

Papandreou and Greek politics today

Democracy at Gunpoint: the Greek Front

Andreas G. Papandreou (Andre Deutsch, £3.30).

IN THE preface of this book (a slightly shorter version of an earlier American edition) Papandreou describes it as a book of political memoirs. It is, however, much more than that. It is also a lucid exposition of Greece's postwar political history, a book that penetrates deeply into the web of modern Greek politics and particularly into the relationship between Greece and its successive "protecting powers" — Great Britain up to 1947 and America since 1947.

A few months before Greece's liberation from the Nazis, (May 1944) representatives of all political and guerrilla groups in occupied Greece came together in Lebanon and agreed to a programme of peaceful transition to civil life after liberation. It all looked bright until, as a result of Churchill's insistence to bring the discredited monarchy back, the Lebanon agreement was broken. The leadership of the National Liberation Front (EAM) and more specifically the politburo of the Greek Communist Party, the KKE, which formed the hard core of EAM — under the pressure of their followers were forced to the only alternative left to them at that time: civil war.

One can easily detect Papandreou's bitterness over the 1944 British intervention — a bitterness that stems not so much from approval of the KKE tactics but from the feeling that the British, having used his father to mastermind the Lebanon agreement, discarded him when his useful role was completed and threw him into the wilderness of Greek politics — from which, however, he emerged 20 years later as the triumphant Ethnarch, the national leader.

The civil war (1947-49) brought in the Americans, with their Truman doctrine and the channeling of immense financial aid to help carry the fight against the insurgents and boost up the country's devastated economy. As Papandreou convincingly documents, the lion's share of the economic part of this aid was used eventually to enrich the economic oligarchy of the country.

The Americans had come into Greece at a time when their administration's policy was basically concerned with the destruction of the old prewar empires. At that time — as Papandreou explains — they showed restraint in interfering in Greece's internal affairs. But as they started consolidating their position as the new imperial power, and appreciated the importance of Greece's strategic position in South East Europe and the Middle East, they copied the policies of prewar imperialism, and transformed Greece into the archetype of present-day neo-colonialism. One of the important contributions that Andreas Papandreou's book makes is that it shows the subtle ways through which neo-colonialism works — as in the following examples:

- the American ambassador becomes a substitute for the constitutional monarch, indeed the arbiter of the political system, and dictates even the electoral system the country ought to adopt — as in 1952;

- the American military and intelligence missions infiltrate the Greek armed forces, by subsidising directly (not via the Greek Government) the Greek Army Intelligence;

- the country is linked to NATO and forced to maintain a disproportionately large army. Equipment for this army comes directly from America and its officers are directly trained in American military schools. Thus the Greek army has been transformed into an occupation army, which differs from traditional occupational forces only by the fact that the uniforms worn are Greek;

- political developments in the "colony" are definitely conditioned by political changes in the metropolis. It clearly follows from Papandreou's narrative that the repercussion of Kennedy's rise to power was to pave the way for free elections in Greece — the first in its postwar history — which were won by the Centrist alliance in 1963;

- at a later stage the colonisation of the economy has been vigorously pursued by the establishment of American concerns (some owned by reactionary Greek Americans) which are granted unbelievable concessions;

- the climax of all this is the establishment of dictatorship by American-trained officers using American tanks and the tacit support of the American ambassador Talbot.

This is basically Papandreou's story. Within that story he tries to portray his role in Greek politics — from the moment he returned to Greece in 1961 after a long career as an academic economist in the United States, first as director of the Centre for Economic Research and then (1964) as a deputy for Patras (not Athens as the book cover has it).

Papandreou came to Greece armed basically with the philosophy of an American liberal, convinced that through an imaginative use of fiscal policy and a dose of indicative planning the Government could successfully pursue the aims of growth and equity. He had subsequently

found that without radically transforming his country's obsolete political structure, even such innocent policies could not work. He embarked upon a vigorous campaign which ended — one hopes temporarily — in his imprisonment and subsequent exile.

In the last part of his book, Papandreou discusses the view put forward by his opponents that the coup could have been prevented if his reform proposals were less radical and his slogans less imaginative. He seems to agree with this and defends himself on the ground that to choose another course would have been immoral. However, the mechanism for mobilising the Army for the eventual intervention had started long before Andreas appeared on the Greek political scene.

It started in 1958, when the ruling Right-wing establishment and the American services were shocked by the fact that the Left-communist alliance of the United Democratic Left (EDA) had gained one quarter of the popular vote. A parallel government was little by little built and forced its way to power when it became apparent that the traditional Right-wing establishment (the king and the royalist party) could not have used their well-tested methods to maintain their political hegemony in a system of parliamentary democracy.

So Papandreou should neither regret nor try to justify the choice of the path that he followed in Greek politics. That path had been prescribed for him by the Greek people and it is an honour for him that he so determinedly followed it. What he should regret is his insufficient attention to organise adequately the progressive wing of his party — which he effectively led since 1965. By reading his memoirs one can see the fatal lack of organisation in many instances. Imaginative programmes, popular appeal, good intentions — none helps against an armed opponent.

With a modern organisation, with a wide participation of the rank and file in the decision-making process, the campaign of the years 1965-67 could not have been lost that easily. Courtiers and opportunists are eager to join popular leaders, but an effective, modern organisation could neutralise their impact. One hopes that in exile Papandreou will manage to bridge this gap and build up the organisational structure which is so vital to the liberation struggle which will overthrow the regime and destroy one of the basic outposts of neo-colonialism.

G. N. YANNOPOULOS

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Edited by Geoffrey Grigson (Faber, £2.50).

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