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London Trial Highlights Alleged Soviet Meddling in Greece

LONDON—Under the British legal system publishers rarely fight libel suits when a settlement is possible, for the laws put the burden of proof on the newspaper accused of defamation. So when an organization such as the Economist Newspapers Ltd. goes to the mat on a libel action you can expect the significance of the case transcends the cash value of some wounded ego. The trial of such a case has begun this week before the High Court in London, where George Bobolas, principal owner of Ethnos, a mass-circulation left-wing newspaper in Greece, is charging he was libeled by a 1982 article in the Economist Foreign Report. The article stated

these articles are simply picked up and reprinted without alteration or any attempt to disguise the source. Others are purported to be written by "staff correspondents" from various locations and contain passages that duplicate material from the Soviet press.

This mix has been packaged in a commercially competitive format that has boosted the paper's popularity. Since its debut in 1981, Ethnos has soared to a circulation of 180,000, the largest in Greece. Patterned after the British tabloids, it combines gossip, sports, sex, crime and color pictures with the most outlandish anti-West fabrications. Ethnos has charged, for example, that the U.S. killed 2,000 people on the first day of the Grenada invasion (U.S. figures for the total number of people killed in the whole action: 45 Grenadians, 24 Cubans, 18 Americans); that the Afghan rebels are "paid murderers who commit horrendous crimes against the unarmed Afghan people, crimes of which even the Nazis at Auschwitz . . . would be jealous," and that a Star Wars payload blew Challenger apart.

nikos and future Ethnos editor Alexander Filipopoulos. They met with the then Soviet propaganda chief Konstantin Chernenko and with copyright officials Boris Pankin and Vasily Sitnikov. The latter two have been identified in John Barron's 1974 book "KGB: The Secret Work of Soviet Agents" and by other Western sources and Soviet defectors as director and deputy director respectively of the KGB disinformation department. The two Greeks went home with an agreement to publish the "Great Soviet Encyclopedia" in Greece.

Mr. Yannikos has said that Ethnos was launched using royalties from this venture with the Soviets. Details of this financial arrangement began to filter out when Mr. Yannikos talked to Mr. Anastasi, a correspondent for the London Daily Telegraph and the New York Times, after Mr. Yannikos was squeezed out of the venture.

Disclosures during the trial could prove significant both for Greek public opinion and for the country's image abroad. That image has eroded under Mr. Papandreou's radical Socialist rule, during which Greece has sought to obstruct the interests of the West in general and of the Atlantic alliance in particular, while supporting Soviet foreign policy on issues ranging from Afghanistan to Poland to arms control. If the Ethnos trial exposes Soviet infiltration of the Greek press, Greeks and foreigners may find the facts sobering.

Meanwhile, things are moving toward the moderates in Greece. Mr. Papandreou's Panhellenic Socialist Movement, known as Pasok, performed poorly in October's local elections. The conservative New Democracy Party won mayoralties in Piraeus, Athens and Salonika. This undoubtedly was on the premier's mind when he told Parliament last month that he was ready to negotiate a new agreement for American military bases in Greece and that he now wants to stay in NATO—not, mind you, to help defend the West but to protect Greece from Turkey. Mr. Papandreou has also recently expressed support for Greece's membership in the European Community. In the second shuffle of his government since the elections, Mr. Papandreou last week dumped three left-wingers from his cabinet. All of which suggests that you still can't fool all of the people—not all the time—even with a left-wing newspaper.

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Europe

By Peter Keresztes

that Mr. Bobolas had launched Ethnos with Soviet money and implied that the paper was a Soviet propaganda mouthpiece.

The Economist of course is expected to defend the basic assertion in the Economist Intelligence Unit's Foreign Report that Mr. Bobolas started Ethnos with a \$1.8 million subsidy from the Soviet Union. Furthermore, the British publisher should be in a position to back up the broader implications of the article that according to Ethnos's own interpretation allege the plaintiffs "were not part of a free press but rather the mouthpiece of a communist and totalitarian state's propaganda machine." In this defense, articles in Ethnos could be revealingly compared with those in official and semiofficial Soviet organs.

The case represents the first opportunity to examine Soviet methods of subversion under the rigors of an open court in a major Western democracy. The trial could have implications for politics in Greece, where the coming years are likely to see a showdown between left and right. More generally, the case, which is expected to take six weeks, will be closely watched by all in the West who are concerned with the growing sophistication of the Soviet Union's propaganda offensive.

"If the Economist can prove its case, it will be of major significance, because it will throw wide open the study of Soviet infiltration of the Western press," says Paul Anastasi, who has written a book on the subject and has himself been involved in a protracted litigation with Ethnos.

Striking parallels have long been apparent between what the Soviet press prints and what shows up in Ethnos. Ethnos regularly disseminates articles that replicate material in Soviet organs such as Izvestia, Pravda, Tass and New Times. Some of

Ethnos, moreover, is different from the rest of the Greek leftist press. Most leftist Greek papers are primarily nationalistic; the "Turkish threat" is always a big issue, but the price of shoes and the numbers of jobless also matter. In contrast, Ethnos appears to follow the Soviet line even to the point of ignoring Greece's socialist premier, Andreas Papandreou, when his words or deeds seem to stray from the Kremlin formula. Ethnos's competitors don't follow its suggestions to either align Greece with the Soviet bloc or Finlandize it, nor do they buy its argument that the Soviets and the Greeks together could control the Dardanelles.

Ethnos's staff of correspondents (mostly non-Greek) includes a number with a history of Soviet or communist links. The paper's U.S. correspondent, Carl Marzani, for example, is a former U.S. State Department employee who served three years in prison for not disclosing communist activities in the 1940s in the wartime OSS and the State Department; Ethnos's U.K. correspondent, Stanley Harrison, was until 1981 chief sub-editor of the Communist Party paper in Britain, the Morning Star. Neither reads Greek. Ethnos's foreign editor, Dinos Tsakotelis, spent the worst of the Cold War years at the Czechoslovak propaganda agency, Telepress. Cyprus correspondent Akis Fantis has been editing the pro-Soviet Cyprus Communist Party paper.

The Ethnos affair goes back to June 1978, when Mr. Bobolas, a wealthy right-winger who was once singled out by the ruling colonels for an award, went to Moscow with Greek Communist Yannis Yan-