

University Seminar 703: Modern Greek

December 5, 2012

Speaker: Stan Draenos, Historian and Political Analyst, Athens, Greece

**Book Presentation: “Andreas Papandreou: The Making of a Greek Democrat and Political Maverick”**

Presiding Chair: Vangelis Calotychos, Columbia University

Rapporteur: Alexis Radisoglou, Columbia University

Attendees: Costas Panayotakis (CUNY), James Miller (New School for Social Research), Evelyn Pappas (CUNY), Constantine Farmakidis (Albert Einstein College of Medicine), Alvaro Garcia (Columbia), Simos Gerasimidis (Columbia), George Deodatis (Columbia), Zoe Pappas (Columbia), Kathryn Yatrakis (Columbia), Katerina Stefatos (Columbia), Kostis Kornetis (NYU), Kostis Smyrlis (NYU), Gerasimus Katsan (Queen’s College, CUNY)

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*Summary of Presentation:*

Draenos gave a 20-minute introduction to his book, a biography of Greece’s former prime minister Andreas Papandreou, and talked about his relationship to Papandreou. Draenos argues that Papandreou’s legacy is highly ambiguous and that, in examining the Papandreou legend, his research "surfaced important aspects of Papandreou's politics that did not fit comfortably within that legend's narrative confines." Draenos kept his remarks very short because he wanted to leave ample time for discussion.

<http://us.macmillan.com/andreaspapandreou/StanDraenos>

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6.175 x 9.250 inches, 256 pages.

*Summary of Discussion:*

*Q.*

What was Papandreou like? What was his personality profile?

*A.*

He was a multi-faceted character. I knew him but I didn’t really understand him. He’s an enigmatic figure. He had a lot of charm. He could be a very good, loyal friend. He could be very autocratic. He was a very attentive listener, genuinely interested in what people had to say. But ultimately, once he had made up his mind, he was interested, in a political context, in how he could use you. But he had a genuine interest in people. Very warm,

great sense of humor, a great storyteller. He had a dark side, but part of his enigma is he was also very transparent.

*Q.*

One central question for Americans today is, he had expertise and training in economics. People ask today, “how could he not have known” that these policies would bankrupt the country?

*A.*

The welfare state he built cost money, and there were serious problems, e.g. in the national health system. But if you look at his statements from 1986/87, when he made a turn to the right: they resonate today. He understood the need for Greece to become competitive in a global context, and it was the period of the first austerity programs. If you look at 1993 – his last term of power – the first serious effort to address taxation. The obvious question for me is: he understood these things, but what did he do about them?

*Q.*

I agree that he was a brilliant economist. But my point is that he must have known. But there is another parameter that is difficult to quantify: corruption. I have a feeling that the perception is that both the Left and the Right adopted the policies at some point that Papandreou had started in 1989. How is his legacy going to be defined, in terms of increase in public debt but especially in terms of the dramatic increase of corruption?

*A.*

There is an awful lot of finger-pointing. It’s a rather distorting lens to look at the past through the lens of these immediate issues. But there were a lot of issues at the time, a major debt crisis he inherited. It is complicated. There was an inheritance of the Ottoman period of a sense of the state as the enemy. In a sense, Andreas would democratize corruption. There was a layer of crony socialism on top of crony capitalism. What I find difficult today in Greece is that now that that system is broken down everyone blames it on Andreas.

*Q.*

Perhaps you can say something about his ideological outlook and how it may have changed over time, the ideologies he seemed to have affinities with: liberalism, neo-Marxism, social democracy. And the other issue is that of Greek leverage, in contrast to today.

*A.*

He always calculated, he was a masterful politician. George Papandreou’s referendum was very much a Papandreou-style move. I’m just talking about sheer political strategic game-playing.

*Q.*

I think the Europeans have been playing hardball with Greece and the Greek leadership has not been able to reciprocate. They haven’t been using every card they have.

*A.*

But how do you use every card? What could Greece try to do?

*Q.*

There’s many economists who have alternative plans. It’s obvious that the current plan

doesn't work, and it's not good for Europe. Now the Greek government are the enforcers of the European nations instead of helping the people, so instead of using the leverage they have they are terrorizing the Greek nation by presenting Greece as being completely without power. That's why there is a real class struggle, and I think the pro-austerity forces are on the wrong side of that struggle.

*Q.*

Maybe Papandreou, in the 1980s, used this leverage with the US? Where do you see him having played a bolder role?

*A.*

With the issue of accession of Portugal and Spain to the EU in 1986, Papandreou threatened to veto unless Europe came up with a program for the weaker economies, and he succeeded to get those funds.

*Q.*

I have a question about his earlier career. To what extent did his experience in the United States shape what we perceive as his anti-American policies?

*A.*

There is a long chapter on his American years. He was not anti-American then. You will not find anti-Americanism in any of the speeches. Cyprus was the radicalizing issue for him. And the anti-American feelings among centrist voters in Greece – as opposed to leftists who identified with the Soviet Union – I think there's more of a disappointed Americanism. I think Kennedy had raised hopes that the US would no longer identify with right-wing governments. In Greece, there were entrenched interests. For that reason you had a large number of people who became disappointed.

*Q.*

I'll try to ask the ideology question again. In the 1970s, there was Euro-communism and the fight against the junta, and you, back then, thought of yourself as part of that moment. And you said seven years ago or so that Papandreou was a cold-war liberal. So how do you get from being that to being a tribune of the international left? Is he reading people, is he responding to people, or is he an opportunist?

*A.*

He believed in soft power approaches, as a cold war liberal. The book is about the process of being radicalized. Part of it is because he was at the receiving end of American policies. The leverage issue was Cyprus where he took a stance against the American right-wing anti-communism, thinking he could develop a position independent of the objectives of NATO.

*Q.*

I think we may have to go further back in terms of his transformation. He was a Trotskyist as a student, so he started from a very radical position, then became a cold-war liberal, and then became radicalized again. PAK – which he was a member of – was the absolute representative of the tendency of third-worldism in Greece. So if you remember some of the manifestos of PAK, it's the most radical organization dealing with the resistance against the junta in Greece. They call it an "American occupation," he talks

about Guatemala and Congo, about “armed struggle.” Was it the junta that really radicalized him, was that the catalyst?

*A.*

These are important issues. Let me qualify one thing: Andreas was not a cold-war liberal in the conventional sense. In 1948, when the Wallace wing split from the Democratic party, Wallace was critical of the democratic party stance on the Truman doctrine. I can't say I fully understand Papandreou's evolution. Andreas is often seen as a sheer demagogue, stirring up anti-American feeling in the Greek people. I should point out that in the 1960s, whereas the Left considered him an agent of the CIA, the right considered him the stalking horse for the rebirth of EAM. One totally contradicted the other, that's part of his enigma. He was a radical. Within the Greek context, he was opposed to the Greek establishment. There is a funny kind of correlation with this and the junta's anti-establishment stance. They repressed the right, too. The left more but also the right. In a sense, Andreas was fishing in their waters. I don't really have an answer for myself.

*Q.*

You mentioned ASPIDA as an alleged conspiracy. In a sense, you adopt Andreas's position. He saw himself as the primary target of the junta. There are some big taboos there. There is so little out there.

*Q.*

Where does he stand on this?

*A.*

I have a whole chapter on ASPIDA. There's a lot we do not know. They represented a group of centrist officers. The group was organized in the 1960s to support General Grivas's campaign to enter politics in the 1960s. It was Grivas who exposed the ASPIDA conspiracy also. If Andreas had not been re-appointed minister, he would probably have been left out by the ASPIDA conspiracy. It's complicated.

*Q.*

It's really surprising that your book is the first biography of Papandreou. Do you have an explanation for this?

*A.*

I think the Greek academy are mainly people of the left who despise Andreas because he was seen as the person who stole the moment and betrayed the socialist possibility in Greece.

I know I haven't satisfied the question about what he really believed. He was not an ideologist. As an intellectual, he was very much wed to Western rationalism. When I told him my dissertation would be about Weber, he said, “A friend!” He was always open to revising his understanding based on his experiences. He did believe that multi-national capitalism needed to be opposed, and that Greece was part of that.

*Q.*

During his exile from Greece during the junta in Toronto, he didn't travel a lot. Could you tell us about visits to New York?

*A.*

He visited the US in the 1970s for a series of lectures in Michigan. In fact, he made a

number of visits. There was an event in Manhattan in 1972. He did come to the United States.

*Q.*

Do you like him as a figure, as his biographer?

*A.*

I used him as a prism through which you conceive of a spectrum of events. He was a substantial and serious figure. I think he's poorly understood. Was he wedded to certain values? I think he had a genuine concern for people, especially those who were used by higher powers. He was a bourgeois who found personal fulfillment in his connection with people.

*Q.*

Do you think his love for Greece may explain some of the contradictions?

*A.*

He had a sense of Greece as a matter of the heart.

*Q.*

So he was sincere in his efforts to alleviate some of the trouble?

*A.*

One of his main projects was to undo the negative consequences of the civil war, to reconcile those who had been marginalized. Maybe that's one thing that gives consistency to his policies.