

Spartans called together their allies once more, since they wished to take their votes on the question of whether war should be declared. Representatives came from the allied states and, in a general conference, put forward their views, in most cases attacking the Athenians and advocating a declaration of war. The Corinthians, who feared that any further delay might cost them Potidaea, had already sent embassies on their own account to all the allies, urging them to vote for war. They, too, were present at this conference, and their representative made the final speech, which was as follows:

*Spartans to  
vote to  
be  
war  
etc.*

120 'Fellow allies, there is no occasion now for us to make any complaints about the Spartans. They have already voted for war themselves, and they have summoned us here to do the same thing. Indeed, this is what a leader should do - to look after his own interests as everyone else does, but also, in return for all the honour he receives from others, to give a special consideration to the general interest.

'Now, all those of us who have already had dealings with the Athenians do not need to be told that we have to be on our guard against them; but those who live inland or off the main trade routes ought to recognize the fact that, if they fail to support the maritime powers, they will find it much more difficult to secure an outlet for their exports and to receive in return the goods which are imported to them by sea; they should therefore consider carefully what is being said now, and not regard it as something in which they are not concerned; they must be prepared to see that, if the maritime powers are sacrificed, it will not be long before the danger spreads farther, until they, too, are threatened, and that thus this discussion affects them just as much as it affects us. Therefore they should not shrink from the prospect of choosing war instead of peace. Wise men certainly choose a quiet life, so long as they are not being attacked; but brave men, when an attack is made on them, will reject peace and will go to war, though they will be perfectly ready to come to terms in the course of the war. In fact they will neither become over-confident because of their successes in war, nor, because of the charms and blessings of peace, will they put up with acts of aggression. He who thinks of his own pleasures and shrinks from fighting is very likely, because of his irresolution, to lose

*Corinth speaks  
to sparta*

*Sparta: Ummmm.  
Let's double-check with  
everyone! (And also the  
Oracle!)  
Corinth comes along.*

THE ALLIED CONGRESS AT SPARTA

118 It was only a few years later that there took place the events already described - the affair of Corcyra, the affair of Potidaea, and the other occurrences which served as causes for the war between Athens and Sparta. The actions of the Hellenes against each other and against foreign Powers which I have just related all took place in a period of about fifty years between the retreat of Xerxes and the beginning of this present war. In these years the Athenians made their empire more and more strong, and greatly added to their own power at home. The Spartans, though they saw what was happening, did little or nothing to prevent it, and for most of the time remained inactive, being traditionally slow to go to war, unless they were forced into it, and also being prevented from taking action by wars in their own territory. So finally the point was reached when Athenian strength attained a peak plain for all to see and the Athenians began to encroach upon Sparta's allies. It was at this point that Sparta felt the position to be no longer tolerable and decided by starting this present war to employ all her energies in attacking and, if possible, destroying the power of Athens.

*Recap:  
Athens  
powerful  
and Sparta  
must stop it.*

119 Though the Spartans had already decided that the truce had been broken by Athenian aggression, they also sent to Delphi to inquire from the god whether it would be wise for them to go to war. It is said that the god replied that if they fought with all their might, victory would be theirs, and that he himself would be on their side, whether they invoked him or not. Still, however, the

*Sparta asks Delphi*

those very delights which caused his hesitation; while he who goes too far because of a success in war fails to realize that the confidence in which he goes forward is a hollow thing. Many badly planned enterprises have had the luck to be successful because the enemy has shown an even smaller degree of intelligence; and even more frequently has it happened that what seemed to be an excellent plan has ended not in victory, but in disaster. No one can alike conceive and dare in the same spirit of confidence; we are in perfect security when we make our estimates; but in the test of action, when the element of fear is present, we fall short of our ideal.

121 'Now, on this present occasion it is because we are the victims of aggression and because we have adequate reasons that we are going to war; and once we have made ourselves secure from the Athenians we shall at the proper time return to peace. There are many reasons why victory should be ours. First, we are superior in numbers and in military experience; secondly, one and all and all together we obey the orders that we receive. As for sea-power, in which they are strong, we shall build ours up both from the existing resources of our alliance and also from the funds in Olympia and in Delphi. If we borrow money from there we shall be able to attract the foreign sailors in the Athenian navy by offering higher rates of pay.<sup>21</sup> For the power of Athens rests on mercenaries rather than on her own citizens; we, on the other hand, are less likely to be affected in this way, since our strength is in men rather than in money. The chances are that, if they once lose a battle at sea, it will be all over with them. And supposing they do manage to hold out, then that will give us more time in which to improve our own naval tactics, and once our skill is on a level with theirs, there can be little doubt about our superiority so far as courage is concerned. They cannot acquire by education the good qualities that are ours by nature; we, on the other hand, by taking pains can abolish the advantage they hold over us in point of skill. It will require money to carry out these projects, and we will contribute money. What an appalling thing to imagine that, while their allies never stop bringing in contributions to maintain their own slavery,

21. See Pericles' reply in 1, 143, and the comment in the Introduction, p. 28.

Corinth

we, whose aims are vengeance and survival, should hesitate to incur expense in order to prevent this very money that we are saving from being taken from us by the Athenians and then used to make us suffer!

122 'There are also other ways open to us for carrying on the war. We can foster revolts among their allies - and this is the best means of depriving them of the revenues on which their strength depends. Or we can build fortified positions in their country. And there will be other ways and means which no one can foresee at present; since war is certainly not one of those things which follow a fixed pattern; instead it usually makes its own conditions in which one has to adapt oneself to changing situations. So, when one enters upon a war, one will be all the safer for keeping one's self-possession: the side that gets over-excited about it is the most likely side to make mistakes.

'And here is another point to consider. If this was merely a question of boundary disputes between equals and affecting individual states separately, the situation would not be so serious; as it is, we have Athens to fight, and Athens is so much stronger than any single state in our alliance that she is capable of standing up to all of us together. So unless we go to war with her not only in full force but also with every city and every nationality inspired by the same purpose, she will find us divided and will easily subdue us. And let us be sure that defeat, terrible as it may sound, could mean nothing else but total slavery. To the Peloponneses the very mention of such a possibility is shameful, or that so many cities should suffer the oppression of one. If that were to happen, people would say either that we deserved our sufferings or that we were putting up with them through cowardice and showing ourselves much inferior to our fathers; for they brought freedom to the whole of Hellas, while we not only failed to safeguard our own freedom, but also allowed a dictator state to be set up in Hellas, although in individual states we made it a principle to put down despots. Such a policy, in our view, cannot be held to be exempt from three of the greatest mistakes that can be made - lack of intelligence, lack of resolution, or lack of responsibility. Nor do we imagine that you can escape these imputations by claiming that you feel superior to your enemies. This feeling of superiority has done much harm

Other methods to beat Athens

what would happen if we lose to Athens

Corinth

before now; indeed, from the number of cases where it has proved disastrous it has come to be known as something quite different - not superiority, but plain stupidity.

But there is no need to bring up these complaints from the past except in so far as they may help us in the present. As for the future, you must look to that by safeguarding what you have now and by being willing to face sacrifices. It is in your blood to regard all kinds of excellence as the prizes of toil and sweat, and you ought not to change that way of looking at things even if you have at the moment some advantages in wealth and in power; for it would be wrong to lose because of plenty what was gained because of abstinence. Instead we must go forward into this war, in the knowledge that we have many reasons for feeling confident: we are acting on the authority of the god, who has himself promised to support us; and all the rest of Hellas will be with us in the struggle, either through fear of slavery or through hope of liberation. It is not you who will be the first to break the treaty, since the god, in ordering us to make war, regards the treaty as already broken. It is rather a case of enforcing a treaty whose terms have been contravened. What constitutes the breach of a treaty is the first act of aggression, not measures taken in self-defence.

From every point of view, therefore, you have good reason to go to war, and this course is what we recommend as being in the interests of all of us, remembering that identity of interest both among cities and among individuals is the surest of all guarantees. Let there be no delay, therefore, in coming to the help of the people of Potidaea. They are Dorians and are being besieged by Ionians - a very different state of affairs from what used to happen in the past. Let there be no delay either in claiming liberty for all the rest. It is out of the question to wait any longer, with some of us already suffering from aggression, and the rest of us certain to suffer before long in the same way, if it should once be known that we have met in conference and did not dare to take measures to defend ourselves. No, fellow allies, you must recognize instead that the crucial moment has come, that the advice we give you is the best possible advice, and you must vote for war. Do not be afraid of the terrors of the moment, but set your minds instead on the enduring peace

that will follow war. War gives peace its security, but one is still not safe from danger if, for the sake of quiet, one refuses to fight. As for that dictator city which has been established in Hellas, let us make up our minds that it is there to dominate all alike and is planning to subdue what has not been subdued already. Let us then go forward against it and destroy it, let us be able to live our own lives in the future without fear, and let us liberate the Hellenes who are now enslaved!

This was the speech of the Corinthians. The Spartans had now heard everyone's opinion, and put the vote city by city to all their allies who were present, both great and small. The majority voted for war. They decided, however, that in their present state of unpreparedness it would be impossible to attack immediately, but it was agreed that each state should make its own preparations and that there should be no delay. All the same, while they were occupied in these necessary preliminaries, a year, or rather less, went by before Attica was invaded and war openly broke out.

Corinth