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PEACEKEEPING AND

PEACEMAKING IN CYPRUS

by Robert Mitchell

". . . it is expedient that the Houses of Parliament do approve the participation of Canadian forces in the United Nations international force in Cyprus, and that this house do approve the same."

Hansard, 13 March 1964

INTRODUCTION

There was general agreement in the debate leading to authorization of Canadian participation in the United Nations Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) that the Force would be required to remain longer than the initial three-month mandate. But it was not expected that, a quarter of a century later, the Force would remain in existence and the conflict in Cyprus appear no nearer solution. Canada continues to contribute troops to UNFICYP; is a member of the Commonwealth, like Cyprus; and is also a NATO member, along with both Greece and Turkey. There is therefore a strong Canadian interest in the promotion of an equitable and enduring solution to the Cyprus conflict.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Cyprus, with an area of 9,530 square kilometres, is the third largest island in the Mediterranean. It lies 75 kilometres from the coast of Turkey and 100 kilometres from Syria. As a result of its central location, Cyprus was pillaged, conquered, oppressed or colonized by a succession of empires which were, in their turn, dominant in the region. Phoenicians, Assyrians, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Crusaders, Venetians, Genoese and Ottoman Turks all left their mark on Cyprus. Nevertheless, the primary cultural influence remained the Greek-based civilization which had succeeded the Minoans on the island from 1500 BC. The Cypriot community today is roughly 80 percent of Greek heritage, and 18 percent of Turkish heritage, the remainder being Maronites, Armenians or Latins.

The Congress of Berlin in 1878 transfered Cyprus to British administration, under nominal Turkish sovereignty. Britain annexed Cyprus during World War I and formally established the island as a Crown Colony in 1925. However, the majority of the population, led by the independent Cypriot Church, favoured the inclusion of Cyprus in a Greek state.

This sentiment for *enosis* — the unification of Cyprus with Greece — had deep roots. In spite of foreign occupation, the essential hellenic cultural orientation of Cyprus had been maintained. The four centuries of Turkish rule resulted in the creation of a Turkish minority community distributed throughout the island. Even then, largely through Turkish governing processes, the Greek Cypriot Church was able to maintain its position of communal and cultural leadership.

Pro-*enosis* sentiment was evident from the earliest days of British occupation. Successive colonial administrators found it increasingly difficult to reconcile Britain's strategic interests in the Mediterranean, the geographic position of Cyprus, the interests of the Turkish community and the *enosis* sentiments of the Greek Cypriots. British ambivalence towards retention of Cyprus and the inability to reconcile the conflicting communal interests frustrated moves towards responsible government, with the result that Cyprus was ruled by Governor's decrees from 1931 until independence in 1960. Major riots occurred in 1931 in support of the demand for *enosis*. In 1951, in a church-conducted referendum, the Greek Cypriot community overwhelmingly endorsed the simple statement demanding *enosis*.