Greek association with the Common Market practically guarantees such capital; Yugoslavia's "active coexistence" may well leave it high and dry.

Before ascribing all this to the different social systems in the two countries, it is worth setting out certain other factors. Greece's maritime setting has helped produce an uninterrupted tradition of shipping and commerce (Odysseus to Onassis); the Greeks, along with the Jews and Armenians, controlled the trade of the Turkish Empire, while the Serbs remained in agriculture -- the very field in which Communism now denies them proper scope. Thus, the people in Athens and Salonika strike one immediately as more urban, more quick, more alert, more fitted to the modern world than those in Belgrade, or even in Zagreb or Split; and why not -- is not the city itself virtually a Greek invention? Against this the Yugoslavs have the greater natural resources, but they are not evenly spread; and the Yugoslavs, whether for reasons of conscience or of politics, seem much more burdened keeping up their backward areas -- particularly Macedonia and the Kosmet region adjoining Albania. The latter is part of Yugoslavia mainly because it contains many "sacred" places of Serbian medieval history; its population is already largely Albanian and becoming more so. As for Macedonia, a member of our party cruelly remarked that an independent Macedonian state would be the ideal solution for four nations -- the Macedonians themselves, of course, but also the Greeks, Bulgarians and Yugoslavs, each of whom must now subsidize (in varying degrees) this unusually poor land and rather primitive people. Why do they do it? If there are rational reasons (beyond the accidents of treaties imposed by ignorant great powers), they would seem to be two: First, whoever has a piece of Macedonia has a claim on the port of Salonika, which is neither poor nor primitive. Second, without doubt, Macedonia still involves the formidable heritage of Alexander the Great, whose shadow reached to Asia Minor and beyond. Were Yugoslavia or Bulgaria -- or a "Balkan Federation" including both -- to possess Salonika, it would be not only the leading power in southeastern Europe but a prescient factor in the Near East as well. It is for this reason that the Yugoslavs encourage Macedonian nationality, while the Greeks suppress it (the Bulgarians believe the Macedonians are, or were until quite recently, simply Bulgarians -- and quite a few Western scholars believe them to be right). However, the price for Macedonian "development" in Yugoslavia is paid by the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes; while the Macedonians in Greece must make it on their own, at the pleasure of Athens. Only time can tell which country is pursuing the wiser course, or in what form the Macedonian "question," now quiescent but by no means dead, will erupt.

Much has been written about the political development of Yugoslavia under Communist rule, almost as much about how Western intervention during and after the civil war fastened a Rightist government on Greece. (There was an attempt to find a "Center" formula as in Italy, but Greece had no de Gasperi to make it stick.) There would seem to be a permanent Communist or pro-Communist opposition embracing perhaps a fifth of the population (but very strong in the cities); there is also a "democratic" or non-Communist opposition which claims the loyalties of at least a third, perhaps almost half the voters. The Left is compact; the Center fragmented by individual ambitions and the type of factional politics familiar in the Third and Fourth French Republics. The claims of both are difficult to

judge, because the Rightist government has somewhat curtailed press criticism (I am stating this as modestly as possible) and has also apparently used the police power in the villages to "manage" elections in traditional Balkan fashion. Yet it is hard to see how a Government of the Center would greatly alter the main lines of Greek development; the present regime is not so Rightist as to shy away from state investment in the economy, or from dealing economically with the Soviet bloc. (In a tourist hotel built by the Government, I rode in a Skoda elevator.) In fact, the party system only imperfectly reflects the real division in Greece, which is (as one man put it) between the "believers" and the "scoffers." At one time this division corresponded to that between royalists and republicans, but after the war the Center and Right together helped restore the monarchy; and now, while the pro-Communist Left is the main vehicle of the "scoffers," the Right contains (as in Western Europe) "believers," "scoffers" and opportunists, while the Center is schizophrenic. It is the great hope of the Western powers, and of the technocrats, that economic growth and domestic peace will eventually soften the fundamental division. Perhaps it has already done so; but as long as the opposition can cry "dictatorship" with some justification, we shall never know.

Of course in Yugoslavia there is no opposition so imprudent as to utter such cries; there are only "borers from within" and internal exiles. But then Yugoslavia is, as the ideologues put it, "building socialism" -- or rather accelerating industrialization in a planned economy. Which country, therefore, is more (one cannot help thinking in such terms) "progressive"? It seems obvious that the average Greek today has greater freedom, and seems happier, than his Yugoslav counterpart. Yet which system promises the greater hope of future fulfillment?

An answer to this question involves all sorts of value-choices, and I propose to approach it only by indirection, by describing two civic occasions I recently witnessed. The first was in Athens -- the processional for Good Friday. It began and ended in the Orthodox Cathedral, after winding through some of the city's main squares. At the head of the procession came soldiers, then choir boys and priests, then bishops and the brightly-robed Patriarch, with censer and miter. All tread slowly, softly, to the doleful march from Eroica, played by muted brasses and woodwinds. Behind the Patriarch strode a rather small man in military uniform; he might be a naval aide if we did not recognize him as the King. Behind him, in a row, six Army officers and a lone woman, swathed in plainest black, with no makeup. "It can't be the Queen!" said a girl beside me -- "Frederika... so chic... so gay... Life magazine...." Far from the image indeed, but the Queen nonetheless. After them, other officers, then political leaders, local dignitaries, then the masses. Each of the participants save the Patriarch -- and including King and Queen -- carried a lit taper. The Patriarch was, on this day if no other, the central figure in the procession. It was to him that the crowds on the streets, and on every balcony in sight, looked for their blessing -- all carrying their own tapers.

Traditional? Certainly. The old alliance of King, Army, Church which "confuses" the masses? Perhaps. But the monarchs walked behind the Patriarch, suggesting a certain pluralism and the possibility of transcendental values. And the procession belonged to the people -- no one forced them to stand with their tapers at every window. Perhaps, in the post-religious scheme of things, they should not want to do so. But they do now, and those who do not may stay home. In present-day Eastern Europe, getting what one wants is not so easily scanted.

By contrast, May Day in Belgrade, the first such in the now Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Gaining entry to the key blocks of the Boulevard of the Revolution (formerly Boulevard of King Alexander) is the first problem. Police check admission cards to the special sections within a two-block radius of the official reviewing stand. For several nights beforehand other blocks have been closed off to permit military units to rehearse. Inhabitants of houses near the reviewing stand have been checked the night before; prospective visitors are barred entry on the day itself. The press, the diplomatic corps, the civil servants are in place before the appointed hour. The arrival of the high leaders is announced by motorcycle sirens; the flying squad is followed by blue-coated security officers in an open convertible. Close behind them, in a (presumably bullet-proof) limousine, is the Marshal, followed by other security cars and motorcycles, then other limousines containing government figures. The Marshal's car goes swiftly behind the grandstand, and the diplomats crane their heads to see whom he is with and how he looks. He is resplendent in a braided military uniform, and with him in a teal raincoat is Vice President Aleksandar Ranković. (The two left together also, thereby "settling" the succession question for this week at least.) The commandant of the parade reports to the President of the Republic; the Marshal says the parade shall begin. The rest is familiar to those who have seen films of Soviet May Day parades -- military units, cadets, guards, security troops, tanks, artillery, jets overhead; folk dancers performing before the grandstand (but nowhere else); the workers of various districts and factories, carrying posters with Communist heroes dead and alive and red Party flags; floats depicting economic progress and the latest party slogans; floats mounted by major industrial and commercial enterprises; children on scooters; students carrying mildly satiric slogans ("Stipendia Est Mater Studiorum" -- Belgrade U.); more workers, folklore groups, and units of the Socialist Alliance. The Marshal waves to all the paraders, and applauds back when he is applauded. He is not embarrassed by the portraits of himself, the slogans in his praise, or the chants of fealty to his leadership. This, he thinks, is the Yugoslavia he has created. And it is -- the Yugoslavia of the paraders. But is there another Yugoslavia as well? One notices hardly any old people in the parade itself, and relatively few over 45. When the organized units have passed, the crowd disperses -- it does not follow. It has been rather apathetic throughout, more so the farther one gets from the reviewing stand. Many have stayed home; there are no local parades, as there were minor processions around many of Athens' lesser churches.



TITO, LENIN, MARX, ENGELS



'HAPPY HOLIDAY, COMRADE TITO'



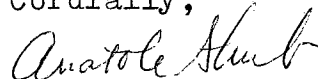
MAY DAY IN BELGRADE: THE SOCIALIST ALLIANCE

Is this progress? I wonder. If one sets aside the peculiar verbiage of Leninism, the fact is that the Greek King, who reigns but does not rule, walked among his people, as did his officers and the businessmen and politicians who rule but whose names nobody knows; all followed the Patriarch, who neither reigns nor rules but (in the religious terminology) witnesses; and the people did as they liked, which was to follow. Another King, another politician, even another Patriarch would make little essential difference; the principles of society have, so to speak, been etherialized. The Marshal of Yugoslavia who has ruled the nation since the war, like the Serbian King who ruled it between the wars, occupies a quite different role, subsuming the history, politics and religion of the country in his own person. The problem of legitimacy remains; the problem of continuity lies on the horizon, promising freedom, slaughter, chaos. "Perhaps Ranković will be able to hold this place together,"

a wise Western diplomat hopes. But who is Ranković, that twenty million should wait on him, and what does he want? Nobody knows. It is of course possible that the current semi-enlightened despotism will, as the "liberals" hope, sufficiently educate, urbanize and industrialize the nation so that it may peaceably give way to more easy-going forms of authority and perhaps even eventually to something resembling the regimes of the West. That is possible, but by no means certain: For, as in Greece only more so, it is difficult to gauge the depths of the subterranean conflicts in the nation, and for much the same reasons. Yet one suspects the conflicts are far deeper here, not only because Greek tensions do find greater outlets, but because the Greeks have a past to sustain them.

The Yugoslavs, too, have a past, but it is not present. I could not help thinking, as I watched the Easter procession in Athens, of a tale told by a Slavonian woman in the midst of the winter snows here. We were talking of the cold, especially at night when the fires are banked. "Ah," she said, "when I was a girl (she is only 40 now) we used to go out this night. We would sleep after supper, and then our parents would wake us about 11, and bundle us up, and out we'd go. Miles we had to walk in the snow, parents, old folks, children, singing, carrying our tapers from all the farms around to the village church on Christmas Eve. And at midnight our Hallelujahs could be heard for miles around!"

Cordially,



Anatole Shub