

A PROMISE AND A THREAT

In its attitude to civil liberties the Greek regime has a way of giving with one hand and taking with the other. In his announcement yesterday about the restoration of constitutional safeguards the Prime Minister Mr. George Papadopoulos, sounded more in a giving mood. He turned away from martial law, under which *habeas corpus* had been suspended, and promised that basic civil rights will again apply. Nominally the regime had already reinstated these rights last year, but martial law overrode such provisions. Thus yesterday's measures remove an evident contradiction between promise and practice.

At the same time the Prime Minister's statement contained a number of sharp reminders about public order, characteristic of the regime. The provision that martial law will still be invoked to prohibit all forms of propaganda against the powers that be is too wide for comfort. It is the kind of order which allows strong-arm tactics against freedom of expression, without recourse to the normal processes of law. And the exhortation to Greek judges to act with full severity, coming as it does just before the verdict in the sedition trial, is ominous. It offers little assurance that civil liberties will be preserved intact.

Nevertheless, the approach of the regime's third anniversary on April 21 is being taken as an occasion for a degree of clemency. Mr. Papadopoulos promised to

release some 350 political exiles by that date. This still leaves a large number of people in captivity. If *habeas corpus* is to be genuinely restored, then all those held without trial should be released or properly charged. It is by such actions that the regime will be judged.

It is clear that the military junta remains sensitive to outside criticism. The continued outcry from abroad, reinforcing the protests felt in Greece itself, have probably played a major part in moving the regime away from its worst excesses of authoritarianism. But Mr. Papadopoulos's denunciation of friends and foes abroad who, so he said, would not allow Greece to march in peace towards its destinies betrays the regime's uncertainty.

The regime is motivated by a desire to placate its foreign critics, but its instinct is to stand firm where it is. It will cede its authority to democratic principles only by slow degrees. The country, so the Prime Minister claims, is not ready for a return to parliamentary democracy. But the condemnation in the Council of Europe and, more seriously for Greece's economic prospects, in Common Market circles, is a cause for alarm. And so the regime is anxious to present itself in a better light. But as the sedition trial shows, which began with open testimony and is ending under the shadow of what looks like a threat, the regime is torn both ways.