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Source: *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 35, No. 4 (Dec., 1992), pp. 885-904

Published by: Cambridge University Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2639443>

Accessed: 04-05-2017 09:26 UTC

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## THE MESSIAH AND THE BOURGEOISIE: VENIZELOS AND POLITICS IN GREECE, 1909–1912\*

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**ABSTRACT.** *The mercurial rise of Venizelos, the most prominent Greek statesman of this century, has been a hotly debated issue of modern Greek history. The tendency until recently has been to explain his success in terms of social changes, and to see the rise of the Liberal party as the triumph of modernizing bourgeois forces in early twentieth-century Greece. This article, however, compares Venizelos both with the generation of politicians which preceded him, and with his leading contemporary, Gounaris. It argues that Venizelos's enormous popularity hinged upon his response to the nationalist, quasi-messianic fervour which gripped Greece after its humiliating defeat by Turkey in 1897. Parliamentary government came to be seen as passive and elitist, political parties as causes of national decline. Using his rhetorical skills and the press, Venizelos presented himself as the agent of national regeneration. His attitude towards class politics, and to the very idea of political parties, was complex and ambivalent. Hence, his rise should be interpreted, not in terms of a simple Marxist or whiggish schema, as the product of Greece's bourgeois revolution, but as the expression of a new more confident nationalism, which reinforced the personality-centred quality of Greek politics.*

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His memory casts light and warmth upon the entire Hellenic world. No Greek refuses his gift. No one disputes the value of his contribution... From all sides of the Greek horizon [come] words of admiration and nostalgia. An unprecedented national unanimity surrounds Venizelos's grave.<sup>1</sup>

This assessment of the great statesman holds good to a surprising degree even today among the Greek public. Not, however, among scholars and intellectuals: they agree upon his standing, but not what he stood for. Venizelos's political career was a long one, spanning several crucial decades in modern Greek history; both his own views and policies, and the country he dominated, changed considerably in the twenty years up to his death in 1936. Above all, the events of 1909–12, which saw his transformation from a Cretan to a Greek politician, remain the subject of lively debate.<sup>2</sup>

\* I would like to thank the editors of this journal and an anonymous referee for their helpful comments and suggestions on an earlier draft of this article.

<sup>1</sup> S. Stefanou (ed.), *Eleftheriou Venizelou politikai ypothikai* (Athens, 1965), introduction.

<sup>2</sup> Our knowledge of Venizelos has profited enormously from the remarkable expansion of historical research in Greece over the last decade. Essential recent studies are: T. Veremis and O. Dimitrakopoulos (ed.), *Meletimata gyro apo ton Venizelo kai tin epochi tou* (Athens, 1984); G.

The Young Turk revolt of 1908 threw the political life of the kingdom of Greece into turmoil. In May 1909, a group of young army officers in Athens formed their own 'Military League' to demand the military and political reforms they believed necessary for a more aggressive foreign policy. In August they camped with their supporters at Goudi, just outside the Greek capital, forcing a change of government, and inaugurating a period of direct military pressure upon the Chamber. At first, public support for the League was emphatic: in Athens over the summer there were unprecedentedly large demonstrations against the old politicians. But this public acclaim evaporated as it became apparent that the officers did not really know how to implement their demands. Venizelos, a Cretan politician who had been prominent for more than a decade in the enosis movement on his island, was invited to Athens by the League's leaders to advise them on the way out of their impasse. In the course of a brief visit, early in 1910, he managed – despite his lack of experience of national politics – to persuade the League to disband, on the condition that elections be held for a National Assembly to revise the constitution.

The results of this election, held on 8 August 1910, were a shock for the established parties: 146 out of 362 seats were won by Independents, mostly newcomers to the Greek political scene. The daily *Patriis* referred next day to the 'merciless decimation of the parties' and commented that 'the general view is that a new period is dawning in Greece'.<sup>3</sup> Venizelos himself, despite doubts as to the validity of his Greek citizenship, and without having campaigned in person, finished top of the electoral list in Attica, and was immediately recognized as the Independents' leader. Four days after the Revisionist Assembly convened, he landed at Piraeus to be greeted by an enormous crowd. When King George offered him the premiership, he quickly decided to call new elections in the hope of winning an absolute majority. His gamble paid off. The old parties boycotted the election in protest, and on 28 November, his supporters – now grouped into a hastily formed Liberal Party – won 300 seats. Of these, only 117 had been elected in the August round; only 45 representatives had held a seat before 1910. In other words, the governing class now consisted almost entirely of new men.<sup>4</sup>

Venizelos's ascendancy was confirmed when the Assembly was dissolved early in 1912 and his Liberal party won a massive majority in elections to the new chamber. Parliamentary government seemed to have been given a new lease of life; national pride glowed in the triumphant outcome of the Balkan

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Mavrogordatos and C. Chadziiosif (eds.), *Venizelismos kai astikos eksynchronismos* (Irakleion, 1988); T. Veremis and G. Goulimis (eds.), *Eleftherios Venizelos: koinonia, oikonomia, politiki stin epochi tou* (Athens, 1989); ELIA, *Symposio yia ton Eleftherio Venizelo: praktika* (Athens, 1988).

<sup>3</sup> G. D. Karanikola, *Nothes ekloges stin Ellada* (Athens, 1973), pp. 422–3.

<sup>4</sup> The best study of the elections of 1910–12 is to be found in I. Nikolakopoulos and N. Oikonomou, 'To eklogiko vaptisma tou venizelismou. Ekloges 1910–1912', in ELIA, *Symposio*, pp. 45–73.

Wars of 1912–13. The years 1910–15 came to seem a golden age of domestic reform and foreign conquest under the leadership of the charismatic figure who would go on to make a name for himself throughout Europe as a masterly diplomatist, and dominate Greece until his death in 1936.<sup>5</sup>

What, though, were the deeper forces which contributed to the military revolt at Goudi and its aftermath, Venizelos's sudden rise to power in Athens? The very limited aims of the Military League itself have been amply demonstrated by Papacosma. But he is careful to set the officers' coup in the context of the much greater popular and social effervescence which accompanied it.<sup>6</sup> And it is this movement, which led to the resignation of two premiers in the summer of 1909, elections to the first National Assembly, and ultimately to the disappearance of the old parties and the period of Venizelist ascendancy, which has captured the attention of other scholars.

Looking back from the vantage-point of 1931, near the end of Venizelos's career, the Liberal journalist Georgios Ventiris argued that 1909–10 had constituted Greece's bourgeois revolution, in which the power of old elites crumbled under the pressure of the new commercial and modernizing classes. Written at a time when the Liberal project seemed to have run out of steam, Ventiris's work was a forceful re-definition of Venizelism's progressivist past. However, his interpretation has come under attack from two sides: while some scholars argue that a Greek bourgeoisie only came into existence after 1909, others insist that Greek society had been solidly bourgeois for many decades, perhaps even before independence itself.<sup>7</sup> George Mavrogordatos suggests in a pioneering study that the unrest reflected a deep division within the bourgeois class, between, on the one hand the 'traditional military-bureaucratic' bloc, equated by him with a 'state bourgeoisie', and a 'new entrepreneurial diaspora bourgeoisie', which was led by Venizelos.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> There is no adequate biography of Venizelos. D. Alastos, *Venizelos* (London, 1942) is the best overall account. Venizelos's diplomacy is examined in a detailed work by N. Petsalis-Diomidis, *Greece at the Paris Peace Conference (1919)* (Thessaloniki, 1978); the contentious issue of Greece's entry into the war is brilliantly covered by G. Leon, *Greece and the great powers, 1914–1917* (Thessaloniki, 1974). A more personal source is P. Delta, *O Eleftherios Venizelos* (Athens, 1978). Indispensable, though to be used with care, are the collections of speeches and writings collected and edited by Venizelos's former private secretary, S. Stefanou.

<sup>6</sup> V. Papacosma, *The military in Greek politics: the 1909 coup d'état* (Kent State U.P., 1977); C. Koryzis, *I politiki zoi eis tin Ellada, 1821–1910* (Athens, 1974), p. 216; T. Veremis, 'The officer corps in Greece, 1912–1936', *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, II (1976), 113–34, gives valuable insights into the changing sociology and mentality of the military.

<sup>7</sup> G. Ventiris, *I Ellada tou 1910–1920* (2 vols., Athens, 1931), I, 18–29; K. Tsoukalas, *Exartisi kai anaparagogi: o koinonikos rolos ton ekpaideutikon michanismon stin Ellada (1830–1922)* (Athens, 1977); G. Dertilis, *Koinonikos metaschimatismos kai stratiotiki epemvasi, 1880–1909* (Athens, 1977); G. Skliros, *Ta synchrona provlmata tou ellinismou* (Alexandria, 1919) pp. 118–20; N. Svoronos, 'The main problems of the period 1940–1950 in modern Greek history' in J. Iatrides (ed.), *Greece in the 1940s: a nation in crisis* (Hanover, N.H. and London, 1981); G. Kordatos, *Eisagogi eis tin istorian tis ellinikis kefalaiokratias* (Athens, 1972 edn); see also, C. Koryzis, *I politiki zoi eis tin Ellada 1821–1910* (Athens, 1974), pp. 170–2; A. Frangoudaki, 'Apo ton 190 ston 200 aiona: to ethniko zitima, i monarchia kai i dynami ton ideon', *Ta istorika*, I, 2 (Dec. 1984), 396–404.

<sup>8</sup> G. Mavrogordatos, *Stillborn republic: social coalitions and party strategies in Greece: 1922–1936* (Berkeley, 1983), pp. 121–7; cf. T. Diamantopoulos, *O Venizelismos* (Athens, 1985), pp. 78–86.

One general problem which these different views reflect is the difficulty of defining what the terms *astiki taxis* (bourgeois class), *astoi* (bourgeois/city-dwellers), or even *oligarchia*, actually mean in the Greek context, where the absence of either a powerful landowning aristocracy or a large working class made the composition of society very different from that elsewhere in Europe. Ever since the Ionian radical Lombardos claimed in 1864 that ‘there are no different classes in Greece’, voices have been raised against the attempt to analyse Greek society according to the norms of western Europe.<sup>9</sup> It remains to be seen whether the insights of social anthropologists into indigenous class terms, mostly in the setting of Greek rural communities, can be applied to urban life and made to offer an alternative to the Procrustean bed into which some scholars persist in fitting Greek society. We still lack any historical study of the deployment and evolution of class terminology in Greece. Nor has much attention been paid to the influence of religion, a remarkably persistent and pervasive cultural force in its Orthodox form, in shaping social and political attitudes.<sup>10</sup>

In the specific period we are concerned with here, other difficulties mark any attempt to tie political developments closely to changes in social structure. It has been estimated that in 1909 there were no more than 4–6,000 bourgeois families – merchants, lawyers and other professionals – living in Athens. Even if their numbers had grown since the late nineteenth century, the fact remains that as a group they were far too small – in a country with universal male suffrage – to account for Venizelos’ sweeping popular success which, as the elections of 1910 and 1912 showed, extended far across social boundaries. The vast numbers of civil servants and other members of the tertiary sector, whose expansion has been noted as one of the characteristic features of Greek social development, came from a variety of backgrounds; their political sympathies remain an unexplored subject, as do those of the trade guilds and artisans. So far as workers are concerned, the existence of a separate class-consciousness has been generally assumed rather than proven. Industrialization had barely

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The concept of a ‘state bourgeoisie’ is analysed in an important work by N. Mouzelis, *Politics in the semi-periphery: early parliamentarism and late industrialisation in the Balkans and Latin America* (London, 1986).

<sup>9</sup> Cited in Koryzis, *I politiki zoi eis tin Ellada, 1821–1910*, p. 21.

<sup>10</sup> The indigenous vocabulary of social stratification is explored in S. D. Salamone, *In the shadow of the holy mountain* (New York, 1987); S. Aschenbrenner, *Life in a changing Greek village* (Dubuque, Iowa, 1986); I. T. Sanders, *Rainbow in the rock: the people of rural Greece* (Cambridge, Mass., 1962), pp. 275–91. R. Hirschon, *Heirs to the Greek catastrophe* (Oxford, 1989) is a rare treatment by a social anthropologist of an urban community in Greece; see also N. Mouzelis ‘The relevance of the concept of class to the history of modern Greek society’ in M. Dimen and E. Friedl (eds.), *Regional variation in modern Greece and Cyprus: toward a perspective on the ethnography of Greece* (New York, 1976), pp. 395–410, and *ibid.* pp. 444–65. On religion and the general intellectual climate at the end of the nineteenth century, see the study by M. Vitti, *I ideologiki leitourgia tis ellinikis ithografias* (Athens, 1974). Local studies of the development of socialism point to a striking symbiosis of Orthodox imagery and anti-capitalist rhetoric, which remains largely uncharted at a national level. See, for example, N. Koliou, *Oi rizes tou ergatikou kinimatos kai o ‘Ergatis’ tou Volou* (Athens, 1988), pp. 29–31.

begun, and workers retained strong localist allegiances. In Piraeus they were mostly refugees and islanders; elsewhere they included seasonal migrants who retained smallholdings back in their village. Not surprisingly, unionization was weak. Socialist ideas had a following only in a small number of towns, and actually lost support during the 1890s. In Ottoman Salonika, where a strong socialist organization did emerge at the beginning of the century, Greek workers remained largely indifferent to its appeal. There and elsewhere too, nationalism kept social democracy at the bottom of the agenda.<sup>11</sup>

Yet despite relatively low levels of social tension or class-consciousness, the common assumption which we encounter from Ventiris onwards, is what one might call the 'primacy of the social'. This locates the roots of Venizelos's success in social change – in the emergence of new social groups, or in their new hunger for political representation. It should be clear by now that there are difficulties with such an approach. To be sure, the turn of the century was a period of rapid change in Greece. Scholars have charted the increase of social agitation, the spread of new Labour Centres, the influx of population into Athens and Piraeus, the disturbances caused by mass emigration out of Patras, which reached its peak in the early 1900s. Yet what weight should we attach to these phenomena? Recent work on industrialization has revealed the slowdown in industrial growth between 1890 and 1910. Lila Leontidou's study of urbanization has shown the very mixed fortunes of most provincial towns and ports in the shadow of Athens and Piraeus. From the economic and demographic point of view, the 1870s and 1880s, a period of strong export-led growth, start looking as important as the stagnant 1900s; and if this is the case, what exactly was it that came to a head in 1909?<sup>12</sup>

These problems echo the extraordinarily rich and complex debate over the causes of the French revolution; they have not, however, received much attention at the hands of Greek historians.<sup>13</sup> Granted that the events of

<sup>11</sup> L. Leontidou, *Poleis tis Siopis* (Athens, 1989), pp. 63, 73–4; A. Liakos, 'Problems on [sic] the formation of the Greek working class', *Etudes Balkaniques*, II (1988), 43–54; J. Starr, 'The Socialist Federation of Salonika', *Jewish Social Studies*, VII (1945), 323–35; cf. the acerbic judgement on union organization in Greece in A. Benaroya, *I proti stadiodromia tou ellinikou proletariatou* (reprinted Athens, 1975), p. 111; Koryzis, *Politiki zoi*, p. 178; K. Moskof, *Eisagogika stin istoria tou kinimatos tis ergatikis taxis* (Thessaloniki, 1979), pp. 176, 196–7.

<sup>12</sup> C. Agriantoni, *I aparches tis ellinikis ekviomichaniseos* (Athens, 1986); L. Papayiannaki, *Oi ellinikoi siderodromoi* (Athens, 1982); K. Kostis and V. Tsokopoulos, *Oi trapezes stin Ellada: 1898–1928* (Athens, 1988); P. Pizaniias, *Oikonomiki istoria tis ellinikis stafidas: 1851–1912* (Athens, 1988) are the most useful examples from the recent flowering of economic history in Greece to shed light on the poor performance of the economy at the turn of the century; L. Leontidou, *Poleis tis Siopis* (Athens, 1989) is an excellent study which, however, raises many of the analytical problems noted above, esp. pp. 50–65. On the stagnant 1900s in Athens itself, see P. Loukakias, 'Athina 1830–1940: Istorikes faseis payiosis tou ypersynkentrotismou tis' in *Neoelliniki poli: othomanikes klironomies kai elliniko kratos*, 2 vols. (Athens, 1984), I, 85–96.

<sup>13</sup> The debate is set out by William Doyle in *The origins of the French revolution* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 7–41. An old Marxist critique is provided by A. Soboul, *Understanding the French revolution* (London, 1988); a new one by Bryan Palmer in *Descent into discourse: the reification of language and the writing of social history* (Philadelphia, 1990), pp. 87–106. Despite their strictures, I have found Lynn Hunt's *Politics, culture and class in the French revolution* (London, 1986) thought-provoking.

1909–12 did represent a turning-point of some sort – and if contemporaries were quick to hail Goudi as an *epanastasis* (revolution), we should not ignore their judgement – to what extent can they be explained by the familiar themes of economic transformation and class struggle? The sole effort to address this problem is to be found in a recent article by George Andreopoulos. He is critical of interpretations which link politics closely with economic interests and social groups, which postulate, for example, the state apparatus as the expression of the influence of the *tzakia* (the ‘leading’ families). In his view the period, 1897–1909, was one of transition, a ‘power vacuum’ caused by the ‘absence of a political force which could articulate a credible hegemonic vision’. Behind this he sees a fundamental ‘people/power bloc conflict’ based not on class but on the opposition of the people to the state. The cynic might argue that this opposition is a permanent feature of Greek politics. It is also doubtful whether an all-embracing concept of ‘the people’ is sharp enough to contribute much to an analysis of Venizelos’s political success. Yet the suggestion that we should look, beyond social groups and formations, to political rhetoric and ideas, and their popular resonance, deserves more attention than Greek historians have given it.<sup>14</sup>

While such an approach has recently been advocated to explain the rise of the NSDAP in Germany, it may be particularly applicable in the Greek case. Venizelos’s rise between 1909 and 1912 differed from Hitler’s two decades later in both its speed and dynamics. It took Venizelos a matter of months to become prime minister, and he achieved this feat without the support of an organized party apparatus. In such circumstances the key to success is to be sought less in institutional backing than in the popular response to a new political message. There surely we may find clues to the ‘secret’ (as the novelist George Theotokas put it) of the man whom even his opponents termed ‘the wizard’, and his supporters ‘the awaited Messiah’.<sup>15</sup>

## I

One issue overshadowed all else in Greek politics; this was the ‘Great Idea’, a dream of territorial expansion to incorporate the Greek diaspora into the new kingdom, thereby creating a Greater Greece to rival the glories of the Byzantine Empire. As one foreign observer put it, this irredentist vision ‘permeates all classes of society – the toothless baby draws it in with the maternal milk, and the toothless mouth of age pledges to it in long drafts of the native resined wine. The shepherd dreams about it in the cold mountain air under his shaggy sheepskin, and the rich proprietor traces it in the graceful

<sup>14</sup> G. J. Andreopoulos, ‘Liberalism and the formation of the nation-state’, *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, vii, 2 (Oct. 1989), 193–224.

<sup>15</sup> See T. Childers, ‘The social language of politics in Germany’, *American Historical Review* (June, 1990), esp. pp. 347–58; Mavrogordatos, *Stillborn republic*, pp. 2–5, 55–9; M. Weber, *Economy and society*, 2 vols. (Berkeley, Calif., 1978), I, 241–71; R. Bendix, ‘Reflections on charismatic leadership’ in Bendix (ed.), *State and society: a reader in comparative political sociology* (Boston, 1968), pp. 616–29.

smoke-cloud of the incessant cigarette.<sup>16</sup> As we shall see, his responsiveness to the 'Great Idea' was central to Venizelos's eventual success.

For over twenty years before he appeared on the national stage, two parties had dominated Greek politics: one led by Charilaos Trikoupis, and after his retirement, by the Corfiot George Theotokis; the other by the inflammatory Theodoros Deliyiannis, a leading advocate of the 'Great Idea'. Greece's 1897 defeat at Ottoman hands delivered a blow to Deliyiannis's irredentism and opened the way for Theotokis to pursue his policies of military reform in his ministries of 1899, 1903 and 1905. He tried to reduce the power of the irregulars, whose aggravating presence has recently been documented by John Koliopoulos, to prevent army officers from involving themselves in political life, and to expand the regular army – ordering new weapons, building barracks and organizing a combined general staff for the first time. In his long last ministry, Theotokis handled the army ministry portfolio himself. He also attempted to introduce a much broader set of administrative reforms, badly needed by Greece's antiquated state machine.<sup>17</sup>

In another country, at another time, Theotokis might have been acclaimed for his methodological approach. Indeed, although his party fared badly in the 1905 elections, in the polls the following year they secured a triumph. But the Balkan powder-keg was about to explode, and the pressures of the international scene now hemmed him in. Across the northern border, the Macedonian struggle was reaching its greatest intensity, stimulated by just those irregular bands which the prime minister had tried to disarm. In Crete, revolutionaries led by the young Eleftherios Venizelos set up a provisional government at Therissos which aroused enormous interest and sympathy in Athens. At the end of 1907 there was trouble on Ottoman Samos where the mayor of the capital, Themistokles Sofoulis (a future lieutenant of Venizelos's), clashed with the island's prince, bringing Ottoman troops to the latter's assistance, and forcing Sofoulis and his supporters to flee to Greece. Sofoulis told Theotokis of the 'terror' provoked by the Turkish troops on the island. But the Greek premier's protests to the great powers were unsympathetically received. Samos, Crete and Macedonia all seemed to offer testimony to the weakness and lack of vigour of the Theotokis government on the international stage; the contrast between the cautious Corfiot and the defiant young figures of Sofoulis, Venizelos and the heroes of Macedonia began to attract unfavourable comment.<sup>18</sup>

Theotokis's great rival, Deliyiannis had – until his death in 1905 – tapped the prevailing mood of popular irredentism and offered a more vigorous

<sup>16</sup> C. Tuckerman, *The Greeks of today* (New York, 1878), p. 120; for a recent appraisal of the 'Great Idea' in terms of domestic political strategy, see P. Kitromilides, 'Imagined communities and the origins of the national question in the Balkans', *European History Quarterly*, xix, 2 (1989), 23–67.

<sup>17</sup> G. Aspreas, *Politiki istoria tis neoteris Ellados, 1821–1921*, II: 1865–1900 (Athens, 1923), 272–87; G. Rallis, *Georgios Theotokis: o politikos tou metrou* (Athens, n.d.), pp. 194–203; J. Koliopoulos, *Brigands with a cause* (Oxford, 1987).

<sup>18</sup> Aspreas, *Politiki istoria*, II, 266–92.



nationalist message. Uniquely among his contemporaries, he had travelled widely through the kingdom in order to broaden his appeal. In these respects he was clearly a precursor of Venizelos, as also in the widespread, often rowdy support he enjoyed in the capital itself. But after the 1897 débâcle (for which he took much of the blame), King George deliberately excluded him from power, despite his continued popularity. When Deliyiannis was assassinated, his party fragmented. As a result, the irredentist message was increasingly spread outside parliament, by the patriotic societies and lobby groups which had sprung up in Athens to finance and support the Macedonian struggle.<sup>19</sup>

Popular dissatisfaction and restiveness in the kingdom were reflected in the enormous success of a new theatrical genre, the patriotic play. Early examples had appeared during the nineteenth century; after 1900, however, they projected a new urgency as playwrights turned to contemporary themes, in Achilles Karavia's successful *Makedonia* in 1903 or Christos Georgiades' *Voulgaroi kai Makedonia* (Bulgarians and Macedonia), of 1905, or the anonymous *O thanatos tou Pavlou Mela* (The Death of Pavlos Melas) of the same year. When writers drew on historical subjects, it was to point a bitter moral. From about 1905, plays began to appear set in the time of Otho, Greece's unhappy first king. The first and best-known example of this was Gerasimos Vokos's *I katochi* (Occupation), which re-told the story of the humiliating episode in 1854 when the great powers blockaded Piraeus to dissuade the Greek army, led by the enthusiastic Otho, from invading the Ottoman empire. The plea was clear: would Greece never be strong enough to ignore the powers and triumph over the Turks? Critics lambasted these plays but the theatre-going public loved them. Their success is another indicator of the growing alienation of popular opinion from the political elite.<sup>20</sup>

It was foreign policy which best reflected Theotokis's weaknesses, his uncertainty, caution and lack of vision. His pro-German sentiments inclined him to look for support towards Berlin at a time when Germany was more concerned to establish an alliance with the Turks against the Russian-sponsored Slavs. As a result he steered clear of any alliances in the Balkans, and Greece – as the German chancellor mockingly put it – found herself in 'splendid isolation'.<sup>21</sup>

But in domestic politics, too, this 'politician of moderation' (*politikos tou metrou*) – so his biographer describes him – seemed to be out of touch with popular sentiment. Theotokis was an instinctive elitist, a man who felt

<sup>19</sup> On Deliyiannis, see W. Miller, *Greek life in town and country* (London, 1905), pp. 27–8, 42–4; Moskof, *Eisagogika stin istoria tou kinimatos tis ergatikis taxis*, pp. 235–7; on the impact of the Macedonian struggle on politics in Athens, J. Koliopoulos, *Brigands with a cause: brigandage and irredentism in modern Greece, 1821–1912* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 215–39.

<sup>20</sup> E.-A. Delveroudi, 'I kalliergeia tou patriotikou aisthismatos sti theatriki paragogi ton archon tou 2000 aiona' in G. Mavrogordatos and Ch. Chadziiosif (eds.), *Venizelismos kai astikos eksynchronismos* (Irakleion, 1988), pp. 287–315; also useful is M. Vitti, *I ideologiki leitourgia tis ellinikis ithografias* (Athens, 1974).

<sup>21</sup> G. Aspreas, *Politiki istoria tis neoteris Ellados*, III (Athens, n.d.), 14.

uncomfortable with the masses, who preferred the quiet of Corfu to Athens, and the peace of his country estate to both, who wrote in French to his wife, and who remarked bitterly to a colleague after having been booed by on-lookers that 'the mass (*to plithos*) is more fickle than the most fickle woman'.<sup>22</sup> Like the Liberal politicians of late nineteenth-century Vienna, whose demise Carl Schorske has so vividly recounted, Theotokis was suspicious of anything which smacked of populism and demagogy. But like *fin de siècle* Vienna, Greece in the first decade of the twentieth century was ready for politics 'in a new key'.<sup>23</sup>

## II

We shall appreciate the sweeping, ambitious character of Venizelos's political vision if we place it next to that of the man who was widely tipped to be the saviour of Greek politics before he came along. This was Dimitrios Gounaris, a young lawyer from Patras, who made a name for himself after 1900 with his searching critique of Theotokis, Deliyiannis, and the other elderly party leaders who dominated the political scene. In one of his first published interviews, in 1902, Gounaris commented that 'we must realise that we do not have a state today', but simply a society ruled by a 'privileged oligarchy which takes the greatest part of our produce and the revenues of the public purse'.<sup>24</sup> This highly educated man, who had acquired a knowledge of several European languages, and studied in Germany and London, found little to admire in the inertia, the limited ambitions and the personal greed of Greece's leading politicians.

His criticisms centred upon the need for national organization: for, according to Gounaris, it was poor organization which was holding back economic, political and military performance. Changing the way politics worked was the key to the rest: with the disappearance of 'personal parties' and their replacement by parties 'of ideas', national regeneration would follow. Standing in the elections in February 1905 he described himself as 'a soldier in the service of political ideas'.<sup>25</sup> The following year, he and several like-minded friends formed a group quickly dubbed 'the Japanese', since they were thought to have been inspired by the example of the victorious Japanese in the war against Russia.

Working within the Theotokis party, they embodied the hopes of progressive circles within the country, and Gounaris was widely hailed as the new star of Greek politics. Prime minister Theotokis was sufficiently alarmed at his popularity to take him and another 'Japanese', Petros Protopapadakis, into his cabinet. From Theotokis's point of view this turned out to be an inspired

<sup>22</sup> Rallis, *Theotokis*, p. 266.

<sup>23</sup> C. Schorske, 'Politics in a new key: an Austrian trio' in *Fin-de-siècle Vienna: politics and culture* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 116–80.

<sup>24</sup> D. Chronopoulos, *Dimitrios Gounaris* (Athens, n.d.), p. 18.

<sup>25</sup> On the debate over 'parties of ideas' in Greece, see Mavrogordatos, *Stillborn republic*, pp. 64–7.

move. As finance minister, the young and inexperienced Gounaris tried to implement a number of radical and badly-needed fiscal reforms; he proposed introducing new taxes on income, property and alcohol, lower duties on sugar, and a revision of tariffs. But he was trying to run before he could walk; attacked from all sides – by powerful landowners, currant growers and urban tradesmen – Gounaris was forced to resign and, for a time, to leave the Theotokis party. In the aftermath, the ‘Japanese’ group disbanded; more than one member would end up enjoying ministerial office under Venizelos.

This bitter experience marked a change in Gounaris’ thinking. Far from subverting the old party system from within, he had been out-manoeuvred by one of its leading members. What made the humiliation more painful was the lack of support he had found among the public. Gounaris now argued that a re-shaping of the political system would have to follow, not lead, the evolution of society: ‘You want parties of principles – ideas, interests, so to speak? But such parties will exist in Greece when there are groups whose interests clash with the interests of other organized groups. Here at present we don’t have large labour unions, we don’t have much industry.’<sup>26</sup> His reversal pushed him into a mood of political fatalism as he waited, with decreasing hope, for the social change that he now believed was a precondition for a saner and more responsible politics.

Gounaris is better known today in Greece for his role as Venizelos’s leading opponent during the *ethnikos dichasmos* (national schism) in the years between 1915 and his execution in 1922. This was the period when Venizelists labelled him a spokesman for ‘the oligarchy’, ‘the dynasty’ and ‘the reaction to 1908’. But the first two charges were without foundation, whilst the third was true only in a rather special sense.<sup>27</sup>

Hailing the formation of the short-lived 1915 Gounaris government after four years of Venizelos’s rule, the doyen of Greek political journalists, Vlasis Gavriilides, wrote as follows: ‘After the passion (*ormi*) comes science. After haste, thought. After disorder, system.’<sup>28</sup> Wartime brought out the contrast with the fiery Venizelos, for Gounaris remained true to his belief in the primacy of gradual social reform over nationalist excitation. In this he resembled his mentor Trikoupis, whose picture was prominently displayed above his desk. His decision to form a pro-neutrality government in 1915 was consistent with the view, which he shared with Trikoupis, that such a policy demanded a period of peace. Sobriety and calm, not enthusiasm and vigour, were to his mind the supreme political virtues,

<sup>26</sup> Chronopoulos, *Gounaris*, p. 32.

<sup>27</sup> It is now accepted that Venizelos too, unlike many of his followers, was generally in favour of constitutional monarchy – a position very close to Gounaris’s; cf. V. Papacosma, ‘The Republicanism of Eleftherios Venizelos: ideology or tactics?’, *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, vii (1981), 168–202. The parliamentary representation of Venizelist and anti-Venizelist camps is examined in T. Diamantopoulos, *O Venizelismos*, 1 (Athens, 1985), 78–86, who argues that both camps saw a substantial turnover of personnel. Gounaris attracted more members of the old ‘leading families’; however, by 1915 he too was leading a basically new cohort of deputies rather than the remnants of the pre-1909 ancien régime. <sup>28</sup> Chronopoulos, *Gounaris*, p. 113.

One novel feature of Gounaris's political philosophy was its emphasis on the role of the *Laos*, or the people. He was a man who, in Gavriilides's words, was 'looking towards the great masses of the people' rather than remaining introverted and confined to his own circle, like the old-fashioned Theotokis: not only – Gounaris held – did wise politicians work for the welfare of the people, but a sound political system was nothing other than the expression of their different interests. Genuine parties, as opposed to personal factions led by self-appointed *archigoi* (chiefs), should be the creation of *laikas omadas* (popular groups), which would choose members to defend *laika symferonta* (popular interests). The *laos* was thus not a homogeneous unity, but a combination of different parts. For Greece, this was a strikingly de-personalized view of politics, and one which demoted the paternalistic *archigos* from his traditionally prestigious position.<sup>29</sup>

Perhaps most important of all, it was remarkably unnationalistic. The great rhetorical absence from Gounaris's vision of politics is the *Ethnos*, the Greek Nation. *Laos* denoted those Greeks living within the existing borders, but the notion of the *Ethnos* had a much wider range, embracing the millions of Greeks who lived in the diaspora of the Ottoman empire, Egypt and elsewhere. Gounaris rarely appealed to this world; his duties lay with the workers and peasants of the Peloponnese; central Greece and, perhaps, Thessaly. Thus more than electoral expediency underlay his party's change of name in October 1920 from the Nationally-minded (*Ethnikofrono*) to the Popular (*Laiko*) party. His deliberate self-limitation, his refusal to move out of the sphere of social improvement and higher productivity into the battlefield of irredentist aspirations and dreams did Gounaris no harm with the war-weary electorate of 1920; but it was precisely what had handicapped him a decade earlier.

### III

Alongside the portrait of Trikoupis in Gounaris's study hung pictures of a much less likely collection of heroes; Napoleon, Frederick the Great and Bismarck. Not even the sober Patras lawyer, so hostile to the pretensions of the Greek *archigos*, was immune to the lure of charismatic Great Men which exerted a powerful attraction throughout turn-of-the century Greek urban society. A combination of elements, some imported, others indigenous to Greek thought, had fused together to produce what verged on a sort of political messianism. In the back of everyone's mind was the humiliation of 1897, when the Turks had painfully exposed the chasm which lay between Greece's irredentist aspirations and her disorganized military capabilities. Only great power pressure had averted a Turkish march on Athens. In the search for national 'regeneration', many commentators now looked for the man who would lead the country to glory by bringing to life the immensely popular 'Great Idea'. Both the quest for a saviour and the conception of

<sup>29</sup> Chronopoulos, *Gounaris*, pp. 68–9.

'regeneration' itself was saturated with the imagery of Orthodoxy, contributing in some cases to a sense of almost messianic expectancy – for a messiah in the service of the nation.<sup>30</sup>

This desire, with its potent ambiguities and extraordinary fervour, was not confined to a few cranks.

Greece staggered throughout the whole period of the first unfortunate dynasty; she is still staggering unsuccessfully through the second. And she is staggering because the Man has not yet been found whom the Nation needs. The Messiah, the teacher, the guide is tarrying<sup>31</sup>

wrote Manouil Charetis, in his study *Ethnologismoi i meleti peri ethnismou* (Ethnologisms, or a Study of Nationalism), which appeared to considerable acclaim in 1905. According to a reviewer in the influential Athens daily, *Neon Asti*, the book radiated 'optimism, pride and hope' – the very qualities which Venizelos would later stress as the key to his political and diplomatic success.

What made the messianic vision so powerful was that other ideological currents ran parallel to the religious impulse. The role of Bismarck in the making of the German empire was a source of inspiration to many politicians in Greece besides Gounaris. And in intellectual and artistic circles in Athens, various elements of Nietzschean thought were circulating from the mid-1890s onwards. Social Darwinist views of international relations also had a wide appeal in Greece, a 'young' country gripped by its expansionist 'Great Idea' and pitted against the "Sick Man of Europe". In his major poems Greece's leading poet, Kostas Palamas, deliberately provided an epic vehicle for such doctrines. And in their train came an idealization of certain political attributes – confidence, energy and vitality – essential to national success. Greece's best-known politicians, the sober Theotokis, in his sixties, his rival Deliyiannis, almost twenty years his senior, and Dimitrios Rallis, who had represented the same constituency for half a century, were unconvincing embodiments of such qualities.<sup>32</sup>

#### IV

Dissatisfaction with the Theotokis style in domestic and foreign affairs, irredentist dreams of the 'Great Idea' and generational revolt all came together in the aftermath of the Young Turk revolution in the summer of 1908. The Theotokis government's cautiously friendly reception of the new regime

<sup>30</sup> Chronopoulos, *Gounaris*, p. 32; for a vivid description of the everyday cult of 'great men', see Palamas's account of his childhood exposure to a 'Roman salad' of contemporary 'gods', 'Bismarck' (1916), in K. Palamas, *Apanta*, iv (Athens, n.d.), 538–40.

<sup>31</sup> Cited in A. A. Maraslis, *Istoria tis Patras* (Patras, 1983), pp. 286–8.

<sup>32</sup> An important source, which is more wide-ranging than its title suggests, on the subject of German cultural and intellectual influences in Greek life is G. Veloudis, *Germanograecia: deutsche Einflüsse auf die neugriechische Literatur (1750–1944)*, 2 vols. (Amsterdam, 1983); on the dissemination of Darwinism, see *ibid.* 1, 260–1; the earliest article on Nietzsche in Greek appeared in 1895, *ibid.* 1, 262–5, 335; on Palamas, see K. Palamas, *The twelve lays of the gypsy* (translated and introduced by G. Thomson) (London, 1969), pp. 10–11; A. Chormouzos, *O Palamas kai i epochi tou*, 1 (Athens, 1944), 21.

was castigated by nationalist critics; they pointed to Austria-Hungary's boldness in annexing Bosnia-Herzegovina, to Bulgaria's acquisition of Eastern Roumelia. What had Theotokis achieved to match such gains? His timid handling of the Cretan issue, when he quietly suggested that the islanders rebel in favour of *enosis* but without implicating the Greek government, betrayed his nervousness in foreign affairs. When, several years later, Theotokis asked Venizelos whether he was accusing him of not having acted for Greek interests when he had been in power, Venizelos demurred; the main charge, said the new premier to the old, was imply that in 1908 'you didn't move'.<sup>33</sup>

A widespread desire for national reassertion, to match the buoyant Turks and the Bulgarians, fuelled the military unrest that led to the Goudi revolt, and the popular unrest that accompanied it. It was directed, not only against Theotokis, but against the political parties as a whole. Contemporaries criticized their lack of 'daring and wisdom'. They demanded a new spirit in politics, a sense of direction. Since 1907 Gavriilides's *Akropolis* had called for a 'peaceful revolution'; now it argued that Greece needed its own Young Turk revolt. In March, several months before Goudi, the *Messenger d'Athènes* had noted that 'it is difficult to enumerate the number of Greeks, clubs, associations, animated by the noble desire to serve the country'. The Military League, which reigned in Athens after Goudi, predictably claimed to be working for 'national salvation' and laid out a series of demands for military reform to enable the army to fight 'for the soul of the Fatherland and for the rights of the Nation'.<sup>34</sup> At a massive rally in support of the League, a priest, said to have been a former guerrilla band leader in Macedonia, administered an oath to the crowd who swore 'by our holy faith that we decide from today to serve our country as her devoted, faithful soldiers, above all personal interests, far from all party views, and to fall if need be on behalf of the regeneration and the greatness of our country.' Then thousands of people moved on to the palace, heard the king from the balcony of the palace and greeted his brief speech with jubilant shouts of 'Long Live the King!', 'Resurrection!', and 'Greece has been resurrected!'<sup>35</sup>

## V

What was it about Venizelos that enabled him to navigate these turbulent waters with such success, dominating Greek politics from the time he landed in Piraeus, scoring a crushing victory over the old parties in elections for the second National Assembly at the end of 1910, and a similar triumph in parliamentary elections in 1912? Obviously his diplomatic skills, both at home – with the League, the king and the old politicians – and with foreign governments, played an important part. Persuading the Military League to disband, gaining the consent of King George and the established politicians in

<sup>33</sup> S. Stefanou (ed.), *Ta keimena tou Eleftheriou Venizelou*, 1: 1909–1914 (Athens, 1981), 417.

<sup>34</sup> Aspreas, *Politiki istoria*, III, 100; Papacosma, *Military in Greek politics*, pp. 42, 203.

<sup>35</sup> Papacosma, *Military in Greek politics*, pp. 77–83.

Athens for the summoning of a National Assembly, urging patience on his fellow politicians on Crete – all these suggested a rare ability to persuade and negotiate in the traditional settings, through private discussions in Athens salons and the ante-chambers of the Palace. But what set him apart from his contemporaries were more general elements of his political vision, his style, his conception of the nature of politics itself.

A major ingredient of Venizelos's success was his acceptance of revolution as a political instrument. In Crete, and in Athens too, after Goudi, he embraced the revolutionary idea, rejecting the past in favour of the rupture which would make a rebirth possible. This brought him close to the popular mood in Greece in 1909, and set him apart from devotees of parliamentary procedure such as Theotokis. Unlike his colleagues, he had a reputation as a fighter; he was described in one laudatory article in the press as 'the armed chief (*oplarchigos*), the former Garibaldi of Crete'. He was, as a supporter put it, always 'the fighter... a contemporary rebel (*armatolos*)'. In the context of a nationalist culture which, in Koliopoulos's words, 'placed captains and their values and pursuits at the centre of the process of national liberation', such a reputation could only enhance a politician's prestige.<sup>36</sup>

For Venizelos, though, a successful revolution required a political brain to guide it; as the demise of the Military League demonstrated, military action by itself, with no further aims, led nowhere. But defining what Goudi was a revolution for meant defining what it was against, and this was a delicate matter. Parliament itself? A few deputies? Or something in between? A pointer was offered by *Patris*, in August 1910, which wrote after the elections: 'A revolution has been accomplished, not only by the army, but by the people... A peaceful revolution... Does Venizelos represent it? He is a symbol, an idea. Anti-partyism (*antikommatismos*) is the hope of the Resurrection (*Anagenniseos*).'<sup>37</sup>

Venizelos could hardly have failed to be aware of the enormous extent of anti-party sentiment in Greece, especially in Athens. Greece had been governed by a 'tyrannical oligarchy', by 'personal parties in love with power'. The election result in August 1910 was said to have been especially surprising in the town of Pyrgos because it was 'the acropolis of partyism'. The old parties themselves had emphasized their own similarities by fighting that election under an umbrella organization, the Federation of United Parties. In the momentous speech of September 1910, which marked his entry onto the national stage in front of a crowd of thousands, Venizelos insisted on his fundamental differences with them:

I do not come here as the *archigos* of a new organised party. I come simply as the bearer of new political ideas... Recognising the need to educate the Greek People and to emancipate it from personal partyism, I shall work to organise a political association with branches throughout the State and designed to constitute the organisation of a

<sup>36</sup> Karanikola, *Nothes ekloges*, p. 424; S. Stefanou (ed.), *Ta keimena tou Eleftheriou Venizelou*, 1 (Athens, 1981), 229; Koliopoulos, *Brigands with a cause*, pp. 293–326.

<sup>37</sup> Koryzis, *Politiki zoi*, p. 217.

new political party, of Regeneration (*Anorthosis*), whose formation is awaited by the People.<sup>38</sup>

Such a stance was riddled with dangerous contradictions. Was Venizelos opposed to parties in principle, or only to the old parties? If the former, what alternative model for parliamentary democracy did he envisage? If the latter, as his hints at the formation of a new party suggested, then what would make it different from its predecessors?

The answers would only slowly emerge, for his victories in the two elections for the National Assembly saw him preside over an enormous and disparate group of new deputies who had benefited chiefly from a protest vote against Theotokis and his established colleagues – the men whom Miller likened to the ‘old Whig families’ of Greek politics. To be sure, other young politicians had castigated the party system before Venizelos: Gounaris was one, though as we have seen his teeth had been drawn by Theotokis’s astute manoeuvring in the spring of 1908. Another was Alexandros Papanastasiou, whose ‘Sociologists’ Society’, a group of radical thinkers, was founded the same year and formed the basis for his *Laikon Komma* (Popular Party) which sent several deputies to the Revisionist Assembly in 1910 before being swallowed up by Venizelos’s Liberals.<sup>39</sup> But these thinkers, in many ways more searching and distanced critics of Greek society than Venizelos, could not compete with his popular appeal: for the public response to their ‘scientific’ attitude to the country’s problems, their belief in the efficacy of intellectual debate, was feeble in contrast with the resounding popular acceptance of the Cretan’s militant and passionate imagery. They drew on the language of German *Sozialpolitik* and British Fabianism; but Venizelos spoke in terms of physical struggle and religious rebirth, of leading the ‘army of the struggle for regeneration’. At the most basic level, they talked about Greek society; he talked about the Nation.<sup>40</sup>

In August 1908 a group of students had addressed a plea to the king: ‘The *Ethnos*,’ they wrote, ‘demands its honour.’<sup>41</sup> This is perhaps the sort of language more familiar to anthropologists than to historians of the Mediterranean. But the work of Campbell, Bourdieu and others has made a strong case for seeing honour as a central value in Mediterranean societies. Campbell’s observation that the ‘pallikar’ or bold, young fighter, represented an ‘ideal of manhood’ referred to the pastoralist community he studied; but

<sup>38</sup> Karanikola, *Nothes ekloges*, p. 422; Koryzis, *Politiki zoi*, p. 217.

<sup>39</sup> Ventiris, *Ellas tou 1910–1920*, I, 36; I. Nikolakopoulos and N. Oikonomou, ‘To eklogiko vaptisma tou Venizelismou, 1910–1912’ in ELIA, *Symposio gia ton Eleftherio Venizelo: praktika* (Athens, 1988), pp. 45–73.

<sup>40</sup> Ventiris, *Ellas tou 1910–1920*, I, 51; cf. P. H. Box, *Three master-builders and another* (London, 1925), p. 7; Miller, *Greek life*, p. 31; on Papanastasiou, see A.-A. Kyrtis ‘O A. Papanastasiou kai oi theories koinonikis metarrythmisis ton archon tou 20ou aiona’, *Ta istorika*, IX (Dec. 1988), 339–52; M. Psalidopoulos, ‘O Alexandros Papanastasiou os oikonomologos’ in G. Mavrogordatos and C. Chadziiosif (eds.), *Venizelismos kai astikos eksynchronismos* (Irakleion, 1988), pp. 329–44.

<sup>41</sup> Koryzis, *Politiki zoi*, p. 212.



it has some relevance on a national scale as well.<sup>42</sup> Theotokis's caution appeared increasingly shameful, even dishonourable to the nation; Gounaris' deliberate focus upon the *Laos* was open to a similar criticism. By contrast, the need to defend the honour of the Nation, to realize the irredentist Great Idea, lay at the heart of Venizelos's conception of his political mission. As a British writer later observed: 'The idea of Hellenism... has been the life-long vision of this man of genius, who has worked always in terms of the larger world of unredeemed Hellenism, rather than for the "quiet time" that seems the summum bonum of most old politicians.' Commenting on the significance of Goudi, Venizelos told a Chania daily that the movement's leaders lacked 'someone with the ability to lead this task of regeneration, as the *Ethnos* understands it'. The allusion here to the *Ethnos* rather than the *Laos* was what separated him from a man like Gounaris. In subsequent articles he developed his favourite theme: the outcome of the struggle would decide whether Greece would descent into hopeless catastrophe, or produce a state worthy of the 'just demands of both the *Elliniko Lao* and' – note the conjunction – 'the entire *Ethnos*'; 'national necessities' demanded the success of the 'programme of regeneration'.<sup>43</sup>

Certain personal qualities were essential for the leaders of this movement. They, like the country they had to re-shape, must have strong hearts, ready to compete successfully with other nations. Time and again Venizelos alluded to this 'strength of soul' (*sthenos tis psychis*) and 'political courage' (*tharros*). They must be filled with 'demiurgic' optimism; Venizelos would no doubt have agreed with the young George Papandreou, who wrote as a student that 'those individuals and those nations who don't believe in themselves, who are not optimistic, will perish'.<sup>44</sup> Political leaders must show utter confidence in their vision, in order to inspire others to follow them. Not surprisingly, perhaps, those who met Venizelos were struck by the force of his personality, his charm and skill in speaking. Chalcocondylis, the editor of a leading diaspora daily, interviewed him in Crete in January 1910, and described the impression he made:

Tall, articulate, graceful in appearance, with piercing blue eyes, ... a metallic voice full of life, power, feeling, decision ... and from where the rapt attention of his interlocutor expects to hear an analysis of critical judgement, he hears the phrases: 'I believe. I

<sup>42</sup> The classic statement is J. K. Campbell, *Honour, family and patronage: a study of institutions and moral values in a Greek mountain community* (Oxford, 1964), pp. 263–321; also P. Bourdieu, 'The sentiment of honour in Kabyle society' in J. G. Peristiany (ed.), *Honour and shame: the values of Mediterranean society* (London, 1965), pp. 191–242; A. Blok, 'Rams and billy-goats: a key to the Mediterranean code of honor', *Man*, xvi (1981), 427–40; M. Herzfeld, *Anthropology through the looking-glass* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 11–12.

<sup>43</sup> Box, *Three master-builders*, p. 195; S. Stefanou (ed.), *Ta keimena tou Eleftheriou Venizelou*, 1: 1909–1914 (Athens, 1981), 142–8; on Theotokis's terminology cf. *ibid.* p. 417.

<sup>44</sup> G. Papandreou, *Politika keimena* (Athens, n.d.), p. 44; for Venizelos on the importance of optimism, cf. the comments collected in S. Stefanou (ed.), *Eleftheriou Venizelou politikai ypothikaki* (Athens, 1965), pp. 16–19; the nationalists' stress on optimism pre-dated the humiliation of 1897, cf. M. Vitti, *I ideologiki leitourgia tis ellinikis ithografias* (Athens, 1974), pp. 54, 83.

hope.' Yet these very phrases are so firm and clear that they give that belief and hope a sense of conviction and persuasiveness.<sup>45</sup>

Like the poet D'Annunzio in Italy, Venizelos stood for a new type of political action, which sacrificed collegiality and rational debate to the power of words, the force of personality and the intimate relationship between leader and the masses.

It was from the crowds who flocked to hear him that he derived his power. The ability to force his will upon his listeners was – he held – one mark of a politician's stature. Thus in a famous moment during that first major speech in September 1910, Venizelos had insisted, against widespread initial protest from the crowd, that the new assembly should be revisionist and not constituent. He carried his point. Yet at the same time, the masses formed an alternative source of backing to the corridors of parliament, even on occasions an alternative source of identity. From a balcony in Piraeus in March 1912, the Cretan Venizelos characteristically exploited his outsider's role: 'They accuse me of being a foreigner', he told the crowd. "'Away with the foreigner," they shout.' And just as he had hoped and foreseen, back came the affirmation from his audience: 'Zito o Peiraiotis!' (Long live the man from Piraeus!).<sup>46</sup>

Venizelos reached a wider public with the aid of the daily press, and here too he showed a sensitivity to the new instruments of mass politics which exceeded that of many contemporaries. In a country with less than 500 miles of carriageway and under 150 cars before 1912, control of the media was vital. Greeks devoured newspapers; according to William Miller, there was 'no other country where the Press plays such an important part in the life of the people'. And journalism in Greece, several observers noted, was political journalism. Percy Martin remarked that the Greeks easily outstripped other Balkan peoples in their 'fetishism of the political word'.<sup>47</sup> Even in Crete, Venizelos had courted publicity, and given extensive interviews. By the time he returned to Athens in September 1910, he had won the support of Gavriilides' *Akropolis*, the leading daily in Greece itself, as well as influential diaspora newspapers, like the *Neos Eleftheros Typos*, published in Vienna, and the *Nea Imera*, from Trieste.

Another prerequisite for the new mass politics, in Greece as much as elsewhere, was urbanization. It created a deracinated electorate, beyond the easy reach of the traditional clientelist structures, sympathetic to politicians who could abandon the old localist preoccupations of the provincial notables for a message that combined the language of technological progress with the emotional power of a religious vocabulary. In time Venizelos would travel throughout the kingdom even more extensively than Deliyiannis had done. However, it was the large urban centres, Athens and Piraeus, which provided

<sup>45</sup> Stefanou (ed.), *Ta keimena*, 1, 156.

<sup>46</sup> Stefanou (ed.), *Ta keimena*, 1, 361–2; Ventiris, *Ellas tou 1910–1920*, 1, 49.

<sup>47</sup> Miller, *Greek life*, pp. 112–24; Martin cited in K. Tsoukalas, *Koinoniki anaptyxi kai kratos* (Athens, 1981), p. 146.

the springboard for his political activities. After Goudi, Crown Prince Constantine had expressed the wish that 'the attitude of the provinces will enlighten Athens'; unfortunately for him, the process worked in reverse. This was the lesson brought home by Venizelos's stunning personal triumph on the electoral lists in Attica in August 1910.<sup>48</sup>

The grandeur of his national mission overshadowed petty details of party organization in Venizelos's mind. His Liberal party was always to remain a rather sketchy affair, with neither a central office nor an Athens section for many years. Certain uncomfortable implications of such an outlook had not escaped the journalist Chalcocondylis. In the course of an interview, he asked Venizelos to predict how the 'revolution' might be more permanently organized. Foreshadowing his September speech in Athens, Venizelos outlined the creation of a panhellenic political association, which would gradually be transformed into a new political party, based on a 'new political class in agreement with the spirit of regeneration'. Chalcocondylis asked: 'where will this new Government of Regeneration draw its strength from, apart from its personalities?' Venizelos's answer, he records, made him pause: 'From the manifest desire (*dedilomenou pothou*) of public opinion for regeneration.' The Cretan politician gave equally vague answers to further inquiries about the structure of the proposed new party and its bases of support, simply assuring his questioner that 'new ideas give birth to new interests'.<sup>49</sup> This was a much less precise analysis of the links between Greek society and politics than Gounaris's, but it was also a much more confident one.

Gounaris and Venizelos thus differed profoundly in their conception of the social basis for political action. Gounaris, as we have seen, argued that a modern state would have different parties representing different *laikas omadas*; Parliament was the arena in which the tension between their various interests would be resolved. Venizelos saw matters differently: if the essential duty of politicians lay towards the *Ethnos*, how could real social differences be permitted to stand between them? Even before the First World War one could detect the signs of what would develop, under the pressure of the Russian Revolution, into an article of faith: that parties should belong to the nation, not to a specific class, and should be able to act as arbiters of social tension by virtue of the fact that they contained within them the spectrum of different social groups.<sup>50</sup> In November 1910, in his final speech before the election for the second National Assembly, Venizelos warned his audience against supporting the formation of another political coalition apart from his own; any other political grouping could only serve the interests of the 'old parties'. To be sure, once installed with a massive majority, Venizelos sometimes called

<sup>48</sup> Nikolakopoulos and Oikonomou, 'Eklogiko vaptisma', pp. 67–8. For the debate over the relationship between urbanization and the rise of nationalism see K. Deutsch, *Nationalism and social communication: an enquiry into the foundations of nationality* (Cambridge, Mass., 1953); cf. E. Gellner, *Nations and nationalism* (Oxford, 1983); E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and nationalism since 1780: programme, myth, reality* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 80–131.

<sup>49</sup> Stefanou (ed.), *Ta keimena*, 1, 157–8, 226–30.

<sup>50</sup> Stefanou (ed.), *Politikaki ypothikaki*, pp. 161–71; *Peitharchia*, 29 Dec. 1929, 23 Feb. 1930.

for the formation of another political party to balance his own; but there was some truth in Ventiris's characterization of his position as that of a 'popular dictator'. Attacks on his solitary style of leadership and his inability to take criticism would recur throughout his career.<sup>51</sup>

His overall achievement, in other words, was an ambiguous one and his role in consolidating 'bourgeois democracy' in Greece needs to be understood in a special sense. His class character was not what contemporaries first noticed about him, nor what defined his political life. It is worth remembering that his rival Gounaris, later to be dubbed the creature of the court and the 'oligarchy', was also regarded in 1912 as a leader of the 'bourgeois classes'. Both were key figures in what, borrowing from Lynn Hunt, we might regard loosely as a 'new political class'; the extent to which membership of this class coincided with membership of the bourgeoisie as understood in a Marxist sense remains to be seen.<sup>52</sup>

Venizelos's own use of class terminology was complex and not free of contradiction: he accepted that he came from the bourgeoisie, but always rejected the idea that his party was its mouthpiece. Part of his distinctive contribution to Greek politics lay in his insistence on the transcending power of national loyalties. The final resolution of the Eastern Question with the Asia Minor *katastrofi* in 1922, presented him with a puzzle in the inter-war years that he never satisfactorily worked out: what was the purpose of a national party after the demise of the Great Idea? Neither anti-communism, nor the goal of modernization ever struck the resonant chord with his public that his national vision had found before 1920.<sup>53</sup>

Once in power, Venizelos's young ministerial team of 1912 proved capable and imaginative administrators, building upon the reforms that Theotokis had begun.<sup>54</sup> Yet the strength of their government, and the secret of its initial success, lay in the personality of Venizelos himself. For despite his professed antipathy towards the old parties of personalities, the party he founded – as Chalcocondylis perhaps foresaw – was no less personality-based than theirs. Indeed, it was a much more concentrated form of the same phenomenon, for his hold over his party was far stronger than Theotokis's had ever been. Venizelos's Liberal party was a triumph for the *archigos* principle: and now the *archigos* was buttressed, not by the approval of his peers, but by the more formidable weight of popular acclaim. This, at any rate, was the view of George Papandreou, who would become one of Venizelos's most influential younger followers. Writing in the midst of his studies in Berlin in March 1913, Papandreou observed that the revolution of 1909 had swept away the old type

<sup>51</sup> Ventiris, *Ellas tou 1910–1920*, I, 75; *Peitharchia*, 12 Jan. 1930; C. Chadziiosif, 'I Venizelogenis antipolitefsi sto Venizelo kai i politiki anasyntaxi sto mesopolemo', in Mavrogordatos and Chadziiosif (eds.), *Venizelos kai astikos eksynchronismos*, pp. 439–58.

<sup>52</sup> Ventiris, *Ellas tou 1910–1920*, I, 73–4; Chronopoulos, *Gounaris*, pp. 64–5, 118 describes attitudes towards Gounaris in 1911–12; L. Hunt, 'The new political class' in *Politics, culture and class in the French revolution*, ch. 5.

<sup>53</sup> See my *Greece and the inter-war economic crisis* (Oxford, 1991), ch. 11.

<sup>54</sup> See P. F. Martin, *Greece of the twentieth century* (London, 1913), pp. 52–60.

of personal parties and brought into power the Liberal party, a personal party in a new sense, based 'on a broad base of trust of the Greek *laos*'. While it carried out its political aims with 'scientific means', it survived 'chiefly through the trust which the person of the *archigos* inspired, that its declared aims would be applied scientifically, "morally and with political skill"'; in this respect, Papandreou concluded, it was 'the supreme personal party'.<sup>55</sup>

Venizelos and Gounaris were both members of a new generation and exponents of a new approach in Greek politics; unlike Theotokis, for instance, they saw the need to establish a direct rapport with the masses, the *Laos*, though they had different strategies for doing so. Venizelos succeeded where Gounaris failed because he appreciated that social and technocratic reform alone was too thin a plank to build a political career upon in a nationalistic era; he realized too that the time demanded a new political style, sensitive to the dreams of the masses as well as their material needs, and able, above all, to encompass the Great Idea. In this respect, his success reflected the limitations no less than the strength of political and intellectual liberalism in Greece, and reinforced religious and salvationist ingredients in politics. 'Glory to God!' cried the *Nea Chios* in May 1919, as Greek troops disembarked across the water in Smyrna. 'The Nation has risen... Greece has found herself again! Venizelos is the *archigos* of the Race!'<sup>56</sup>

In this messianic role, Venizelos appeared to some critics like a sort of meteor, flashing through history but leaving nothing behind. Gounaris's nephew, Panayiotis Kanellopoulos, offered such an assessment in the article he wrote on Venizelos after the latter's death in 1936:

There was no plan to provide direction or ideology independent of the practical application which he alone – the demiurge himself – might manage to bring about; in other words, there existed no plan to guide another (pupil or associate) in other circumstances, no programme which others could follow.<sup>57</sup>

This was not entirely true. Venizelos did leave something behind him, though this was not a body of ideas so much as a model of leadership. In other countries, similar trends in politics led towards fascism or other types of authoritarian regime. Venizelos's strength lay in demonstrating that in Greece they were compatible with a form of democracy and this, for better or worse, helped his legacy to endure.

<sup>55</sup> Papandreou, *Politika keimena*, pp. 70–4.

<sup>56</sup> Papandreou, *Politika keimena*, p. 84; vital on the nationalist background, and the gradual weakening of its original liberal component are G. Avgoustinos, *Consciousness and history: nationalist critics of Greek society, 1897–1914* (New York, 1977), and P. Kitromilides, 'The dialectic of intolerance: ideological dimensions of ethnic conflict', *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora*, vi, 4 (Winter, 1979), 5–31.

<sup>57</sup> P. Kanellopoulos in *Elliniki Foni*, 25 March 1936, cited in Stefanou (ed.), *Ta keimena*, i, 54.