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PEOPLE TO WATCH—YUIN

GREECE'S MAN OF THE CENTRE

From Our Athens Correspondent

"I am tired of seeing the public relations man to others. I want to work for myself." Spiros Markezinis loves paradox and a talk with him is an invigorating experience. We were comfortably introduced in the leather armchair of his spacious study in a penthouse apartment in central Athens. The cushion, perforated by signs from a thimbleful of Turkish coffee, had been: "Are you likely to cooperate with General Grivas in politics?" When Grivas emerged as an aspirant politician everybody thought that a repetition of the Papagos story was imminent. Why has Markezinis would reach and guide this new political upheaval? In fact, an alliance between the two men might have materialized on many other occasions. But Markezinis is tired of watching other leaders for power. He wants power himself.

Speaking to Markezinis one gains the impression that he must have pondered on almost every subject under the sun. It seems remarkable that he has managed to accumulate such wealth of varied knowledge at the age of 31. He is equally skilled in an argument designed to convince Markezinis from speculations of political immaturity as in discussing the comparative merits of his archaic and classical studies, or the specific reasons why Greece should not join the European Common Market.



When conversations turned to the subject of the growing influx of rural population into urban centres—a disturbing feature of the political under-employment in the country—he says: "I have been his architect the last number in light of prop." "But I am not a lover of urbanization!" he exclaims.

Markezinis replies for surprise and immediacy he begins with such scolding statements: "There is unaccounted satisfaction in his fiery eyes as he passes to proving his response. Then, he explains, he is the driving force behind a long-term plan whereby villages would gradually disappear and merge into large urban units, large urban, thanks to the progress of industrialization, farmers would be able to work rationally in the country, but also enjoy the amenities of city life.

WITTY STYLE

Short, with protruding jaw-bones and a contour of hair so sharply delineated that it fascinates onlookers, Markezinis's appearance has little charm. His staccato voice disarmingly strives to keep pace with the racing of his thoughts. However, his dynamic intellect and practical culture make up for those disadvantages. As a political orator he would never have survived but for an unusually lucid, vivid, and witty challenging style which makes his views intelligible, and at the same time arouses his audience, whether in Parliament or at a village gathering. He will often refer to himself in the third person.

An aristocratic family tradition in politics, dating back to his great-grandfather, coupled with his father's firm belief that aristocracy was no fit profession for a politician, led Spiros Markezinis to politics by way of the legal profession, the customary path in Greece. He made his first public speech at the age of 17 in Athens, in support of his father's candidature for Parliament. His first public post was in 1936 when he was chosen by King George to be his legal adviser. He played a leading part in the campaign for the restoration of the monarchy after the war.

This activity was the gain, wide open for his entrance into politics. Since 1946, when he was first elected deputy—for the volcanic island of Santorini, so symbolic of his temperament—he has served intermittently in various Cabinets. Each time, however, the impact of his presence became more strongly felt. His great test came in the 1956 when, by inducing the late Field-Marshal Papagos to go into politics, he contributed to the return of political stability which ultimately led to a salutary change in the Greek approach to affairs.

As Minister of Co-ordination he initiated a vigorous economic policy starting with a bold abandonment of the drachma, which set the foundation of a healthy development. He had said at the time: "No one likes a surgeon until after the operation succeeds." Great traders who

had then cursed Markezinis for the lesson he had caused their private economies, will now praise him for the operation saved Greece's economy.

It was no accident that Markezinis was the real power in the Government then, when people began speaking of "a Markezinis cabinet under Field-Marshal Papagos," a clash between these two ambitious personalities became inevitable. An insignificant issue provided his independence, resigned in 1954. It has been said that, if he had shown less impetuosity and greater interest, he would have become Prime Minister on Papagos's death a year and a half later. He disagrees. He feels that six years spent in meditation and study have been of enormous benefit. "I feel I have reached a higher degree of political maturity than ever before," he will declare with a discerning absence of modesty.

MANY RIVALS

Markezinis leads to-day the eminent "Progressive Party" which is represented in Parliament by himself and only two other deputies. Symbolically, perhaps, they are both detractors from other parties—one from the left, the other from the right. In the effort to create a new force in Greece, which would fill the vacuum caused by the disavowal of the centre parties, and stand between right and extreme left, Markezinis is a heterogeneous force. His object is to start the change of existing attitudes of the Government, but also to approve the right wing of a facile exploitation of the fear of Communism.

He has many rivals in the field. There are General Grivas and many others young and old politicians who are aware of the enlightening character of a well-organized opposition party. The only objection to their Markezinis seems to know exactly what he wants, when the others are still groping in a haze of conflicting personal ambitions and unclarified intentions.

Nothing could destroy the confidence that the formation of a coalition of a halfhearted "new political movement" by 10 provincial and capable deputies who, like Markezinis's opponents, are in search not of a position but of a leader. So many of the politicians mentioned in their programmes appeared to be identical with those advocated by Markezinis that, had it not for the personal conduct of individual aspirants, the existence of two groupings on two platforms would seem to be an inescapable political placement.

Markezinis is making all his chances on the success of international affairs. He claims proudly: "Of course, if there's war, I lose." After a much-anticipated visit to Mr. Khrushchev in Moscow last May he announced his "Third Position" in foreign affairs—an attempt to strike a balance between the positions of the ruling right wing, with its "neo-oriental-nation" complex, and its fears of the domestic effects of world affairs, and the suspect extreme left wing, with its secret loyalties, its unbridled demagoguery and chauvinistic pose. Markezinis favors bold Greek initiatives for divorce, aiming to turn the Balkans into the testing ground for coexistence. His plan for a de-nuclearized zone in the Balkans, he states, would have put to a real test Communist sincerity; the Communists would either agree to a full-scale control system (which, if achieved, could have served as a pattern for controlled, general disarmament) or expose eventual Communist dishonesty. He preaches clear economic ties with the east, but offers Greece's devoted allegiance to the west.

INTERNATIONAL

Among Greek political leaders Markezinis is one of the few whose political thoughts are on today's scene on international background. He is a personal supporter of British initiatives in the field of economic relations and has professed admiration for Mr. Macmillan. As a strong advocate of European unity, Markezinis feels that the division of Europe at a time when large ethnic blocks are forming in the world might prove to be as dangerous as the disunity among Italian city-states in the early medieval century.

One cannot help thinking, however, that, more than his commendable approach to politics, it is his forceful personality and unquestioned political courage which will be Spira Markezinis's most assets in his struggle to reconvert the centre by gaining the confidence of the common man.