

GREECE IN TRANSITION  
ESSAYS IN THE  
HISTORY OF MODERN GREECE  
1821-1974

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## GREECE IN TRANSITION

might be fought largely on issues other than those of foreign policy. During his long absence in Paris he was unaware that the old division (*dichasmos*) intensified by the conduct of his followers had made his regime hateful to all those who had no stake in it. Excessively long military service (some had been with the colours for over eight years), heavy taxation, and the spectacle of profiteering by those in favour, had made matters worse. What Venizelos had also overlooked was that the opposition was better organised than he imagined.

At the election of 14 November 1920,<sup>34</sup> although the Venizelists had over 40 per cent of the total vote, their opponents obtained 260 seats out of 370. This defeat did not mean that half or more of the Greek people had renounced the Great Idea: it meant that those who for so long had been left in the cold were determined to profit from its realisation. Fundamental disputes on foreign policy had no place in the election campaigns. In so far as there was an aim, apart from that of turning out the Venizelists, it was perhaps a wish on the part of many to bring back Constantine, who certainly was not without his admirers. That those who had won the election would try to restore him, was fully realised by the Allied powers, who on 4 December 1920 issued a formal warning that, if Constantine returned, they would wash their hands of their responsibilities towards Greece and cut off all financial aid. This warning however seems not to have become widely known in Greece and in a plebiscite held the following day the Greeks decided by 999,960 votes to 10,383 (these were official figures, for what they are worth) in favour of Constantine's return.

Although certain Constantinists had stated at the elections that they would withdraw the Greek army from Asia Minor, on assuming office they did nothing of the sort, partly because it would have been difficult for military reasons to do so, and partly because the rank and file of the Constantinists would not have stood for it. The government (first under Rallis, then Kalogeropoulos and from April 1921 under Gounaris) were committed to a frustrating struggle in Asia Minor, having been betrayed by the treachery of France and Italy while Great Britain, afraid to break the entente, followed an indecisive policy, which was of very little help. In late August and early September 1922 the Greeks were defeated.

During the months before the Anatonlian fiasco Rallis had vainly attempted to unite moderate Venizelists and Constantinists in a party called 'The National Awakening'. After the fiasco no such combination was possible: the country was again split from top to bottom; the hour for recriminations had arrived; and hatreds were fiercer than ever. On 10 September the King dismissed the government of Protopapadakis, the real head of which was still Gounaris, and called upon Triandafilakos, former Greek High Commissioner in Constantinople, to form an administration. From 26

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## THE FORMATION OF THE GREEK STATE

to 28 September, however, army officers staged a successful revolution and set up a revolutionary committee. This committee arrested the ex-ministers. They were not hostile to Constantine: they allowed the British naval mission to arrange for him, with others of the Royal family, to proceed to Palermo. Constantine's departure was not greatly regretted. It was generally agreed that once he had gone France and Britain would come to the help of Greece when the task of making peace with Turkey was taken up again. His successor George II was well received. There was however little signs of enthusiasm for the Revolutionary Committee.

Although this committee (chiefly under pressure from the British) appointed a civilian government, it kept power in its own hands and treated the ministers merely as the heads of governmental departments. On 18 October it issued a revolutionary manifesto stating that the revolution was above party and that it would purge the country of all those elements that had led to the national disaster. A few days later it announced that a court would be set up to try Constantine's ex-ministers and other persons. This court, working with scant respect for rules of evidence, on 27 November condemned to death five former ministers and General Hadjinesti who had been in command in Asia Minor. The execution of these highly reasonable men, who had been good patriots and victims of circumstances, brought a sense of shame on Greece and their martyrdom probably prevented civil war. It perpetuated, however, Greek animosities. Nevertheless there was a change of pattern in Greek party politics. Throughout the year 1923 there developed conflicts among the Venizelists and among the leading military chiefs. Certain Venizelists became republicans and, to promote their movement, formed 'leagues of national safety', which were somewhat similar organisations to the 'leagues of military reservists' of Constantinist Greece. Venizelos himself, however, at first continued to favour a 'crowned democracy' but in August 1923 he went so far as to inform the press that Greece might possibly do well to become a republic, which was a less complicated form of government than constitutional monarchy.

In October General Gargalidis and Colonel Ziras engineered a military revolt in the Peloponnese and Macedonia, the object being to overthrow the existing revolutionary regime. But Government troops under the command of General Pangalos and Colonel Plastiras, assisted by those of General Georgios Kondilis, put down the rebellion with little difficulty. One result of this affair was to give the republicans in the government the upper hand, for it was rumoured (quite falsely) that King George II was in league with the rebels. Venizelos (he was outside Greece) advised his followers not to force any decision on the question of the monarchy before elections were held and on no account to attempt to establish a republic by force.

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Although this advice was accepted, the question arose whether or not to make republicanism an electoral issue. On this matter the Venizelists were divided but Venizelos, on being appealed to for guidance, pronounced firmly against making the monarchy an election issue.

When at last on 16 December 1923 elections were held most of the old Constantinist royalists abstained. Out of 397 candidates returned, there were some 250 Venizelists. The democratic liberals under Roussos and the democratic union under Papanastasiou (both groups were republican) obtained about 120 seats. The remaining 27 seats went to independents, agrarians and anti-Venizelists. It was not very clear what these results meant but there was a fairly general feeling that the king should withdraw from Greece until the issue of the monarchy was decided. Great uncertainty prevailed. Eventually the Venizelist leaders supported by some 279 deputies and the league of officers implored Venizelos to return to Greece. This, in spite of his many pronouncements that he would never return, Venizelos did. He reached Athens on 4 January 1924 and the following day was elected unanimously president of the chamber. Eight days later he formed his fourth administration.

Venizelos had served Greece well during the later part of his exile as her representative at the Conference of Lausanne which had opened on 20 November 1922. Here, with the help of Lord Curzon, the British Foreign Secretary, and benefiting from the threat which the Greek divisions in Thrace posed to the Kemalists, he salvaged what he could. Nevertheless he signed away territory on which lived about half a million Greeks. This loss of population however was more than offset by the influx of refugees and by the convention of 30 January 1923 providing for the exchange of Greeks in Turkey for the Muslim population in Greece (exception being made in the case of the Greeks of Constantinople established there before 30 October 1918 and of the Muslim inhabitants of Western Thrace). Although Greece was called upon to absorb about 1,300,000 persons having got rid of about 355,000 Muslims, the result was that Greece, with a total population of 5,820,000, acquired linguistic and ethnic homogeneity, the minority population amounting to only just over 6 per cent.

The refugees increased the voting strength of Greece from about 800,000 to 1,100,000.<sup>35</sup> They were nearly all Venizelists, for they attributed their salvation to Venizelos and their misfortunes to the Constantinists. Their outlook was generally liberal and republican, for they associated monarchy with the name of Constantine. In the plebiscite of 13 April 1924 their votes went to swell the number of votes (758,472) for a republic which was more than double the votes (325,322) cast in favour of monarchy. But although the Asia Minor Greeks were drawn into the thick of Greek politics, they never created

their own political group.

Although tradition and republicanism were servants of the 1935 King, they put an end to the Republic. The shifting coalition prevailed since the happier and entrenched monarchy was at the bottom. The memories of the *dichasmos* its. Yet through progress. The government's economy expanded building up a system and the armed services of the great powers although political achievements politicians, w adventure', a finesse, frequently misguided pa