

# PRESS RELEASE

## ECA MISSION TO GREECE

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### CHRONICLE AMERICAN AID ACHIEVEMENTS IN GREEK LABOR MOVEMENT

ATHENS -- Following is the first of a series of weekly articles summing up achievements of American Aid in various spheres of the national recovery effort in Greece. The series will cover most of the fields in which the United States has tried to assist Greece toward national self-sufficiency, from the end of World War II to the beginning of 1952. This article concerns the field of labor and manpower.

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In July, 1948, when the American Mission for Aid to Greece (AMAG), the agency which had administered the Truman Doctrine, was officially succeeded by the Marshall Plan, the AMAG labor advisers already had managed to persuade Greek labor and industry to cooperate, in November, 1947, on a collective bargaining agreement which formed the basis for a new national wage policy.

The wage situation throughout Greece had been chaotic before this policy was established. Few, if any, attempts had been made to comply with the previous nebulous "wage policy", although one was formally on the books. The new agreement, freely arrived at after negotiation between organized labor and industry, brought order to the wage picture, and was used thereafter by the Greek Government and the Marshall Plan Mission in consistent efforts to maintain wage levels, although improved production and the rising cost of living have since resulted in approval of certain wage increases. Meanwhile, continuous effort was applied to foster genuine free collective bargaining practices within the general framework of economic stabilization.

The labor movement in Greece is comparatively new. Like the labor movements of all nations, the Greek effort has had to overcome almost every conceivable obstacle. These barriers included employers' opposition, a characteristic common to the development of free trade unionism in all nations. There was also political interference from both left and right. And there was communist infiltration and intrigue.

But in addition to these "normal" manifestations, the Greek labor movement also underwent four years of dictatorship in which the movement was assimilated into the apparatus of the State. An all-powerful government dictated the wages, working conditions and social security of the working class, consulting labor representatives only cursorily.

On top of all this, the Greek labor movement was held down by conditions peculiar to Greece, the accidents of history, a decade of wars external and internal, wherein Greek workers were forced to endure first enemy occupation, second a bloody communist attempt to seize power in 1944, and thirdly, years of rebellion carried on by guerilla bands.

Labor personnel of the various American Missions, recruited from American Federation of Labor (AFL) and Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) unions, have come to appreciate these conditions and have never ceased to marvel at the vitality and energy of the Greek working class in surmounting the hazards of history.

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American labor advisers worked continuously with the General Confederation of Greek Labor (GSEE) throughout the entire period. With strong support from Greek unionists of all shades of opinion, and assisted by labor colleagues from other free nations who came frequently to Greece to assist in specific problems, the American labor men were instrumental in helping the Greek labor movement to a more sound, constructive and democratic role in the national life.

The labor specialists of the Mission helped resolve wage and hour controversies, recommended modern labor legislation and assisted labor and management in planning the increased productivity which all factions conceded was the great hope of industrial prosperity for Greece. At the same time, the Mission labor men pressed forward with tasks which on the surface were dull or routine, but which experience had proved to be indispensable to real labor progress in all lands. These routine but difficult tools to labor progress, faltering in Greece after a decade of disaster, included a comprehensive statistical system, efficient programs of apprentice training and vocational education, and a social security program which would provide real benefits to the working people who contributed to it.

STATISTICS. One of the major factors retarding the development of the Greek labor movement was the lack of comprehensive and reliable statistics. Mission labor experts cooperated in 1949 with the GSEE and the Greek Ministry of Labor in preparing and publishing "Cost of Living Expenditures -- Worker Families in Greece." This survey, first of its kind in the Balkans, entailed personal interviews with 500 selected families in six major industrial cities. The survey later was expanded to seven more cities, and a follow-up survey of the original group of families took place in the spring of 1950.

The American Mission developed a Cost of Living Index, and has compiled periodical statistical data and special studies in labor statistics which for the first time in Greek history have given impartial and factual backing to the needs and aspirations of labor. Previously the impulses of the Greek working class, due to lack of data, had been forced into purely emotional or political campaigns which often collapsed for lack of foundation. In cooperation with the Ministry of Labor, the Mission laid the groundwork for systematic collection and analysis of labor statistics and fostered legislation, since adopted, which created a Division of Labor Statistics within the Ministry.

APPRENTICE TRAINING. The war wrought havoc with various programs for training young Greek workers to assume larger responsibilities and more advanced skills. Consequently, an American specialist from the Bureau of Apprenticeship of the U.S. Department of Labor was engaged by the Mission to help develop a comprehensive apprentice training program. He helped prepare legislation which later was passed by the Greek Parliament to create an apprentice training section within the Ministry of Labor. An increasing number of young men now are hard at work in factories throughout Greece, under the guidance of wiser, older heads, learning the technical proficiency which will enable them to better themselves and increase the industrial potential of the nation. With systematic on-the-job instruction, and classes after hours, a large group of youngsters is fast moving up the ladder to qualify as journeymen craftsmen, a goal which would have taken many years to attain under the previous system.

A key step in the program was achieved when a joint team of labor, management and government representatives went to the United States under the Marshall Plan technical assistance program to study American methods of apprentice training. On their return, this team took an active role in helping develop training procedures in Greece. Picture slides taken on their trip were an effective means of illustrating lectures, and of arousing interest in a modern program in Greece.

With funds furnished by the Mission, the Ministry of Labor obtained 10 movie projectors and four slide projectors and also bought 150 training films and numerous slides from the U.S. Office of Education to show to groups of

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Greek learners. Apprentices in Greece now are registered under a standardized apprenticeship system patterned after that of the U.S. Department of Labor.

VOCATIONAL TRAINING. Once a modern vocational educational program had been organized, project agreements were executed between the American Mission and the Greek Government providing for rehabilitation of 28 vocational schools with Marshall Plan funds. By the end of 1951, counterpart funds of 20,585,000,000 drachmas (\$1,373,333) had gone into physical reconstruction of these schools and \$2,300,000 in foreign exchange had been spent for modern equipment to be used in training students. Throughout Greece these schools gave first emphasis to such trades as woodworking, automotive maintenance, metal work, and electrical engineering. Girl students benefited by an additional \$50,000 spent for typewriters and office equipment for commercial schools, and sewing machines and other domestic science equipment for home economics institutions.

SOCIAL INSURANCE. Under the AMAG program in the early days of American aid, the U.S. consultants who had been asked to survey social insurance in Greece were soon convinced that the program was far from organized. Two experts from the U.S. Social Security Administration accordingly were brought to Greece to make a thorough study, which they completed just as the Marshall Plan began. On their recommendation, the Greek Government employed an American expert to help reorganize the administration of IKA -- the Greek national insurance system. During 1949, this specialist acted as actual administrator of IKA and many changes were made. IKA since has been returned to purely Greek administration, but an American adviser remained through the interim period to help develop and expand the program on a sound actuarial basis, and to prepare plans for an integrated and improved system of social security which would include not only IKA, but various other independent funds as well.

STRENGTHENING OF THE LABOR MOVEMENT. And yet, although American advisers insist strongly on the necessity of such technical measures, they feel that their most lasting and important achievements have been in areas which their Greek friends also feel instinctively are more vital and immediate, the zones of organization and international solidarity. The Americans aimed their main efforts toward strengthening the labor movement within Greece and helping coordinate Greek labor with the free trade union movement of the west.

Throughout the Marshall Plan period, extending into the present, and at least partially due to the efforts of American labor advisers, communist attempts to control Greek labor have been crushed at every turn by democratic procedure within the labor movement itself. As 1952 began, communist influence in Greek unions was confined to a minority in a few unions, clearly delineated, out of power, and isolated from mass support. In every single union in which the struggle for control had come to issue, the communists had suffered humiliating loss.

The major and decisive victory was achieved in September, 1950, in the Tenth Panhellenic Labor Congress, organized with the technical help of Mission advisers and with the ardent support of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions. On the one hand, the Congress adopted a democratic constitution providing for complete reorganization of the Greek trade union movement on western patterns -- a reorganization accomplished at the expense of the communists who were defeated ignominiously in their efforts to resist the process. On the other hand, the true independence and maturity of the Greek labor movement, after years of governmental control was nowhere more clearly shown than in adoption of a democratic platform which stoutly demanded that the Government abolish the previous system of compulsory union dues in favor of a voluntary system, and pressed for repeal of legislation which gave the Ministers of Finance and Labor the power to set wages.

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The GSEE continued to cooperate during 1951 with the ICFTU in developing international free trade unionism, by participating in several intra-European meetings and conferences, and also by adopting a number of measures designed to strengthen labor organization within Greece.

One such development, pushed hard by Mission labor advisers, was the organization within the Greek labor movement of the federation type of structure. Under this plan, workers in one industry, such as textile factories or flour mills, allied themselves together according to principles developed at the Tenth Panhellenic Labor Congress. Most significant recent example of this tendency was the formation of the Federation of Textile Workers which held its first convention in October, 1951. A number of similar groups were, in various stages of organization at the same time.

As 1952 began, the Greek labor movement gave further evidence of progress in the highly successful meeting of the National Council during January. This organization, composed of the top trade union officials throughout Greece, meets annually to consider the progress of the trade union movement and to develop major policy decisions.

In the entire history of Greek unionism, it is unlikely that there has ever before occurred such a display of unity and strength as was shown during this 1952 session. There were differences of opinion among trade union leaders, and organized groups combated each other on questions of policy. But throughout the conference, these differences emphasized rather than detracted from the essential strength and unity of the trade union movement which the delegates represented. Greek unionists, who closely watched the three-day sessions and took part actively in all shades of opinion which the union leaders represented, were convinced finally that the Greek labor movement had come of age, had become a powerful champion of democratic ideals, and had emerged as a major bulwark against communist influences.

Another indication of the maturity and responsibility of the Greek labor movement during 1951 was the manner in which it presented its views strongly and systematically on all matters affecting the national economy. As the year ended, Greek unionism had made its ideas felt throughout the nation. Political parties and groupings of all shades of opinion, which in years past had often paid only lip service to the needs and desires of the Greek working people, were giving serious consideration to the proposals advocated by organized labor. As 1951 ended, these programs grouped themselves around two main issues:

First, the wage-price problem. Labor was concerned with the rise of prices and living expenses, contending that wage changes had not kept pace with the rate at which prices of necessities had increased. Labor maintained, along with similar organized workers' groups in most other western nations, that wage adjustments were necessary. Labor also contended that prices must be frozen and held in line, so that the working people of Greece, organized or unorganized, industrial or agricultural, could obtain fair value in goods and services for their wages.

Second, Greek labor was an earnest advocate of a workable rationing system, whereby every Greek could obtain his basic necessities of food at fixed and reasonable prices, through a Government-administered program of distribution.

The organized labor movement in Greece was vocal and insistent on both these points, and on many others which they felt affected the interests of the working class. And as 1952 began, all Greek political parties were giving careful attention to their views. This in itself represented a major achievement in the development of Greek labor in the national scene.