

# WANTED: A MIRACLE IN GREECE

BY PAUL A. PORTER

FORMER PRESIDENTIAL EMISSARY TO GREECE

**T**ODAY an almost forgotten American mission has got to perform a miracle—or fail in its job. The miracle is to save Greece from economic disintegration and the inroads of Communism.

The fight to save Greece is just beginning. The announcement of plans is not enough. What will go on in Greece this month and next is infinitely more important than are the debates which commanded the headlines last March and April.

Last January, I went to Greece as head of a mission charged with reporting on the economic situation and with determining what outside assistance would be necessary for the survival of the Greek nation. I know at firsthand the complicated and discouraging conditions which today are confronting Dwight Griswold and the American Mission for Aid to Greece. And I feel strongly that the American people should know precisely what these conditions are.

During a trip through the lovely Greek countryside, a peasant I talked with typified the Greek national psychosis. He was a weary and discouraged man, prematurely old, his face lined and wrinkled, his hands upturned in a gesture of mute despair.

"Four times in my lifetime my home has been destroyed," he said, "—by the Turks, the Bulgars, the Nazis and the guerrillas. Why should I build it up again?"

This hopelessness is typical. The whole country, from top to bottom, is in the grip of a gray, unrelieved, profound lack of faith in the future—a lack of faith which produces simple inertia for the present. From the large textile manufacturers in Athens to the small shopkeepers and farmers in the northernmost part of Macedonia, peo-

**All that the U.S. mission to Greece has to do is end a civil war, eliminate corruption in government ranks, rebuild the economy of a nation and revive hope in a people sunk in despair. There's a chance they'll do it**

ple are paralyzed by uncertainty and fear.

Businessmen will not invest. Storekeepers will not lay in supplies. Peasants will not repair their ruined houses. One official told me that 150,000 homes had been totally destroyed in Greece and that only 1,300 had been rebuilt in 1946.

My most depressing experience in Greece was a visit to Kalavryta, the Lidice of Greece. This was the village high up a narrow gorge near the Gulf of Corinth where, in December, 1943, a small band of Greek resistance forces ambushed a squadron of Nazi occupation troops. The German re-

prisal was an unbelievable act of horror and brutality. The 1,200 men of the village were herded into an open field, where from the vantage point of higher ground, they were forced to watch their homes and shops burned from the incendiary volleys fired simultaneously into each structure. When the conflagration reached its height and the Greeks sought to break away from their Nazi guards, machine guns from concealed emplacements massacred the helpless lot of them.

Meantime, the women, old men and children were concentrated in the largest building—a school. It was the last to be ignited. Legend has it that the screams of the women and children were too much for an Austrian officer and he shot the lock off the door. Liberated from the blazing school, the survivors fled to the hills and returned later that night to recover the bodies of their men on the hillside, and buried them in the village cemetery.

The despair in Greece today is crucial, because our whole program of aid is based on the assumption that the people will be able to snap out of the prevailing inertia. We are not stepping up the amount of outside assistance enough to make the future much different from the past. During 1946, Greece got about \$330,000,000 from UNRRA and the British; our aid of \$350,000,000 barely exceeds this. And, at the same time, we are banking on the ability of the Greeks to more than double their exports. So, far from having too liberal an amount of money for use in Greece, we are operating on an exceedingly narrow margin. Indeed it may soon become apparent that estimates of \$350,000,000 which my

group made are too conservative, and that additional funds may be necessary. Mr. Griswold will find that conditions have rapidly worsened since the first mission went out last January. There has since been a widespread drought which has substantially reduced local grain production.

The military activity has been stepped up. And our own price level has risen to shade the value of the dollars Congress has made available. The \$350,000,000 loan will not go as far as we had hoped and planned. At best, we will get up to the minimum reconstruction level. At worst, we may have trouble maintaining a level of decent subsistence.

If the American mission is to end this deep sense of national hopelessness, it must resolve two controversial situations—the civil war and the present government.

One winter day in Macedonia, as I was standing on a riverbank, hundreds

of low-flying geese suddenly appeared out of the clouds, flying in formation and honking wildly as they came. I remarked casually to a Greek standing with me that they must have fine shooting in Macedonia.

"Men have been so busy shooting one another in this part of the world," he answered sadly, "that they have had no time for the geese."

So long as this state of mind continues, the prospects for economic reconstruction are dim. You cannot devote your full energies to repairing docks, building bridges and maintaining roads when you are likely to be shot in the back any moment. The greatest obstacle to the reconstruction of Greece is the continuance of the civil war. There can be no permanent solution of Greece's economic future until the present military burden is reduced—until money and men are released for productive purposes. There can be no permanent solution of Greece's psychological paralysis until the menace of external aggression is removed.

I am convinced that the Russians know this even better than we do. The Communists know that the revival of guerrilla warfare will put us badly on the spot in Greece—so they are working overtime to revive it. That is why, it seems to me, Russia's U.N. delegate Andrei Gromyko vetoed the U.S. proposal to establish a semipermanent frontier commission in the Balkans. The plain fact appears to be that the U.S.S.R. does not want a pacification of frontier conditions in the Balkans. For such pacification will be an almost indispensable condition for American success in helping bring about Greek economic recovery.

This brings up the question of the Greek government. The present regime obviously must constitute the set of tools through which we work. We cannot kick off by naming a new team. Adoption of these means would contradict the ultimate ends we wish to accomplish in Greece and elsewhere; furthermore, blatant intervention of this kind would supply potent ammunition to Soviet propaganda about American imperialism. But we can—and must—do something to sharpen these tools.

Chief among these tools is the Greek civil service. The late King George of Greece, in my first talk with him, referred to many government employees as "camp followers" and "coffeehouse politicians" and described the whole civil service as a kind of pension system for political hacks. These were harsh words, but not unwarranted. The civil service is overexpanded, underpaid and demoralized. The low salaries have been augmented by a completely baffling system of extra allowances by which a few civil servants probably get as much as four times their base pay.

At the same time the bulk of them do not get a living wage. Many of them are forced to supplement their government pay by taking outside jobs. Imagine the effects in Washington if officials in government de-

partments worked part time for local lawyers or lobbyists or industrialists. The curiously short working week—usually 33 hours, consisting of mornings only for 6 days a week—facilitates the economic double life which so many government workers lead.

The result is complete disorganization. I have never seen an administrative structure which, for sheer incompetence and ineffectiveness, was so appalling. The civil service simply cannot be relied upon to carry out the simplest functions of government—the collection of taxes, the enforcement of economic regulations, the repair of roads.

Thus the drastic reform of the civil service is an indispensable condition to getting anything else done in Greece. But the civil service is just the beginning. There is the far more intricate and explosive question of the political leadership of the country. Candor will compel me to make some frank statements about this government, but what would you have America do? Would you have prayed with Henry Wallace for the defeat of the Greek aid bill so that you could exchange the present inefficient, right-wing regime for a police state on the Tito model?

I rather doubt it. Because whatever it is, the present Greek government is not a totalitarian dictatorship, and besides, it does not seem to me that the nature of the government is relevant to the question of external aggression. We can't take the position that it is all right to commit acts of aggression against governments we do not like, and only bad to commit such acts against governments we approve.

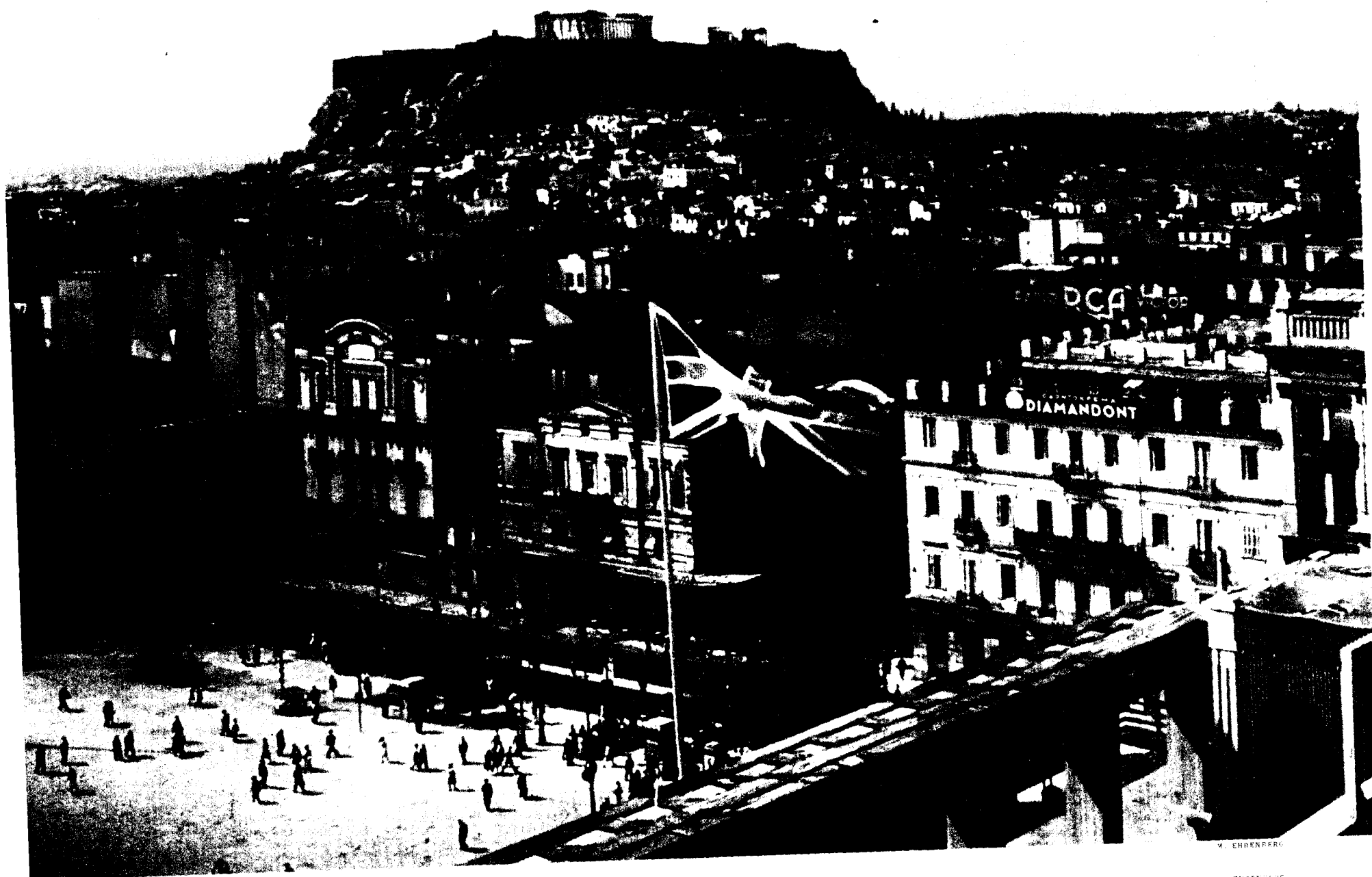
There is within Greece a vigorous and critical political opposition. There is a free press. The Communist paper is published daily in Athens, and each morning in my mailbox I received an English translation of the mimeographed bulletin of the EAM bitterly denouncing the present regime. It is not at all a liberty-loving regime in the American sense, but it is paradise next to its neighbors of the north and their much vaunted "new democracy." Obviously the existence of freedom of expression is no excuse for other governmental delinquencies. But it does signal the possibility of peaceful and democratic change.

On the other hand, the fact remains that this present government has not, on the record, shown any affirmative philosophy or any inclination to do the things necessary to end their nation's travail. On my first day in Greece, I had a talk with General J. G. W. Clark, the intelligent and somewhat sardonic head of the British Economic Mission.

"When visitors on arriving in a new country," he began by saying, "run into a sandstorm or a hurricane, they are always told how unusual the weather is. But the situation you are running into here in Athens—the monetary crisis, the possible civil service strike, the pending fall of the

(Continued on page 106)

Collier's for September 20, 1947



M. EHRENBERG

M. EHRENBERG

CHURCH WORLD SERVICE



In the shadow of the Acropolis the British flag flies over a public square in Athens. A U.S. mission is now working to restore the political and economic health of Greece

A Greek mother and family. The boy standing at left suffers from rickets. Fatness of baby in mother's arms is caused by swelling of hunger edema, a starvation disease

Regular Greek troops, in their age-old uniforms, who have been engaged in a grueling civil war with guerrilla bands. This strife has slowed the recovery of the ancient nation





# CHARLIE SQUIRES AND THE SEVEN



They had spent the night on a bench in the station, running a dangerous blood pressure

**A**FTER Charlie Squires quit the hotel business in Chicago to take up turkey raising, the *Innkeepers Journal* sent me to Wisconsin to see how he was getting along. As we might have suspected, he was getting along fine.

"Oh, hell, yes," he said, showing me around his model farm. "I've finally licked the turkey business—figured out a serum to keep 'em from catching cold."

Susie, his wife, was thinner, but as pretty as ever. She seemed happy in a bright, nervous way.

"This is so much better than living in a busy hotel in some noisy old city," she said. "And I love my house. I love it!"

It was quite a house. It had been put together with imported flagstone, granite and mahogany; the drapes were hand-woven and the furniture was all custom-made.

"Charlie insisted on ordering things that were hard to get—but he battled around until he got 'em," Susie said, proudly. "We're all settled now. The last chair came yesterday."

We sat in the sun porch where wide screened windows overlooked Charlie's manicured acres, with the Kickapoo River glinting below us in the summer sun. It was serene and quiet there, and the countryside was gentle, inviting the eye like green New England hills. It was no wonder Susie loved it.

She brought us coffee in a silver pot, with fresh hot rolls and home-churned butter. Charlie perched on an arm of the oversize davenport and stretched out his long legs.

"I suppose you heard about my last night at the Grand Embassy with Bert Buell and the seven Italian acrobats?" he suggested.

"Several versions," I admitted. "Nobody seems to have it straight."

Charlie lit his pipe.

"Never knew a story to get so garbled," he said, comfortably.

Susie, who had put on her coat to go shopping, decided to come back in and sit down. Charlie looked up in surprise.

"You don't want to hear it again, punkin!" he exclaimed.

"If you're going to tell that one, I certainly do!" she said, an intent look in her eyes. As he talked she moved to the edge of her chair, following every word as though she'd missed something last time he'd told it.

Of course, not every woman understands the satisfaction some men find in good, stiff competition. Perhaps that's what Susie missed in Charlie's story. She'd never quite believed, for instance, that he had

enjoyed the war. He's no ordinary fellow and he liked everything in China, including Lingling. His letters home were ecstatic; he was forever wading across rice paddies after being given up for dead.

And when he came back to Chicago and his job in public relations with the Grand Embassy Hotel in 1945, the situation that awaited him delighted his soul. Through the congested war years room clerks had got the habit of insulting customers without discrimination, conventions had been rudely turned away, old gentlefolk had been sneered at because they were too innocent to cross eager palms with rare jewels or gold. The arrogance that accompanies power or plenty had made the Grand Embassy staff insufferable; even charwomen had splashed supper guests with their long wet mops. Fastidious people had been sent to rooms with warm crumpled sheets still on the beds. Some of them had been asked to sleep with total strangers.

But now the war was over and people could begin to pick and choose again, and the house count was falling off, and the Tiger Room was losing money; and when Charlie asked for the complaint file two housemen had to trundle it in on a hand truck.

Now, there are two thousand seven hundred and forty-eight rooms in the Grand Embassy, and Charlie's job was to keep them full of people. He was promotion manager. Kenneth Ashcraft, the managing director, who had also been away, a colonel in the Quartermaster Corps, was appalled at the situation. But not Charlie. The bigger they are, the harder they fall, he said. The tougher the challenge, the more it excited him.

He tried to cheer the old man up.

"Why, there's nothing to it," he said, as they went through that poison-pen correspondence together. "I'll push until they give, that's all."

He wrote letters, made long-distance phone calls and flew from city to city in anything that would leave the ground. When he found customers who'd promised never again to darken the Grand Embassy's revolving doors he mesmerized them with his charm, sent them small bottles of Irish whisky and large baskets of flowers. He'd never been happier. Whenever he was thrown out of an office he'd come back to Susie with his long face aglow.

One night he came into their suite after a trip to Toledo, picked Susie up and danced her around the room.

"I've met the champion!" he shouted joyously. "Wait 'till you hear what happened to H. Bertrand Buell!"

Bert Buell was executive secretary of the International Roadmasters, an annual convention of three thousand wild-eyed, spendthrift highway engineers. Before the war, nothing had been too good for Bert;



He usually managed to get them to sign before their fingers became too limp to hold a pen

the staff had wooed him as if he were a shy young maid—with pretty compliments and rare tropical fruits and five-pound boxes of candy for his wife. But in the heyday he'd been told to take his convention to Muskegon; and when he had stopped overnight with his wife, a new house detective had waked him up and thrown him out, along with Mrs. Buell. They had spent the night on a bench in the Union Station running a dangerous blood pressure.

"But why doesn't he sue us?" Susie asked.

"Because," said Charlie triumphantly, "the poor egomaniac forgot to register his wife, a hot-eyed blonde. Isn't that a honey of a situation? There's nothing in the complaint file to touch it. He's so sore he wouldn't even write us a letter!"

"But, Charlie," she said, in her pretty, bewildered way, "you act pleased!"

"But can't you understand, Susie?" he demanded. "It's gonna be a fascinating battle of wits!"

"Oh, dear," Susie said. "What is it about these things that makes you so happy?"

He tried to explain it to her. In Toledo there had been tumult and shouting in H. Bertrand Buell's



Susie laughed at Bert's tired old jokes and listened wide-eyed to the story of his life

private office, then a door opened and a heavy brass ash tray had missed Charlie's head by inches.

"But what's funny about that?"

He looked down into her lovely, puzzled face, and kissed her.

"You just keep house, sweetheart," he said. "Let me run the business."

It was along about then that he dreamed up the Cock 'n' Feather, a secret bar back of his office down in the bowels of the house. You pressed a button, a panel slid open and there it was, a replica of an English taproom, stocked with every liquid a man could handle. Into this little nest he would entice recalcitrant prospects and ply them with hospitality until they thawed out, usually managing to get them on the dotted line just before their fingers became too limp to hold a pen.

"I don't see how you're going to get Bert Buell into the hotel, let alone down here," Mr. Ashcraft said, the day the carpenter shop sent in the cost sheets for Charlie's hideaway. "A rather expensive shot in the dark, it seems to me."

"Bert is merely the *pièce de résistance*," said Charlie, cheerfully. "Come in here a minute."

He pressed the button, the panel slid open, and there was the President of the National Association of Canners of Artichoke Hearts, asleep on a red-leather wall bench.

"I just booked him for December," Charlie said, with satisfaction. "Next to the National Association of Glove and Parka (Continued on page 60)