

CANADIAN FLOUR FOR GREECE

GREECE is the only European state whose armed forces have fought and won an active campaign since the Second World War to prevent their country from being transformed into a satellite of the Soviet Union. It is because of the determination of the Greek people and their readiness to continue for over a decade to live under trying war conditions rather than yield that Greece is still a member of the community of free nations today.

No Respite

The Greek people were accorded almost no respite between their liberation from German and Bulgarian occupation in the autumn of 1944 and the outbreak of that internal conflict in December of the same year which was to continue in one form or another until September 1949. Communist elements in various parts of the country fought to overthrow the duly constituted government which had the backing of the majority of the people, and during the period of guerrilla warfare large areas, particularly in the north, were devastated repeatedly. Some 700,000 persons fled from the affected areas to other localities in Greece as refugees. In addition many, including thousands of children, were taken by guerrillas to Communist-dominated countries across the northern frontier. Large areas of Northern Greece were left almost desolate.

After the defeat of the guerrilla forces in September 1949, the so-called "internal refugees" began to return to their devastated villages and neglected fields. With government aid and the assistance of E.C.A., supplemented by contributions from voluntary organizations, the refugees set to work with a few draft animals and simple tools to restore their homes and to make the soil productive once more. The task proved an extremely hard one, since in some areas the devastation had been almost complete and many villages, reached only by mountain trails, were almost completely cut off from the outer world. By the end of 1951 the flocks on which the villagers depended for a large part of their food supply stood at only one-fifth to one-third of the pre-war level, which itself had not provided a standard of living comparable to that of other countries of Europe.

Crop failures in 1951 proved a major disaster for many of the northern villagers who had harvested a first straggling and meagre crop in 1950 and had counted heavily on obtaining something approaching normal yields in 1951 in order to get through their second winter at home. Canadian voluntary organizations, including the Canadian Red Cross Society, the Greek War Relief Fund and the Canadian Save the Children Fund, approached the Canadian Government asking for emergency aid in the form of a substantial shipment of wheat for the relief of villages whose inhabitants were already reduced to living on herbs and faced the possibility of death by starvation before the 1952 crop could be harvested. The Canadian Ambassador to Greece, the E.C.A. Mission in Greece, the Near East Foundation and others confirmed that many of the villagers would starve during the coming months unless food supplies reached them soon. Meanwhile the Unitarian Service Committee of Canada, whose executive director had made a personal survey of conditions in northern Greece in July and August 1951, had already embarked on a campaign to raise as much as possible in the form of voluntary contributions to provide bread for Greece. (By the end of April this organization was able to report that a total of 650 tons of flour had been so contributed for distribution in Greece under its own auspices to selected villages.)

Help from Canada

On February 19, 1952 an Order-in-Council was passed by the Committee of the Privy Council with a view to contributing to the relief of starvation in Greece. Taking note that the existence of famine conditions in Northern Greece had been