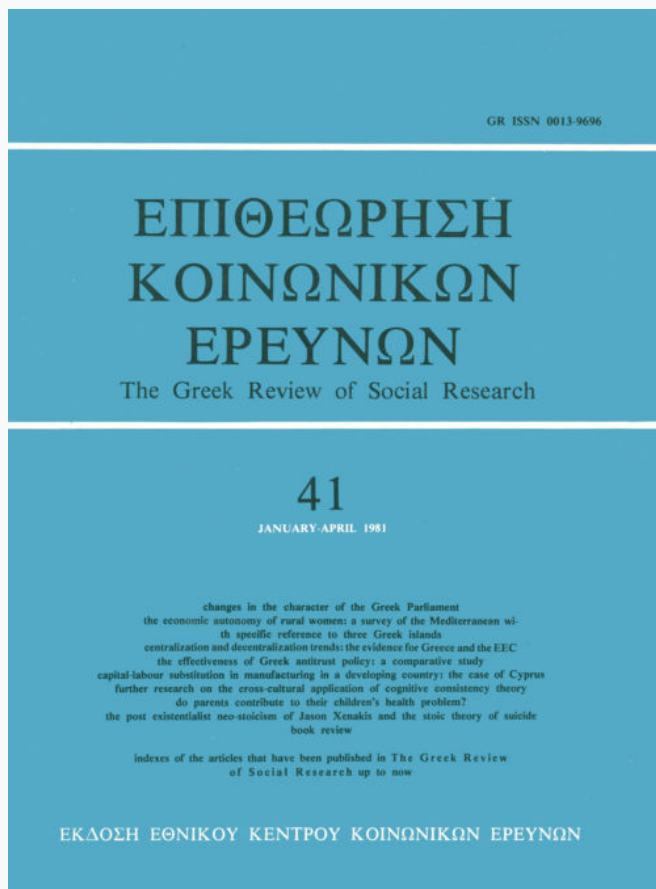


## The Greek Review of Social Research

Vol 41 (1981)

41



### Changes in the character of the Greek parliament

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doi: [10.12681/grsr.365](https://doi.org/10.12681/grsr.365)

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### To cite this article:

Dritsas, M. (1981). Changes in the character of the Greek parliament. *The Greek Review of Social Research*, 41, 2-5. <https://doi.org/10.12681/grsr.365>

# changes in the character of the Greek Parliament

by  
Margarita Dritsas

Most recent analyses of the electoral results of October 1981 in Greece have dealt with the strictly political level. What they lack, however, is a reference to the relationships that exist between the political level and the more generally social. Such an approach seems necessary if one intends to transcend the narrow political party problematic and goals in an attempt to understand political phenomena more fully. Thus, any changes in the character of the Greek Parliament should necessarily be contrasted to the existence of changes or the lack of them in Greek society. The question that should be asked furthermore is whether any changes in the Greek Parliament—supposing of course that changes have occurred and also supposing that there are correspondences between political institutions and social structure—indicates a more fundamental structural change of the Greek social formation or simply confirms a certain conjunctural turn in the character of the Greek society.

The following remarks may hopefully lead to some conclusions.

Parliament, as we know, constitutes part of the political system of any country and State. The political system, nevertheless, does not function in isolation from the rest of the political and state institutions and more particularly from the political parties. Although a detailed analysis will not be undertaken in these pages, it is admitted that the party structure and the electoral system which affects it to a large extent have an impact on the composition of parliament. Party organisation as well as the existence or absence of democratic selection of candidates no doubt affect the physiognomy of any political institution, including Parliament.

At the same time, both of these bodies, parties and parliament, articulate directly with the social system, or with civil society, which, in some way, they express and are supposed to serve.

Often, both Greek society and the Greek political system have been described as traditional formations dominated by clientelistic relations.<sup>1</sup> This statement is usually accompanied, implicitly or explicitly, by a series of other arguments: i.e. that traditional formations are gradually becoming modernised and they will some day resemble their western counterparts both economically, when capitalism will expand sufficiently, and politically, when agencies of national mass representation will be established. According to this view, Greece is at some transitional stage of development, whereby the traditional and the modern coexist. Clientelistic relations for instance and old fashioned parties of notables operate side by side with mass and class parties and organisations. Within parties, too, there are traditional and modern structures (e.g. congresses and charismatic leaders, local party organisations but also local clientele and chiefs, candidate selection processes that emphasise clientelistic qualities and overall party programmes). By extension,

1. Cf. M. Dritsas, «Political Clientelism, an Overview and an Alternative» in the *Greek Review of Social Research*, No. 36-37, 1979 (in Greek).

whatever changes have occurred in the character of Parliament are measured along the same continuum «traditional-modern» and the character or «sociography» of the Greek Parliament is supposed to reflect precisely this transition from one stage to another.

Leaving aside the many problems that the term «sociography» or «character» poses for the analyst, such as vagueness of the concept, lack of theoretical derivation, lack of explicative capacity, and accepting that it only refers to the characteristics of the individual deputies that make up the Greek Parliament, such as age, profession, class etc. it is arguable whether the changes mentioned by most analysts there are or in any case whether they are spectacular.

More substantially, the developmental approach is ahistorical and inadequate for the explanation of such phenomena.

Very schematically, we shall try to argue that Greece does indeed present features similar to those described by development theorists and is characterised by a certain structural fluidity not however, because she is gradually becoming westernised or economically advanced or because Greeks imitate more and more the Western culture but rather because right from the emergence of the country as an independent nation-state, or even long before, when Greece was integrated in the international system of the division of labour and later when the capitalist mode of production was introduced in the social formation and became dominant, Greece followed a course very different from that of the West. Certain dominant groups played a very important part in this process inside as well as outside Greece and the new economic structures articulated differently with the already existing modes of production. So then, the difference between Greece and the western models of development is not quantitative but rather qualitative. This becomes obvious if certain striking features of the country are considered. For instance, neither does the economy resemble that of the «advanced» industrialised world, since there are no large production units and in general the orientation of the economy is towards non-productive activities. One of the consequences of this structure is the inflation of the service sector. Of course the tertiary sector and especially that part belonging to the public sphere, was always very prominent in the Greek society. Moreover, the working class has been and still is relatively small and weak. Nor has the political trajectory of Greece followed the western pattern since the emergence of both the State and the political system has been very peculiar. It did not arise as the result of internal struggles between dominant groups but was rather imposed from abroad.

Greece, on the other hand, also differs from the so called «Third World». She never underwent direct colonial exploitation by an industrialised power. Whatever transfer of resources occurred was always done indirectly and has been mediated by various culturally related groups such as, for instance, the diaspora Greeks.

If on the other hand clientelist relations and «traditional» elements are considered, we find them well preserved even in the «advanced» countries. In the USA for example, the personalistic character of parties and of politics in general has been stressed by most analysts. In Japan, equally, it is precisely this traditional structure that supports the spectacular economic growth.

Clientelistic relations therefore do not necessarily disappear with economic growth, nor do they constitute really traditional phenomena.

In Greece, their insistence can be explained in terms of the persistence of certain structural and historical features of the Greek social formation, such as the character and history of the Greek State, say, and the particular orientation of the Greek economy.

The concept of clientelism when used to denote the dyadic face to face relations between deputies-politicians/ candidates on the one hand, and voters on the other is that it ignores the possibility that similar relations may exist at a higher party level, within other political institutions and even outside the strictly political system. Even if clientelism appears reduced within Parliament, in fact it may simply mean that it is more difficult to detect such relations, especially if they are displaced towards other centres within the state as well as within the parties.

In other words, any probable change in the character of the Greek parliament as far as clientelistic mechanisms are concerned may not indicate decisive transformations particularly if these mechanisms still exist elsewhere and especially within the state bureaucracy.

This hypothesis about the state bureaucracy and the inherent clientelist networks is made more plausible if certain historical facts are considered:

1. The Greek state came from abroad and from outside the Greek society and was imposed on the latter. It has always been overinflated regardless of the fact that it never fulfilled the functions that would have justified such an inflation. It constituted rather a mechanism for professional employment.<sup>2</sup> This characteristic is still prominent today.

2. With the post-war international re-arrangements and even since before the war, when Greece was placed deeper into the international community on the one hand, and because of the weakness of the dominant social groups to play their historical role on the other, there was a need for strong state interventionism. Consequently, the power of the executive was reinforced at the expense of the legislative and the state bureaucracy acquired an increased autonomy vis a vis certain social groups but also, and more particularly, vis a vis the legislative institutions. At the same time, the need for rational planning created additional contradictions and pressures, to the extent that there is now the phenomenon of the appointment of technocrats—who are indispensable in the view of the new functions of the

2. Cf. C. Tsoukalas, *State and Social Development*, Athens: Themelio 1981 (in Greek).

state—carried out not in a rational way or in accordance with meritocratic criteria but rather very much like before, on the basis of personal relations, acquaintances and favours.

3. At no time in the past have there been any agencies mediating between the state and civil society and safeguarding freedom and autonomy of the citizens. Such agencies might have neutralised clientelist relations. On the contrary, whatever pressure groups exist have been created with a strong dose of state activism or through political party initiative for purposes other than the defence of the interests of their members. These agencies moreover have been also characterised by strong personalistic elements.

Besides, the method of operation, the hierarchical organisation and the internal regulations of state services, accompanied by the rather low salaries, over-manning, and concealed underemployment, undoubtedly underpin and strengthen patronage networks to the extent of reaching extreme cases such as «bribery» which often supplements civil servants' salaries.

If the social structure is analysed now, certain constant characteristics may be discerned which have been preserved almost throughout modern Greek history.

Greece, since its inception as a modern nation-state has had a strong petit bourgeois component which was reinforced with subsequent developments. The overinflated state on the one hand and the ever existing multitude of small producers and merchants on the other—despite the penetration and dominance of the capitalist mode of production—accompanied by small land-ownership, constituted the peculiarity of the Greek social formation. Besides, the ideology of mobility, the general post-war rise in the living standards, the safety valve of emigration when Europe was experiencing its economic boom and finally the imitation of foreign consumers patterns reinforced further the petit bourgeois character of the country.

At the same time, the fundamental orientation of capital away from productive activities and towards speculative short-term high-profit operations has led neither to serious industrialisation nor to an increase of the working class.

Therefore, despite some conjunctural changes—accentuation of prominent features—it is reasonable to argue that no substantial transformation has occurred in the Greek social formation.

Given now that the dominance of particular groups is not only expressed by their presence in the political institutions, but that it runs through the whole structure of relations and the logic of the state in a capitalist society, we should not expect to find significant changes in the composition of Parliament.<sup>3</sup> Having said that, however, we must also admit that certain traditional characteristics of the Greek Parliament are still quite prominent. Reference is made here to the petit bourgeois component and the male dominance.

3. Cf. debate between R. Miliband and N. Poulantzas about the nature of the capitalist state.

These two features are also very strong in the Greek society at large. There is therefore a certain correspondence between Parliament and society.

The Greek Parliament is still filled with the ever existing lawyers, professionals and technocrats, though the latter are now more numerous than in the past. All three categories nevertheless share various characteristics, i.e. their source of income and the way they appropriate revenues and surplus value. They are mainly small property owners, living in urban centres and they seldom form part of the salaried population.<sup>4</sup>

The second indicator of the lack of change is female participation. Although women make up 52% of the population of Greece and in spite of the fact that ever higher numbers of women enter the world of work and education, many among them—and society in general—consider their occupation temporary, inferior to that of men and inconsiderable. Although women in Greece have always worked, either in the fields, factories, offices or at home, they still occupy the traditionally «female» jobs—nurses, teachers, secretaries etc. They are often subject to unfair discrimination precisely because the mentality of people has changed so very little. If political representation and parliamentary participation is looked at, it is noted that only very small progress has been made. In 1977 there were 10 women MPs. In 1981, they went up to 13. With the exception of Britain, nevertheless, Greece still has the lowest percentage of women in politics in Europe, a mere 4.3%.

Many analyses of the electoral results of October 1981 stressed the total average rate of women candidates for Parliament—9.12%, or 268 candidates for Parliament.<sup>5</sup> Yet, this calculation is misleading because it includes the mass of women figuring on the voting slips of small and electorally weak parties. These parties were used mostly as consciousness raising groups attempting to sensitise people to the many problems women face, but not as a mechanism of electoral representation. Within the larger parties, in contrast, especially in PASOK and New Democracy, women candidates were a small minority—8 out of a total of 369 in the case of ND or 2.6% and 4.8% in the case of PASOK.<sup>6</sup> If the basic characteristics of women candidates are examined, it is reasonable to hypothesise that the choice and composition of party lists were made with clearly narrow criteria and purely electoral considerations. Most of the women elected in Parliament, and many of the candidates as well, were distinguished for their resistance action against the military dictatorship; they were thus characterised by a considerable degree of «heroism», an element important for image building and vote catching. Heroism, however, is also considered a male feature par ex-

4. Cf. A.I.D. Metaxas, «Biosocial and Cultural Map of Parliament, 1966-1974-1977» in *Political Science Review*, No. 1, 1981 (in Greek).

5. Cf. D.G. Tsaoussis, «Elections and Political Tradition» in *Political Science Review*, No. 2, 1982 (in Greek).

6. A. Giotopoulou-Marangopoulou, «After the Elections» in *Women's Struggle*, No. 12 October-December 1981 (in Greek).

cellence and has been a basic element of the general ideology and value system in Greece. A second dominant element of women MPs is that they all come from important and influential political families with more or less stable clientele. In other words, no change has occurred in the way candidates are selected by parties nor in what people look for in MPs.

If, therefore, little has changed in the Greek society and the State on the one hand, and in the candidate

recruitment procedure and electoral law on the other, the type of MPs elected cannot differ substantially from that of their predecessors.

The general conclusion must be that unless a substantial transformation occurs in the social structure that sets the parameters within which the different parts of the political system are articulated and operate, no important change can be expected within the political system and hence Parliament as well.