

## Attic Chronicle by Phocion

### The Balkan powderkeg and Papandreou

*The prime minister has suddenly become a wild chauvinist and populist for his own domestic reasons.*

**G**reek Prime Minister Andreas Papandreou led his cabinet on a visit Feb. 21 to the northern Greek city of Yannina (of Ali Pasha and Lord Byron fame) to commemorate the anniversary of the city's liberation from Turkish rule about 70 years ago.

The prime minister's commemoration speech was used to revive a theme which had remained dormant since the 1945-49 Greek civil war: the civil rights of the 400,000 strong Greek minority living in neighboring Albania. At a time when Albania and Greece continue to be in a technical "state of war" dating back to 1940, Papandreou announced that he "will not tolerate" violations of the rights of Greeks by the Albanian government and that his government assumes the right to act on behalf of Albania's Greek minority.

This is the kind of Balkan news which almost always leads to war.

A few weeks before Andreas's provocative statement, the Yugoslav authorities arrested five Greek citizens on charges of espionage on behalf of Bulgaria.

These events occurred at a time when NATO was playing out its HILEX 84 exercise on the basis of a scenario assuming a Soviet invasion of Yugoslavia and a Soviet Army breakout into the Adriatic sea. The HILEX scenario further assumed that under such a hypothetical crisis, U.S. troops stationed in Europe would be removed for missions outside Europe, and defense of the central and southern sectors would be assumed by European troops.

All this took place when the last

U.S. Marines had been withdrawn from Lebanon and the Persian Gulf area was about to be recognized as a "Soviet sphere of influence."

Given Greece's currently poor relations with NATO and the precipitous decline of U.S. military power in the area, Papandreou has selected the worst possible moment to stir up the potent monsters of Balkan ethnic passions. In the spring of 1983, I had forwarded to Papandreou's government an extended memorandum warning then against the growing military pressures of the Soviet military junta into the Balkans, primarily against Greece, Yugoslavia and Albania and in favor of Bulgaria which might soon create a "Treaty of San Stefano 1877" situation in which Russia becomes the arbiter of the Balkan peninsula and the Russian Navy gains control over the Bosphorus and Dardanelles.

Papandreou's Yannina speech goes against this simple wisdom, wisdom otherwise well understood by the neighboring Turkish government, however, which has arranged its military policy accordingly. Why did Papandreou select this unwise course of policy?

One should ask Mr. Gerassimos Arsenis, the Greek minister of National Economy.

Papandreou's Yannina speech represents a major turning point in domestic Greek politics: The charismatic Andreas, a Kissinger protégé of the 1970s, has been forced to recast himself into the image of a populist/nationalist demagogue rather than rely

on the "socialist" mass appeal which had given him his 1981 landslide victory at the polls.

As a result of the McNamara-sponsored Arsenis economic policy, the Papandreou regime's popularity has suffered a precipitous collapse in the first weeks of 1984.

As the socialist-ruled country is engulfed in persistent strikes in which the government is adopting ever-growing hostility toward labor, as net domestic investment has collapsed to net loss, and as Greece's foreign debt has trebled in two years (it now stands at about \$24 billion), the government's popularity has declined from a neat 51%-plus two years ago to 27% this past February. Papandreou's party, the PASOK, has lost numerous local municipal elections this year, and it suffered an electoral rout in the highly significant nationwide elections of the Greek Bar Association in which PASOK and Communist Party lawyers ran in joint tickets against the moderate candidates associated with the opposition party, New Democracy.

This dramatic collapse in popularity confronted the prime minister at a time when Mr. Arsenis, his New York- and Geneva-bred economics minister, received a new set of instructions from the International Monetary Fund demanding a further round of economic austerity. To carry out his IMF orders, Arsenis launched into a populist propaganda campaign against the "black reaction" of local businessmen who oppose the IMF. This has led to the new pop-chauvinist approach selected by Papandreou at Yannina.

As a result, the Balkan bureau of the KGB is anticipating a feast in the months ahead. Andreas will not be the first Greek politician who wrecked his nation to rescue his regime. In this, he follows the tradition of Themistocles, Ephialtes of Athens, and Pericles.