

THE COLONELS' COUP

The elections scheduled for May 28, 1967 were widely expected to be won by the reasonably centrist party of George Papandreou, Sr., but it was also expected that it would have to form a coalition government with a leftist party, and that Papandreou's stridently anti-American son Andreas (a former U.S. citizen and Harvard graduate) would be too influential. At least that was the excuse.

But on the morning of April 21, the tanks rolled into the streets of Athens as a group of colonels moved to take over the Defense Ministry, the parliament, the royal palace, communication centers, and arrest all the leading politicians, including the acting Prime Minister. (Phillips Talbot, the U.S. ambassador, denounced "a rape of democracy"; the local CIA chief reportedly asked "How can you rape a whore?") King Constantine refused to mobilize against the coup, and, with his residence circled by tanks, after initially arguing with the junta, finally swore them in officially as the new government. (The figurehead civilian premier was Konstantinos Kollias, the meddling attorney general played by Georges Rouquier in the film.) The King eventually bitterly regretted this decision, and in December mounted a counter-coup that was such a flop, he had to flee the country.

Colonel George Papadopoulos eventually emerged as Prime Minister and became Regent. His reign was marked by high rates of economic growth, the abolition of most civil rights (albeit with a crazy quilt of loopholes), internal anti-junta demonstrations (including an assassination attempt), the revolt of a destroyer and its crew, international condemnation (but with tacit support by the U.S. as a Cold War ally), and a slow movement toward "democratization."

The end eventually came not with a bang but a whimper. Dimitrios Ioannidis, a hardliner even by the standards of the junta, disgruntled by the tentative liberalization, overthrew Papadopoulos in November 1973, destroying whatever ideological framework it retained. Working behind the scenes, he overthrew Archbishop Makarios, the President of Cyprus, triggering a takeover by Turkey of the northern part of the island. This fiasco lost him the support of senior officers, and the junta-appointed President moved to form a national unity government, including legitimate old-line politicians. Former Premier Constantine Karamanlis flew in from Parisian exile and was sworn in again; his party then won the November 1974 general election.

In 1975, 20 members of the junta were tried for high treason and insurrection. Four leaders, including Papadopoulos and Ioannidis, were sentenced to death, a sentence commuted to life imprisonment. Papadopoulos died in 1999; Ioannidis remains in prison.

BANNED BY THE JUNTA (listed at end of film)

Long hair	Edward Albee
Mini-skirts	Harold Pinter
Sophocles	Writing that Socrates was homosexual
Tolstoy	The Bar Association
Mark Twain (partially)	Learning Russian
Euripides	Learning Bulgarian
Russian-style toasts	Freedom of the press
Aragon	The New International Encyclopedia
Trotsky	Sociology
Strikes	Beckett
Freedom to unionize	Dostoevsky
Lurçat *	Chekhov
Aeschylus	Gorky (and all the Russians)
Aristophanes	Who's Who
Ionesco	Modern music
Sartre	Pop music (M. Theodorakis)
The Beatles	New math
Peace Movements	

...and the letter Z, which means "HE LIVES" in ancient Greek

*André Lurçat (1894-1970), a modernist architect who was active in the rebuilding of French cities after World War II.