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THE GREEK POLITICAL SCENE ON EVE OF PARLIAMENTARY SESSION

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THE GREEK POLITICAL SCENE ON EVE OF PARLIAMENTARY SESSION

The uneasy calm that has characterized the Greek political scene since early last summer probably will soon end. Parliament is scheduled to open on 12 November and the atmosphere has been heated by the recent publication of the so-called ASPIDA report which accuses a number of military officers and politicians of political activity in the army, intelligence, and security forces.

The present "palace" government of Premier Stephan Stephanopoulos, a motley assortment of former Center Union (EK) followers of ex-premier George Papandreou, is supported by the National Radical Union and Progressive parties. Its precarious balance is preserved mainly by a "unity of fear" of the Papandreou popularity with the electorate. With the backing of the crypto-Communist United Democratic Left, Papandreou continues to demand new elections, while his controversial son Andreas continues to exploit the Papandreous' differences with the royal family in his own efforts to take over the EK.

The King prefers to delay elections as long as possible, although he may be forced to agree to them some time in 1967. The Stephanopoulos faction probably will not emerge from an election with a workable parliamentary base.

Background

Following the ravages of World War II and the guerrilla war against the Communists (1947-49), Greece experienced over a decade of unusual political and governmental stability. In 1952 the Greek Rally--a consolidation of a multitude of conservative parties--took power. In 1956 the rally was reorganized into the present National Radical Union (ERE) party and in the election of that year Constantine Karamanlis was swept to power. In the

early 1960s Karamanlis' popular image was tarnished by EK charges that he was using police tactics. Finally, a quarrel with the palace led to Karamanlis' resignation in the summer of 1963, and to the assumption of power by George Papandreou. In the new elections in February 1964 Papandreou's EK party received 53 percent of the popular vote, the first clear electoral majority in postwar Greece.

The EK emerged as a viable if somewhat loosely organized

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Principals in Greek Political Crisis



KING CONSTANTINE



Prime Minister **STEPHANOPOULOS**



Fomer Prime Minister
GEORGE PAPANDREOU



ANDREAS PAPANDREOU

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non-Communist alternative to the conservative ERE. Its influence soon began to spread under the leadership of the popular Papandreou, an articulate and eloquent figure whose political sympathies historically had swung between the left-of-center and the right.

In early 1965 Papandreou began to encounter serious difficulties with his policies. King Constantine, the 26-year-old monarch brought to the throne by his father's death the previous spring, was becoming increasingly concerned with Premier Papandreou's attempts to "democratize" the normally tradition-bound and conservative army, intelligence, and security forces by placing EK supporters in key positions. He was especially irate over the premier's intentions to assume the defense ministry portfolio, charging that Papandreou was doing so to cover up the political shenanigans of his son. Andreas Papandreou had been implicated in ASPIDA, allegedly a secret, pro-EK, and antipalace organization of military officers.

A confrontation between the King and Papandreou in July 1965 led to the premier's resignation and the ensuing government crisis. Today, it is doubtful that a peaceful reconciliation between the adversaries is possible. Instead, the EK may split beyond repair, with the forces of left and right exploiting their respective republican and promonarchy sentiments regardless of the harm to their country.

The "Meddling" Monarchists

The confrontation between the King and Papandreou has raised the issue of the role of the monarchy in the country's political affairs. This same theme is likely to be the most important issue in the next elections. Historically, the monarchy has had its share of difficulties, having been banished three times in this century alone. King Constantine risked the same fate by maneuvering Papandreou out. His action led to charges from the Papandreou faction, and the crypto-Communist United Democratic Left (EDA), that Constantine acted unconstitutionally by trying to rule rather than reign.

The King appears sincerely to believe that the Papandreou, particularly Andreas, represent a threat to the country's Western orientation and to his own future. He has so far been unwilling to compromise with the former premier, and may even be willing to risk the consequences of a dictatorship if the Papandreou power is not curbed.

Constantine's youth lends credibility to charges of political immaturity, but there are signs that he has learned a great deal from the confrontation. Much of the blame for his seemingly harsh action can be laid to the bad advice he received from members of his royal household, none of whom can be said to harbor republican or pro-Papandreou sympathies and who favor the establishment of a more authoritarian government.

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Traditionally, the chief support for the monarchy has come from the army and the conservative social and political groups. A group of large entrepreneurs sometimes called the "economic oligarchy" is also identified with the palace. The monarchy's role in the fight against Communism helped to enhance its popularity. However, the passage of time has blurred the image of the guerrilla struggle and instances of political meddling from the palace have resulted in some misgivings about the monarchy even within conservative circles.

On balance, the King is probably not as incompetent as his enemies claim, his political judgment has probably matured, and most important, he possesses the courage to cling to his beliefs. Although he will probably allow the politicians every opportunity to arrive at some accommodation he is unlikely to give up without a fight, and may even succumb to the advice from some factions within ERE and the army who favor an "extraparliamentary" solution. It is clear that his fear of a Papandreou victory will dictate his holding out on elections as long as possible, perhaps until February 1968 when they are constitutionally required.

The "Apostate" Government

The Stephanopoulos government itself typifies the murky state of Greek politics. Made up of "defectors" from the EK and kept in power by the reluctant support of ERE and the Progressive

Party, the government has been no more than a holding operation from its outset last fall. With only a slim majority in Parliament, it has been unable to pass any major legislation which might help strengthen its political foothold. Many members of the government are obscure politicians with no recognized administrative ability, their qualifications based solely on their willingness to desert their former leader and make themselves available for high office. Some have engaged in corrupt practices in dealing with the financial and patronage connected with their office. Stephanopoulos himself has described many of them as being "sick or psychopaths."

The group has organized a party cell, the Liberal Democratic Center (FDK), which they say represents the "true center," but some of the ministers have yet to join. Lacking the necessary popular following and the solid support of any of the politically potent newspapers, the FDK members will be hard pressed to survive a new election unless they manage to run on a new ticket.

The government has surprisingly survived a number of periods of tension during its year of tenure, chiefly because no one of the opposition factions is sufficiently well organized to push for early elections. Its monetary control measures during a gold crisis last winter brought satisfactory results. However, this may be due chiefly to the basic soundness of the economy which

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allows it to survive temporary political maladjustments.

The old bugaboo Cyprus is also a thorn in the side of the Stephanopoulos "experiment." While the government must be credited with the courage to reopen the dialogue with Turkey over the peculiar and perennial problems with the island, its inherent weakness is one of the biggest difficulties in finding a Cyprus solution acceptable to the Turks, as the necessary concessions could prove unpopular with the Greek electorate.

In spite of its precarious existence, the government does amble on. However, with all the opposition factions beginning to make at least preliminary adjustments for the eventual election, the government members realize their days may be numbered. The publication of the ASPIDA report at least superficially touched the government itself and, although the report will probably not change the average person's views in regard to his vote in any election, it will surely contribute to increased political tension in the coming months.

The National Radical Union

The nominally opposition National Radical Union finds itself in a most uncomfortable and politically embarrassing position. Combined with the eight Progressive deputies under Spyros Markezinis, the ERE deputies comprise the basic support in parliament for the "apostate" government. Thus, although they

are reluctant to be identified with the government, they are faced with the inglorious task of supporting it, sharing in its faults and failures, but not sharing in the dispensation of political favors and patronage to help preserve their own incumbency.

The dominant element in ERE is a variety of rightist factions which generally view the monarchy as a symbol of solidarity and source of prestige for the state. ERE has the support of the army which has historically chosen its officer corps from the country's more conservative families. Like its counterparts in many other countries, ERE receives the majority of its popular support from the more conservative rural areas.

ERE has been without effective leadership since Karamanlis' voluntary "exile" to Paris after the elections in early 1964. Its present leader, Panagiotis Kanellopoulos, has been forced to retreat from many of his espoused positions for lack of support within the party organization. Kanellopoulos has been bothered by the specter of Karamanlis, and much of his effort has been based on his desire to improve his personal image rather than to promote the party's program. Although many deputies are becoming increasingly restless, his periodic threats to withdraw ERE support from the government have failed to materialize, chiefly because of the fear that the ERE popular image has not recovered from its low state

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which allowed the EK to win overwhelmingly in 1964.

A question mark for ERE is the present image of ex-premier Karamanlis, both within the party and among the voters. Toward the end of his term as premier, Karamanlis was under some criticism for his alleged authoritative policies which led to disfavor with the people and the politicians, as well as the eventual break with the palace. There are doubts whether his return would bring about the rejuvenation of the party necessary to allow a promising ERE showing in an election. In addition, his relationship with the palace is not much improved and he also is reported to have some misgiving about the need for the monarchy. Personally, he regards himself as the only real answer to the impasse--as do many others in the conservative circles. However, he will probably return only under circumstances which he believes most beneficial to himself and reportedly would prefer to return as the result of popular acclaim.

Papandreou's Center Union

The course the EK selects will largely determine the tenor of the coming election campaign.

The EK, formed in 1960, brought together many diverse elements of the political center. Its main electoral strength has come from the lower middle class, the intellectuals, skilled labor, and a significant portion of the youth of the country. It

also has the support of a strong, high-circulation portion of the press. Its strength within the peasant class also increased in the last two elections. Its many republican elements traditionally have fought for limitations on the monarchy and have generally outdone the ERE in pressing for economic and social reforms. EK's principal intraparty problem has been the maintenance of party unity.

A key factor in the EK is, of course, the position of George Papandreou himself. He still remains the most popular and charismatic figure in Greek politics, but his nearly 80 years and apparently failing health presumably rule him out as a leader much longer. It is uncertain whether he is physically able to wage a long, hard political campaign.

Most interesting is the relationship of the elder Papandreou with his son Andreas, a former US citizen and an able economist, who is politically inexperienced and has been attacked by conservatives both in and outside his party for left-wing sympathies. Papandreou has long been grooming his son to take over the EK. However, there is a marked dissimilarity in their public utterances, especially in regard to Andreas' attacks on the King. Some observers believe that the father is not in sympathy with his son's increasingly bitter attacks on the monarchy, but at the same time he does not have the influence to turn his son away from his radical course.

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Most certainly Andreas is the leading candidate to take over at least the EK left wing, although possibly under a different banner. The long-awaited publication of the ASPIDA investigation report, which accuses him of being among the leadership of the conspiracy, has so far linked him with the organization by implication only and has largely resulted only in the usual stir in the widely read and highly partisan Greek press. If a court examination fails to unearth new evidence which points to Andreas' direct involvement in the plot, he will probably exploit the case as another example of the way the "dark forces," among which he includes the US, are working to the detriment of democracy in Greece.

Andreas charges that the King acted in July 1965 to transform Greece from a constitutional to an absolute monarchy and that whole sections of public life, national defense, public order, foreign relations, and education have become extensions of the palace. The younger Papandreou denies he is raising the regime issue, but insists he merely questions the functioning of the monarchy--whether the King or the people should "govern." Andreas also denies he is in collusion with the Communist-front EDA, which supports and profits from his confrontation with the King. However, some of the EDA leadership may be apprehensive about the effect heavy popular support for Andreas could have in any election in which he heads an EK ticket that did not cooperate with EDA.

Moderate elements within the EK violently oppose Andreas' taking over the party and deplore his scathing attacks on the King. So far, however, they have found no device to thwart his drive for power. They are unwilling to declare an open break in the party, realizing that their own best chance for re-election to parliament lies in running under the banner of an EK headed at least symbolically by the ex-premier. Nevertheless, if the ASPIDA affair should upset Andreas' appletart, some EK members may pull out and set up a new party to offset the pro-Papandreou faction.

The Extreme Left

The United Democratic Left (EDA) swiftly seized upon the July 1965 "coup" to establish the appearance of a united front with the EK in its opposition to the King's "meddling" politics. EDA leaders organized demonstrations and supported pro-Papandreou rallies in their drive for unity at the "street" level.

The elder Papandreou has consistently denied that he solicited the support of EDA. However, for purposes of his popular image, he probably welcomed it on some occasions. His son Andreas' contacts with a prominent Communist friend have led to charges of EDA-EK collaboration.

The precise electoral strength of EDA is difficult to measure. Declared membership of the party is probably less than ten percent of the populace, but a protest

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vote by disgruntled nationalists in 1958 swelled a normal 10-15 percent of the vote to nearly 25 percent. EDA support is derived chiefly from the industrial and port workers in the urban areas of Athens, Piraeus, and Thessaloniki. The party also has an active youth movement. It has served as a front for the outlawed Communist Party of Greece since 1951, but its ability to exploit the unequal distribution of income, along with the ebbing memory of the guerrilla war, has given the party an increased air of respectability. Its effectiveness is somewhat marred by organizational problems, much of which revolve around the Sino-Soviet dispute.

EDA will continue to support the Papandreous in their demands for new elections. Further, the possible repolarization of the Greek political structure cannot but help the fortunes of the party. What is not certain, however, is whether open EDA-EK cooperation will reap benefits for the Communist front. If Andreas becomes the principal political figure and proves to be a foil for the EDA, the party's popular support could rise higher than it did in 1958. However, should he isolate EDA, the effect could be disastrous for the party, as he would probably draw much of the marginal EDA vote.

Considering these alternatives, EDA will probably bide its time and continue to profit from the infighting within the nationalist parties. It may also

gain more respectability from its support for the increasing popular, though nonetheless controversial, Andreas Papandreou. It will also hope that George Papandreou's early departure from the scene will increase the opportunities for a popular front.

Dark-horse Candidates

There are other potential personalities who would like to benefit from the renewed political activity. One such player is Spyros Markezinis, the highly egotistical leader of the small, right-of-center Progressive Party, who has remarked to the US ambassador that his deep knowledge of his country gives him a "superiority complex" in parliamentary debates. However, he has never been able to create a popular image and his main hope would appear to be in the King's turning to him in desperation.

Within the EK and the "defectors" there are at least three others who may emerge among the new leadership. George Marvros, a former cabinet member for Papandreou who resigned over a dispute with Andreas, has re-entered center politics as a possible counterweight to Andreas. However, he has no particular political standing and will find difficulty in drumming up electoral support. Nikitas Venizelos, the grandson and nephew of two of modern Greece's most prominent liberal politicians, may be interested in reviving the now defunct Liberal Party.

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Constantine Mitsotakis, the minister of coordination for Stephanopoulos and the holder of the same post under Papandreou, would also like to lead many of the maverick FDK deputies and additional EK defectors in a new center group which they would herald as the "true center." However, he does not have a powerful political standing in Parliament nor does he possess a particularly popular image outside of his home constituency in Crete. He has also been implicated in the ASPIDA scandal.

Conclusions

Irrespective of how the political forces line up, the next few months should bring a period of intense political activity. The King will probably delay elections as long as he can, but

he may be forced to agree to them sometime next year. Andreas Papandreou will probably continue to be the most controversial figure on the political scene and he could assume actual leadership of the EK, especially if his aging father should pass from the scene. Andreas' takeover of the EK could result in complete disarray in the party. Should the King decide to institute a dictatorship, a complete polarization of the political spectrum could endanger the present structure of the government. In addition, the failure to come to a political compromise in its domestic affairs complicates the country's relations with its neighbor Turkey and increases the improbability of a satisfactory solution to the Cyprus problem. (CONFIDENTIAL)

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