

Attic Chronicle by Phocion

Condemned to slow death?

Andreas lost his fight with economics czar Arsenis and his bid to make a deal with President Caramanlis.

Could it be that the time has arrived for even this columnist to display a measure of compassion toward the predicament of Prime Minister Andreas Papandreou? Consider:

In two and a half years in power, this man ruined a modest nation's economy, defenses, and educational system. He brought it to the forefront of drug use among nations. He shattered its traditional moral outlook with an outpouring of officially sanctioned pornography. He turned it into a haven for international terrorism. He used it as a lever to help collapse the NATO alliance. In the spread of all this evil, he was motivated by a deep-seated hunger for personal power.

Now he faces the following problem: The political barons of his ruling party, the PASOK, are demanding that he dissolve the Parliament and declare general elections this June 15. They consider this the most advantageous date for their party, rather than the constitutionally scheduled October 1985. Their judgment is correct; it is based on the fact that a collapse of Papandreou's electoral coalition has been in progress since January. Widespread disaffection stemming from the economic crisis has caused PASOK's popularity to decline from 42% to less than 28%. Papandreou's ruling party has lost every local election held this year in various regions and municipalities. The June European Parliament elections are widely expected to produce an embarrassing defeat.

Papandreou's party bosses, already in revolt against their chief, are arguing that this trend will be unstoppable next year. Therefore, the party's best chance is to try a general election now while the party machine has not yet crumbled and could still pull off a not-too-obvious vote fraud. They warn, correctly, that the party's local organizations are about to disintegrate under the pressure of popular derision and discontent.

Early in March, Papandreou took the position that he will not allow early elections but will try to alter the government's economic policy. He therefore launched a factional effort to undercut his Minister of National Economy, Gerassimos Arsenis, known as Mr. IMF Austerity in Greece, and an intimate friend of Robert Strange MacNamara, the world's leading advocate of genocide by economic means.

By March 26, Papandreou's fight with Arsenis ended in defeat. Instead of being curbed, Mr. Arsenis succeeded in causing the resignation of two other ministers and taking over the Ministry of Treasury, to add it to his control of the Ministry of National Economy and the central bank of Greece. Papandreou was defeated because Arsenis enjoys the active backing of the IMF and of Greece's foreign creditors. The country's foreign debt having grown from \$8 billion in 1981 to over \$24 billion under the management of Arsenis, the Greek economy

is now at the beck and call of its Euromarket creditors. Hence Papandreou's straitjacket.

According to the Greek constitution, only President Caramanlis—Greece's most substantial political personality of the post-war period and a staunch traditionalist conservative—has the right to dissolve Parliament and declare elections. President Caramanlis has made it clear to the prime minister and others that he will oppose any early elections. A stern and unforgiving sort of paternalist, Caramanlis has privately said that "since my Greeks decided to vote for a Socialist government, I shall make them drink the whole cup to the bitter dregs. Let them have their Socialist government for the whole four-year term. No elections before October 1985."

However: the Greek president is elected not by popular vote but by an election in which only the members of Parliament vote. To be elected president, one needs two-thirds of the vote. For the balloting in May 1985, Caramanlis is assured of the 119 votes of the conservative New Democracy Party's deputies. He will need the votes of at least 81 of PASOK's 166 deputies if he is to be re-elected. Therefore, Andreas has made a rather meek, reluctant offer to Caramanlis: if you allow me to hold early elections, I will give you the votes you need.

Caramanlis has remained humorously silent on the subject. According to reports, he is not impressed with Papandreou's offer because he knows what is generally known in the country: There will be no other candidate for the presidency to contest the immensely popular Caramanlis. Yet, ironically, the man is committed to "punishing" his Greek "children" with one and a half more years of Papandreou's Socialism and Arsenis' economic austerity.