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My dear François

I have been meaning to write to you for some time about the European Committee of Scientists for Democracy in Greece. I need hardly say that I am in favour of democracy in Greece and would prefer to see a more liberal regime there. However, I do not feel that the present regime is, in itself, an adequate reason for not holding Summer Schools on Spetsai.

You will recall that the meeting planned for 1967 was cancelled because the military junta had recently seised power. It was not possible to organise a meeting for 1968, but during this period I corresponded with Evangelopoulos (the Greek organiser of the 1966 meeting) who was for several months at M.I.T. While he was there he had several discussions with Alex Rich and other Americans about the desirability of having further meetings on Spetsai. He concluded that he would prefer these Molecular Biology Summer Schools to continue because of the great stimulus they give to young Greek biochemists, and because they would reduce the isolation of Greek scientists, which they find very painful. Under those circumstances, I could hardly resist his appeal to me to organise a further meeting, although I have no personal reason for doing this as my scientific interests are turning to other areas of Biology and the meetings are held at a time of year which is inconvenient for me. Fortunately, my two colleagues, Brian Clark and Mark Bretscher, agreed to do the bulk of the organisation, and the meeting has, in fact, been planned by them in collaboration with Evangelopoulos.

At no time were we approached by a member of the Greek junta, or their representatives, and the decision to hold the meeting was made here on our own responsibility.

I think it is clear then that if such meetings are to take place, certain conditions will have to be fulfilled. I list some of these below:

(1) At the 1967 meeting a small number of students from Eastern Europe attended. The Greek Ambassador has assured me that any such students we accept will be given visas by the Greek Government.

Dr. Francois Gros 19 March 1969

(2) I have asked the Ambassador to give me an assurance that the holding of our meeting in Greece will not be used by the Government for propaganda purposes. He has passed on this request to his Government. I have told him that further meetings (i.e. after 1969) will not be held in Greece unless such an assurance is given.

(3) I am writing to Evangelopoulos to ask that we shall not be addressed this year (as we were in 1966) by a Minister, or representative of the Government, to avoid the kind of remarks of which you give specimens among the papers you have circulated.

(4) Although the request for our meeting comes from Greek scientists we do not, at the moment, have a good cross-section of the views of scientists living in Greece. We hope to form an opinion on this during our visit this summer. If the majority of such Greek scientists is against holding a further meeting, we would certainly not organise one.

If your committee has other suggestions along these lines I will be happy to consider them.

I agree with your committee that the dismissal by the Government of academic persons, without right of appeal, is not what one expects of a democratic regime. However, when one examines the alleged reasons for dismissal, listed in the papers you have sent me, I find the case being made by your committee to be overstated. An appreciable fraction of the scientists listed would appear to have been dismissed for rather good reasons, such as making a large profit on the compulsory sale to students of their lecture notes, getting jobs for inadequately qualified relatives, or neglect of their work. Apart from the manner of the dismissals, an unbiased person might conclude that the Greek Government is to be praised for taking positive steps to reduce the corruption in Greek academic life. Does your committee propose that such persons should be reinstated?

Nor do I think that there is any evidence for torture being employed at this present time by the Greeks, although it is likely that a small number of people were tortured in the past, as, you will recall, also occurred in Algeria. It would be unfortunate if actions such as police brutality were to be made the main reason for not visiting a country, or some of us might have doubts about coming to Paris. In short, I feel that while the Greek junta has certainly not behaved in a democratic manner, their actions are not quite as bad as you make them appear.

I would be more impressed by your committee if it extended its activities to cover other countries in Europe, such as Spain, Portugal, Poland, Eastern Germany, etc., whose regimes are in some cases at least

Dr. Francois Gros.

19 March 1969

as oppressive as the Greek one. Like Sydney Brenner, I do not relish the spectacle of people who take a stand on moral principles about not visiting Greece, but who are prepared to go to meetings in Madrid or Warsaw, or organized by the Vatican.

My basic objection to the actions of your committee, however, is that they are likely to be ineffectual in restoring democracy to Greece, and in the process will harm Greek science, which is a very tender plant, and cause dissention and ill-feeling between scientists in the rest of Western Europe. By holding meetings in Greece under our conditions and using the threat of going elsewhere as the means of obtaining liberal concessions, one is in a position to exert real influence on the Greek Government at least as far as Greek science is concerned. Provided scientists do not support, or appear to support, a bad regime, it is better to help one's colleagues in other countries, especially when they ask for help.

I hope, therefore, that your committee will reconsider its attitude about the Spetsai Summer School and will instead try to make suggestions for the guidance of those, such as myself, who are running it. If your committee would pursue such a policy I would be very happy to collaborate with it.

I hope you will regard the present letter as confidential. While you may, if you wish, circulate it to your committee I do not wish it to be published at this stage. You will realise that if you do publish the circular letter you sent me I shall have to make some rebuttal, but I hope we can avoid such public quarrelling and find means of working together on this matter. Should your committee so wish I would be prepared to come to Paris to discuss matters with them.

I am sending copies of this letter to Pollock, Monod and Jacob.

With all good wishes

F.H.C. Crick