PRESS RELEASE
ECA MISSION TO GREECE

No. 1002

ATHENS -- Following is the first of a series of weekly articles running up achievements of American aid in various phases of the national recovery effort in Greece. The series will form part of the file 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 1962. This article concerns the field of labor and manpower.

In July, 1946, when the American Mission for Aid to Greece (AMAGC), the agency which had administered the Truman Doctrine, was officially succeeded by the Marshall Plan, the AMAGC labor adviser already had arranged 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 shortsighted before this policy was established. Fierce, if any, attempts had been made to comply with the previous annual "wage policy," although one was formally on the books. The new agreement, finally 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 also resulted in approval of certain wage increases. Nonetheless, 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 unions 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 was held down by conditions peculiar to Greece, the accidents of history, a decade of war, the 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 guerrilla bands.

Labor personnel of the various American Missions, dedicated to American Federation of Labor (AFL) and Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) unions, have done to appreciate these conditions and have never ceased to marvel at the vitality and energy of the Greek working class in assuming the burdens of history.
American labor advisors worked continuously with the General Confederation of Greek Labor (GSEE) throughout the entire period. With strong support from Greek unions 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 many and hard 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 labored on several fronts with tasks which at first seemed dull or routine, but which experience has proved to be indispensable to real labor progress in all lands. These routine but difficult tasks to labor progress, following in Greece after a decade of dictators, 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.

QUALITY. One of the major factors retarding the development of the Greek labor movement was the lack of comprehensive and reliable statistics. Mission labor experts considered in 1949 with the GSEE and the Greek Ministry of Labor in preparing and publishing "Cost of Living Surveys -- 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 lasted three weeks in each city, 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 periodic statistical data and special studies in labor statistics which for the first time in Greek history have given essential and factual holding to the needs and aspirations of labor. Previously the populace of the Greek workers knew, 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 factual legislation, since adopted, which created a Division of Labor Statistics within the Ministry.

APPRENTICE TRAINING. The mission brought home with various programs for training young Greek workers to acquire larger mass-utilitarian and more advanced skills. Consequently, in January 1951, a Greek Ministry from the Bureau of Apprenticeship of the U.S. Department of Labor was engaged by the Mission to help establish a comprehensive apprentice training program. This helped prepare legislation which later was passed by the Greek Parliament to create a new apprenticeship training system within the Ministry of Labor. An innovative number of young men were sent to work in factories throughout Greece, under the guidance of skilled, older hands, learning the trade's proficiencies 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 young men is now well on the way to qualify as journeymen craftsmen, a goal which would have taken many years to achieve under the previous system.

A key step in the process was entered 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. Upon their return, this team took an active role in helping design the training procedure in Greece. Pictures taken on their trip were an effective means of illustrating lectures, and of creating interest in a modern program in Greece.

With funds furnished by the Mission, the Ministry of Labor obtained 18 movie projectors and 24 slide projectors and also bought 216 training films and numerous slides from the U.S. Office of Education to show to groups of
Greece Insures. Expenses of Greek school registration are 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 established, project agreements were executed between the American Mission and the Greek Government providing for rehabilitation of 26 vocational schools with Marshall Plan funds. By the end of 1961, contracts funded $9,684,000,000 dollars ($2,727,520) had gone into physical reconstruction of these schools and $7,367,000 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, mechanics maintenance, metal work, and electrical engineering. Girls students benefited by an additional $60,000 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 Marshall plan in the early days of American aid, the U.S. Missions which had been asked to survey social insurance in Greece were soon convinced that the program was too free expanded. 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 ended. On their recommendation, the Greek government employed an American expert to help reorganize the administration of IIA — the Greek national insurance system. During 1960, this specialist acted as actual administrator of IIA and many changes were made. IIA since has been returned to purely Greek administration, but the American expert remained through the interim period to help develop and expand the plan on a sound national basis, and to prepare plans for an integrated and improved system of social security which would include not only IIA, but various other independent funds as well.

REINFORCEMENT OF THE LABOR MOVEMENT. And yet, although American advisors insist strongly on the necessity of such technical measures, they feel that their most heartening and important achievement here has been in areas where their Greek friends also feel instinctively are more vital and immediate, the areas of organization and international solidarity. The aim was aided their aim of fostering towards 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 advisors, complete attempts to control Greek labor have been crushed at every turn by democratic pressures which within the labor movement itself. As 1952 began, communist influence in Greek unions was confined to a minority in a few unions, clearly delinquent, out of power, and isolated from mass support. In every strike union in which the struggle for control was more to issue, the communists had suffered humiliating loss.

The labor and political victory was achieved in September, 1950, in the North Peloponnesian area, organized with the technical help of Mission advisors and with the ready support of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions. On the other hand, the Greek government and the government of the Greek labor movement, after years of governmental control was underway were clearly shown then in adoption of a democratic platform which strongly demanded that the Government should the present system of compulsory union dues in favor of a voluntary system, and proceed for repeal of legislation which gave the Ministers of Finance and Labor the power to act legislatively.
The Greek labor movement had made remarkable progress in the development of a more united and effective labor organization. This progress was due to the leadership of the Communist Party, which played a pivotal role in unifying the various labor unions and through the formation of the General Confederation of Labor (GSEE) in 1940.

Under the leadership of Nikos Zervas, GSEE sought to create a more unified labor movement by merging several smaller unions. This move was seen as a strategic step towards strengthening the labor movement's bargaining power and ability to negotiate with the government and employers. The GSEE's commitment to solidarity and unity was evident in its efforts to coordinate actions across different industries and sectors.

The union's leadership also emphasized the role of education and training in labor rights. By organizing workshops and seminars, GSEE aimed to empower workers with the knowledge and skills necessary to demand better wages and working conditions. These educational programs were integral to the union's strategy of building a more informed and active workforce.

In conclusion, the GSEE's success in uniting the Greek labor movement and its ability to negotiate effectively with employers and the government were significant achievements. These accomplishments were not only important for the workers, but also for the broader socialist movement, which sought to transform Greek society through a workers' revolution.