

Greeks lose the formula

NEW YORK — The ancient Greeks may have invented democracy, but their modern heirs seem to have made a hash — or, rather, a moussaka out of it. Enough to make old Pericles spin in his grave.

On Sunday, Greeks went to the polls in an attempt to elect a viable government. This comes after a June election in which no party was able to get enough votes, followed by a weird, short-lived coalition between the right and communists. So everybody was hoping that on Sunday, Greece would finally get a real government.

Most pundits gave the edge to the right, under Constantine Mitsotakis' New Democracy party. Any ancient Athenian logician would have done so. PASOK, the Greek socialist party led by the colorful Andreas Papandreou, was engulfed by scandal. Papandreou, who had ditched his crabby left-wing wife for a fleshy blonde stewardess half his age, was considered by many to be borderline gaga. He had also undergone heart surgery. Surely PASOK would meet its nemesis.

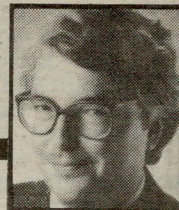
Not so. Greeks, as usual, were full of surprises and the election was deadlocked. The left won 40.6% of the vote and the right 46.2%. The Greek Communist party got 10.9%. No party seems able to form a government, though both left and right are claiming victory. There will have to be a coalition or another election.

What's remarkable about the latest fiasco is that so many Greeks voted for Papandreou and his socialist PASOK that has been rocked by one political bombshell after another. Wiretapping, vote fraud, massive embezzlement, diversion of government funds... the charges go on and on. Papandreou and his boys did things that would land them in jail for many years in other western democracies. In fact, he and some senior cronies are to be tried on criminal charges some time in the future.

Yet, all the Greeks who voted for PASOK don't seem to care one bit. Many believe the nonsense Papandreou has been putting out about how his problems are all the result of a CIA plot. Greeks love this kind of stuff. In fact, Greeks generally like to blame all of their misfortunes or headaches on: (a) the CIA; (b) the Turks; (c) the fascists; (d) the CIA; (e) the Albanians; (f) the Turks; (g) international bankers.

Never will one hear the Greeks blame them-

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selves for the messes they create. Papandreou has raised this bad habit to a national mania. Another reason so many Greeks voted for a party dripping with scandal has to do with patronage — an Achilles heel of democracy.

Papandreou used to teach at the University of Toronto and no doubt there absorbed a great deal of Pierre Trudeau's system of left-wing politics. Which works like this: Promise people the moon — a coucouretsi in every pot and feta on every plate. Paid for by others. Next, expand government by hiring scads of new bureaucrats. You can be sure they will keep voting for the people who butter their pita. Too bad if there is a growing deficit, inflation and strangulation of the enterprise market that pays the bills.

Does all this sound familiar? Canada is in much the same predicament, only a bit less blatantly. In the end, businessmen take their money and talents elsewhere while the economy spirals downhill.

Then there is the question of connections — a typical Third World political malady. A Greek will vote socialist because his cousin Yanni works over in the tax department. If you want to get business done, you need connections.

Democracy in Greece, and many other nations, tends all too often to be a sort of smash and grab process. The "in" party loots and pillages as long as possible. When the opposition gets in, the same thing happens. Parties have nothing to do with political or economic ideology; they are really more like maurauding gangs.

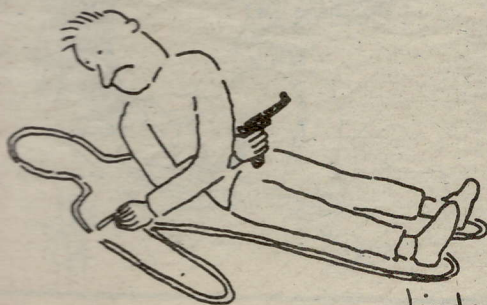
On top of these ills, Greece and other Third World nations often suffer from too much power concentrated at the top under which there are no strong political or judicial institutions. Parliaments tend to be rubber-stampers and the courts merely do precisely what the government tells them to do. Every time the government changes, institutions and legal bodies are purged and restaffed by the winning party's hacks, henchmen and flunkies.

But for such things to be going on in Greece is truly dismaying. Even so intelligent and entrepreneurial people as the Greeks can function only poorly under such a corrupt system which is not much better than neighboring Turkey's, a nation the Greeks hold in exceptionally low esteem.

Greece badly needs catharsis — a cleaning of its political Aegean Stables that are by now up to the rafters in corruption. Alas, there is no Hercules on the horizon capable of performing this daunting feat. Tired old Mitsotakis at 71 is not the man for the job. Nor is Papa Papandreou, who may shortly be corresponding with pal Pierre Trudeau from a comfortable jail cell.

If Greece is to become part of united Europe, it had better stop being so Levantine and start studying ancient Athenian history again.

Punch



Linden.