

Clientelistic Fascism

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The Greek communists called the Metaxas Dictatorship Monarchofascism. Most authors deny the fascist character and describe it as a simple royal dictatorship. My opinion is that the regime of the 4th August 1936 was fascist, indeed, and I will try and prove this to you within the next half an hour.

In 1948 Christopher Montague Woodhouse characterized the Metaxas regime in this way: *“To compare Metaxas’ Government with the dictatorships of Italy and Germany is ridiculous. The term ‘Fascism’ in connection with Metaxas is idle abuse [...] he did not found a one-party state as the Fascists did [...] he did not plan aggressive war. He did not preach racial nationalism [...] He seems to have seen his dictatorship rather after the model of the dictatorship in the ancient Roman republic.”* Woodhouse apparently considered Metaxas as a kind of Sulla who retired to his country seat when he had done his work. The explanation for this innocuous description of the Metaxas dictatorship is rather simple: It was written during the Greek Civil War when the Western powers were allied with those forces which had supported the dictatorship before WWII. Moreover, the Greek communists called the regime monarcho-fascism and as a staunch conservative Woodhouse was not ready to side with the Communists even in this question.

A similar innocuous picture of Metaxas drew Ehrengard Schramm von Thadden in 1955 when she described him as a kind of nice benign grandfather. This is even more astonishing because Schramm von Thadden knew Greece very well, had written a book on the history of Greece in WWII and she was a social-democratic deputy. A similar distorted picture is found in the historical awareness of many Greeks: Metaxas is the saviour of Greece from Communism and the hero who said *ochi* (no) to Mussolini on 28 October 1940.

But who was Metaxas in reality? He was born in Cephalonia in 1871 as son of a civil servant. He attended the military academy in Athens and became a protégé of Crown Prince Constantine who sent him for further training to the Prussian Military Academy in Berling. During the Balkan wars Metaxas proved his military proficiency. In WWI he confirmed King Constantine in his neutrality course. In the 1920s and 1930s he was involved in all plots and coups of the extreme right wing. Two times he was sentenced to death and pardoned. In the early 1920s he lived in Mussolini’s Italy in exile and discovered his sympathy for fascism. In the early 1930s he founded a party and participated not very successfully in the parliamentary life of Greece. He openly admitted that he was for abolishing parliamentarianism. Occasionally he declared that in a war he would side with Great Britain.

When he took over he did not change his personal lifestyle but in politics he applied the clientelistic spoils system, too, by putting all his followers in important positions. He, too,

applied patronage by marrying his daughters to suitable sons-in-law and transferring good jobs to them.

Leftist authors tend to call the regime fascist but they do not prove it in a scholarly way. More recent scholarly study call the regime totalitarian. Apparently the authors do not understand that this characterization applies to communist dictatorships as well. Even the German specialist for European fascist movements, Wipperman, still does not accept the Greek regime as fascist in his newest book which appeared in 2008.

In 1983 he published his first study on comparative European fascism. In this book he put all Balkan dictatorships of the 1920s and 1930s into one chapter under the heading Kings' Dictatorships. In his opinion these dictator kings even prohibited the introduction of fascism in these countries. Only the royal dictatorships of Romania and Croatia had some fascist features at a certain moment. Wippermann admits that Metaxas created a uniformed state youth but he cannot discover any other fascist feature within the 4th August regime.

Wippermann arrived at these wrong conclusions because he equated the Greek dictatorship with dictatorships in the other Balkan states where the kings were indeed the sole dictators. But George II was no powerless Vittorio Emanuele. Greece was ruled by a dictatorial duumvirate, by two co-dictators, by George II and Metaxas. The King controlled the army which obeyed him unconditionally, with it he could have ended the dictatorship any time. But as long Metaxas did not threaten the position of the King he could act at liberty.

In the 1970s there was a vivid discussion going on in Germany about fascism. Several theories were developed on both sides of the political spectre. The most convincing one was that of Kühnl who took up the discussion thread of the 1920s of the German Left and described Fascism primarily as an anti-ideology. According to him Fascism was anti-conservative, anti-liberal, anti-communist, anti-plutocratic, anti-democratic, anti-parliamentarian and so on. It was extremely nationalistic, militaristic, aggressive and expansionist as was proved by Germany and Italy. Racism was a special feature of German fascism. And in each country infected by fascism there was a fascist mass party.

But this great European debate on fascism in the 1970s concentrated on the western European phenomenon. It did not try to analyse fascism in different political cultures. Even the leading specialists on fascism, the conservative Nolte and the leftist Kühnl, agreed that the Greek regime was not fascist. For them the existence of mass party was the decisive criterion whether a regime was fascist or not. But only if one analyses and describes the Greek system in its specific environment is it possible to compare it with its European counterparts adequately. If one does it the other way round and projects western European fascist features on Greece one comes to the wrong conclusions namely that the Greek regime was not fascist.

The interpretation of the Greek regime is further complicates because it existed only four years. It was still under construction when Italy attacked Greece and dictator Metaxas died.

The subsequent developments changed the character of the regime. Thus the regime did not have the chance to unfold its features fully.

During the first two years the regime was a bit insecure in deciding its ideological course. At first the regime appealed to the national feelings of the Greeks and propagated a militant anti-communism, addressing the conservative instincts of the population. Had the regime remained on this level it would have been an authoritarian conservative dictatorship but already in September 1936 Metaxas and his propagandists stroke new tones: Vice-president and minister of economics K. Zavitzianos stated that the regime would be similar to the Italian system. In October Metaxas became more precise: The overthrow of the parliamentary system and economical liberalism was final; the new state would be based on the corporative system. The economy of the country would be reorganized on the introduction of obligatory vocational syndicates. In order to acquaint the Greeks with the ideas of the corporative state the press published articles written by Charles Maurras, a leading member of the French *Action Française*, and a series of articles by Bruno Biagi, former Italian secretary of State for the corporations, who visited Athens in October 1936.

However, Metaxas's appeals to the younger generation were more important. Apparently he understood that he could not impress the sceptical elder generation with his ideas. In October he praised the old Spartans and Macedonians as ideals for the youth. Obviously the dictator did not appreciate the democratic elements of ancient Athens. In June 1937 he proclaimed ancient Sparta as model for his new state. In January 1939 the regime reached its ideological climax when chief propagandist Theologos Nikoloudis glorified the New State: *"It is a totalitarian state, strictly speaking a strong state, not to say a violent state. Everything in it is based on the national closeness, on the idea of power and submission, on the spiritual values of life, on the conservation and promotion of the family, on the respect for work, on the holiness of religious feelings. The nation is considered as a soul. The state teaches the citizens the virtues of the citizens. It makes its citizens conscious of their duties. It pushes them to unity and cooperation in the national spirit. It leads the human beings from a primitive orderless existence to a higher existence under the organizing power of the state. It assigns the names of its creator, its heroes and its geniuses to history."* The New State rejects the idea of the sovereignty of the individual. Liberalism had made the State a servant of the individual. But according to the idea of totalitarianism everything rests with the State; nothing human or spiritual of some value exists outside the State. The New State is in opposition to democracies. Only under dictatorships the peoples had reached fulfilment of their material and spiritual wishes. The New State was not reactionary but revolutionary. It wanted to live peacefully among the civilized peoples but it did not believe in eternal peace. War calls forth human ideas and ennobles the fighter. The New State is openly anti-capitalist. Work is the highest social good in the eyes of the New State. The New State abolished class struggle. The

State of Metaxas was the coronation of Greek history which had experienced three periods of grandeur, each time under authoritarian rule: The first had taken place during the fifth century b.c. in the golden age under the rule of Pericles. The second was the millennium of the Byzantine Empire. The third was the State of Metaxas.

Nikoloudis called this state as *O Tritos Politismos* (Third civilization) which can be translated into German as "*Drittes Reich*". As ideals of the New State were praised the Roman *virtus* and the Spartan *arete*. The propagandists and ideologist of the regime published their ideas in a journal called *Neos Kratos*.

The New State was propagated by more factors. Among the most important was the *Führerprinzip* (leader principle). Metaxas was no longer the prime minister but the leader (archigos). Unlike Goebbels Nikoloudis had no feeling that he overdid the promotion of Metaxas and that he ran the danger to make him ridiculous when he called him "*the great helmsman, the helmsman of the nation, the chosen, the envoy sent by God and providence, the first worker and the first peasant.*" The cult around the leader assumed shape which remind one of the cult around Zachariadis or Stalin. The elder generation looked at these adorations sceptically but the youth movement EON chorused "*A people, a King, a Leader, a Youth*". The German equivalent sounded: "*Ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Führer.*"

Metaxas was of course a chauvinist and a racist but only in theory. He despised the Turks and the Slav neighbours in the north. But because the expansionist dreams had ended with the Asia Minor catastrophe he could project his chauvinism only to Greece or the Greek past. His propagandists tried to convey to the Greek people a sense of superiority towards other peoples which found a fertile ground in petit bourgeois brains and lived on for many years. In Metaxas eyes the Greek race which had performed fantastically in the past was superior to all others and if it oriented itself at the ancient models it would certainly surpass all others again. Metaxas did not take action against the Greek Jews but he despised them and expressed himself positively as regards Hitler's antisemitic policy. For him the Jews were capitalists and internationalists. If the Germans had not chased them they would still be annoyed by democracy. In Metaxas opinion racism was a law of nature.

Militarism was less developed than in the western fascist countries. Apologists of Metaxas doubted the fascist character of the regime because Metaxas did not display a military bearing, but this argumentation does not meet the reality. It was the King who controlled the armed forces and not Metaxas. Metaxas did display a military bearing in areas which he controlled, e.g. the youth movement EON and the *tagmata ergasias* (work battalions) which both wore uniforms. The EON was the equivalent of the Hitler Youth and the Reichsarbeitsdienst the same as the work battalions. The reason why Metaxas never wore a uniform despite the fact that he was a general is rather simple: He was rather small, well over 60 and corpulent. He would have looked unattractive in comparison with his co-dictator George II

who was tall, slim and always wore a uniform.

The scapegoats of the regime were the communists. According to Metaxas they were responsible for all evils which had hit the Greek state during the past years. Communism had divided the nation and undermined the old ideals of religion and family. His hatred led to a systematic persecution of the communists. Similarly Metaxas disliked liberalism but in this case the persecution was not as bad. Metaxas hated intellectuals influenced by European ideas which he considered alien. Here one should not excluded a feeling of inferiority of Metaxas.

Metaxas was not a theoretician or thinker but rather a copyist of ideas of others. In the beginning of his dictatorship he copied Italian ideas later he took over Nazi views. Only the draft of a constitution of December 1940 was his own mental child. Even if the text may lead to the conclusion that Metaxas was constructing “only” an authoritarian state an entry in his *Tetradio ton Skepseon* (notebook of thoughts) of 2 January 1941 makes it clear that he was still thinking in fascist patterns. He wrote: “*On 4th August Greece obtained an anti-communist regime, an anti-parliamentary regime, a totalitarian regime, a regime on the basis of the peasants and workers and consequently a anti-plutocratic regime.*”

These revealing remarks correspond exactly with the criteria of Kühnl for fascism. But the apologists of Metaxas denied this with the argument that he did not create a fascist mass party. They do not understand that this argument is only valid in Western Europe and cannot be applied in Greece. In the political system of Greece such a party could not come into being. Metaxas’ own party had never been more than his personal clientele and therefore he dissolved it as all other parties when he came to power. In Greece a mass party could come into being only if all other clientelistic networks had been broken to pieces and the homeless clientele was searching for a new political mechanism which might fulfil their expectations..Metaxas knew this and described it in his *Tetradio ton Skepseon* accurately: “*Sure, [Greece] had no special ruling party. But the whole people were the party except the die-hard communists and the reactionary adherents of the old parties.*” Metaxas considered the whole people as his party as his clientelistic following.

The clientelistic character of the Greek parties made his game even easier. Unlike his European colleagues he did not need to build up a mass part in order to come to power. The clientelistic system permitted a direct transformation to fascism. Metaxas eliminated the oligarchical leadership of the old parties and made their adherents orient themselves to him. A mass party would have been alien to the Greek political system. Metaxas interpreted the former clients of the old parties as the people which followed him. His clients in the state apparatus, the EON and the *tagmata ergasias* where the real substitute for the missing mass party. And this fictitious mass party was kept together in the traditional Greek way, by rousfetia, as all other parties before and after Metaxas, and it was Metaxas who had the mo-

nopoly of the distribution.

The military liked the quasi military codex of honour and the strong state. The Greek economic oligarchy was delighted to be masters in their own house again. Thus the picture becomes round. The regime of 4th August was fascist. It was fascism under the specific Greece conditions, it was fascism in a clientelistic system. It was clientelistic fascism. At the same time it was a poor people's version of the European phenomenon.

All Balkan states which once belonged to the Ottoman Empire have inherited the clientelistic systems and thus many of the dictatorships of the 1930s there were clientelistic fascist systems. But the clientelistic system did not only modify fascism but communism as well. Thus one may speak of clientelistic communism in the Balkans in the post-war period. And clientelism is still alive in this part of Europe.