



**REVUE
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SUPPLEMENT

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RED CROSS PRINCIPLES

VII

6. Independence

The Red Cross must be independent of all authorities and free from every influence.

“Political, religious and economic independence.” Thus runs the formula—explicit and, when all is said and done, an apt one—which we find in the old summary of the fundamental principles.

The reasons why independence is necessary are so obvious that there is no need to dwell on them. If the Red Cross is to remain the Red Cross it must be master of its own decisions, it must control its own actions and words. In order that it may be better able to show the way to charity and its justice, it must break certain ties with the constituted powers. It must be free to base its actions on purely humanitarian motives, applying its own principles on all occasions and treating all men with equal consideration; it must be free to remain universal. No power, no matter what its nature, must be in a position to move the Red Cross from the fixed course set by its ideals. Furthermore, the institution's independence will serve as a guarantee of its neutrality. It will allow each Society to work in spiritual harmony with its sister Societies. It is, moreover, essential for the Red Cross to inspire the confidence of everyone it may be called upon to assist, even, and especially, if they do not belong to the ruling circles. Lastly, the Red Cross ranks are open to all men of goodwill, and its submission to a temporal or spiritual authority would close its doors to

those who did not fall in with the official views. From the point of view of Red Cross action, independence is thus a subsidiary condition, but none the less a necessary one.

Independence must in the first place be shown in regard to politics, national and international. That is obvious. As we have seen, neutrality demands that Red Cross organisations should abstain from all interference in either the home or foreign affairs of a State. On the other hand it is important for them to preserve their independence by firmly resisting any attempt to introduce politics into their own sphere.

When we deal with the organic principles in the second part of our survey we shall consider in detail the complex problem of the Red Cross's relations with the public authorities. We shall then see that although the National Societies have close ties with their respective Governments, since they give them assistance by supplementing the official services, they must nevertheless retain their autonomous and private character.

The special character of the International Committee of the Red Cross means that it does not meet with similar difficulties. There is nothing to threaten its independence. The fact that all its members without exception are recruited, by co-option, from among the citizens of a small neutral country with no ambitions, offers the world a further safeguard. The Committee is completely independent of the Swiss Confederation in regard to its policies and administration. Its position in this respect is in no way modified by the fact that its work has been largely supported by gifts received from the Swiss people and that facilities have been liberally afforded it by the Federal Government. The people and Government of Switzerland will both, so to speak, be rallied in support of its neutrality.

The very fact of this complete independence leaves the International Committee without any material power. It has no armoured divisions and cannot appeal to outside influence nor resort to skilful manœuvres. But that is not all: its very principles forbid it to make use of such means of exerting pressure as it might on rare occasions have. One cannot, for instance, conceive of the Committee suspending a relief scheme, which it has been carrying out on behalf of the inhabitants of

a country, simply because the Government of that country rejects a humane request in some other connection. By so doing it would be harming the very people it is meant to help, and it would, in the last analysis, be the innocent who suffered. The Committee cannot even harbour resentment against those who attack it unjustly ; such attacks are forgotten immediately in the interests of its mission, which is the only thing it feels called upon to defend.

In actual fact the Committee draws its strength from this apparent weakness. Its indifference to all temporal power is more than balanced on the spiritual plane ; thus destitution may denote spiritual wealth, and abasement may become dominion. The States may rest assured that in a world dominated by self-interest, there is at least one exception to the general rule, one institution whose objects are solely humane ; that in a world where expediency and compromise reign, the Committee will act without any ulterior motive, and give no handle for any intrigue ; that in a world divided by hatred, it will only be moved by love of one's fellow man. The purity of its intentions and the sincerity of its motives will inspire confidence and those who appreciate such qualities will listen to its voice. A firmly held ideal carries more weight than any subtle diplomacy, and no one will feel that he is losing face by complying with disinterested requests based on international ethics, as he will know that no base motives are hidden behind them.

When a delegate to the XVIIIth International Red Cross Conference apparently wished to reproach the International Committee with not "representing anybody", Judge Sandstroem, Chairman of the Board of Governors of the League, replied : " I think it could not be better expressed why the International Committee has got the task it has and why it ought to be maintained in it. The Committee does not represent anybody, it does not represent any particular interest ; it just represents an idea, and an ideal—the Red Cross idea, the Red Cross ideal—and that, I think, is its great merit ¹."

¹ Proceedings of the XVIIIth International Red Cross Conference, Toronto, 1952, p. 100.

The Red Cross must also resist all forms of social and economic pressure. It cannot allow any class, any group of interests, or even public opinion itself, to divert it from its goal. If circumstances so demand, it must have the courage to face unpopularity. In the same way, it cannot suffer any interference by financial interests, nor yield to any attempt to influence it, even very indirectly, by means of money. The fact that its work depends entirely on donations, may make this condition a very hard one : but no concession can be made. Even if its resources dry up as a result, the Red Cross must refuse any financial contribution which would affect its independence to even a very slight extent. So far as it is concerned, there is no truth in the maxim that " the man who pays the piper, calls the tune ".

For the same reasons, the Red Cross cannot be incorporated in or associated with another institution which does not fully respect its spiritual and material independence. Any deviation from its line of conduct may be fatal to it. Moreover, if the Red Cross establishes close ties with other charitable organizations for purposes of collaboration, it must be on condition that they agree to observe the principles of the Red Cross in their entirety when carrying out the common work ¹.

The fact that the Red Cross may co-operate with outside bodies has not always been fully realised. Sometimes even, with the intention of increasing the prestige of the Red Cross, a monopoly has been claimed for it, although one cannot be sure that this is always in the interests of the people who are to be helped. In our opinion a more liberal attitude is warranted. " To be in the Red Cross " does not merely mean bearing a name and wearing a badge ; it means possessing a certain attitude of mind and respecting an ideal. And under that heading, there are sometimes others from whom we have to learn.

JEAN S. PICTET

(To be continued.)

¹ This condition has been laid down in the principles formulated by the League of Red Cross Societies.

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS

SUNDRY ACTIVITIES

News Items

After a stay of two months in Greece, M. F. Horneffer, Head of Section, returned to Geneva on January 20. The mission given him by the ICRC, following the reorganisation of its representation in that country, included, in particular, visits to various places of detention and exile, where M. Horneffer distributed relief supplies—consisting of medicaments—to a value of about 16,000 Swiss francs.

* * *

The mission of M. J. de Preux, ICRC delegate in Saigon, is nearly ended. Having completed the work of distributing relief supplies to refugees in South Viet Nam for UNICEF, and taken steps to ensure the smooth running of the scheme for the benefit of war-disabled persons recently instituted by the ICRC, M. de Preux is preparing to return to Geneva. The ICRC has appointed M. A. Leuenberger as his successor, and the latter will take over the duties of International Committee correspondent.

The Revue internationale will publish an article, in an early issue, on the work carried out by M. de Preux during his mission.

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M. H. Ph. Junod, ICRC delegate in South Africa, who arrived in Geneva last June, has now returned to Pretoria after seven months' absence.

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE

Although his visit to Europe was essentially of a private nature, M. Junod was, nevertheless, entrusted by the ICRC with a mission to the Red Cross and the British authorities in London. It related to the situation in Kenya.

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In late February, during a ten day study-visit to the League of Red Cross Societies in Geneva, M. Mansour Farzami, Executive Director of the Junior Red Lion and Sun, Iran, visited the ICRC on several occasions.

M. Farzami formerly held the post of Director of the Foreign Relations Department of the Red Lion and Sun. In that capacity he was in constant touch with the ICRC. He was thus able to participate in the kind welcome given in Iran to the representatives of the ICRC, in connection in particular with the missions carried out by M. Gaillard in 1951 and 1952, and M. de Cocatrix in 1954, not to mention the visit paid last year to that country by M. Paul Ruegger, who was then President of the ICRC.

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Mlle L. Odier and Dr. M. Junod, Members of the ICRC, accompanied by M. J. Babel, Head of Section, took part in a meeting held on February 27, on the initiative of the League of Red Cross Societies, which brought together, at that organisation's headquarters in Geneva, the representatives of international organisations concerned with the question of blood transfusion.

The League's invitation was also accepted by the World Health Organization, the International Society of Blood Transfusion, the International Organization for Standardization and the International Commission for Medical Equipment.

The object of the meeting, presided over by le Médecin-Colonel J. Julliard, Secretary-General to the International Society of Blood Transfusion, was to enable the organisations present to exchange views, consider the co-ordinating of their work in that field and examine the questions of interchangeability, the standardisation of equipment, and biological standards. The matters

relating to reserve stocks for emergencies and the recruitment of blood donors were also discussed.

Organisations throughout the world interested in the question of blood transfusion will be informed later of the results of the meeting's work.

* * *

The International Committee's action on behalf of tubercular refugees from Trieste and members of their families is being continued. A family of three recently left Morzine for resettlement in Switzerland, while a patient under treatment in Leysin, and now cured, proceeded to Belgium where the "Entraide socialiste Belge" will help her to resume a normal life. The person in question is the last but one of the 102 refugees who were admitted to hospital in Leysin in December 1953.

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In 1955, the collective and individual relief supplies distributed by the ICRC amounted to 48½ tons, representing an outlay of about 700,000 Swiss francs. The International Committee's share of this amounted to 34 tons (equivalent to 500,000 francs in value), the balance being supplied by various other donors. The figures do not, however, include the relief supplies distributed by the ICRC delegate in Saigon for the account of UNICEF.

In terms of value, pharmaceutical products take the first place (452,000 francs), followed by foodstuffs and clothing (174,000 francs) and, lastly, appliances for the special use of the disabled (74,000 francs).

The beneficiaries of this assistance were the victims of war-time and post-war events in some thirty countries. Part of the relief supplies was distributed to the victims of natural disasters.

* * *

The repatriation of former prisoners of war and civilian internees in the USSR has been accelerated during the past few months. On two occasions, in December and January last, the

ICRC instructed one of its delegates, M. G. Hoffmann, to proceed to Friedland Camp (German Federal Republic) to help with the arrangements for the refugees' reception. During these visits M. Hoffmann got in touch with the representatives of the German Red Cross at Friedland, and the medical officer of the camp.

* * *

Mlle A. Pfirter, Head of the Nursing Personnel and War Disablement Sections of the ICRC, at present engaged in a study-mission in the Middle East, met the directors of the Lebanon Red Cross and Syrian Red Crescent in Beirut and Damascus, as well as the representatives of the health authorities of those two countries. As she did when visiting Egypt, Mlle Pfirter collected some very useful information on the training of nursing personnel.

* * *

Countess Bonde, one of the directors of the Swedish society for the welfare of children, the " Rädde Barnen ", recently visited the ICRC headquarters, accompanied by M. G. Thélin, Secretary-General to the International Union for Child Welfare. She was welcomed by Mlle L. Odier and M. R. Olgiati, Members of the ICRC, and M. H. Coursier, a member of the Legal Department. The object of her visit was to inform the International Committee of the progress of the campaign started by her association, the Swedish Red Cross, the Swedish Federation of Voluntary Aids and the Swedish Civil Defence Department, to promote the wearing of identity discs by civilians.

We may here recall that an article by M. Georges Thélin on " The Protection of Children in Time of War " was published in the December 1955 number of the Revue internationale, which described, in particular, the remarkable work being done by the Rädde Barnen Association to promote the application of Article 24 of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949. We would also like to mention that the nation-wide campaign for the issue of identity discs, started by the Rädde Barnen, will continue until next June, and that about 500,000 discs were applied for during the first few weeks.

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M. L. Bossard, the International Committee's delegate in New Zealand was in constant touch, during 1955, with the New Zealand authorities and Red Cross Society, more especially with the latter's Secretary-General, Mr. Galloway.

He also had occasion to discuss the present activities of the ICRC with Sir Willoughby Norrie, Governor General, and Mr. I. H. Luxford, Mayor of Auckland. Moreover, he approached the immigration authorities on several occasions in connection with the resettlement in New Zealand of a number of refugees from Trieste whose welfare, as is well known, is a matter of particular concern to the ICRC.

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During his mission in the Middle East, M. D. de Traz, special representative of the ICRC, has, for the past two months mainly visited Egypt, Israel and Syria. In each of those countries M. de Traz enquired into the living conditions of the military and civilian prisoners captured in the clashes, during the last four months, between the Israeli, Egyptian and Syrian forces.

In Israel, the delegate of the ICRC visited two Egyptian and two Syrian prisoner-of-war camps, and also a military hospital. In addition the high Egyptian and Syrian military authorities authorised M. de Traz to visit the Israeli prisoners of war detained in Cairo and Damascus.

During those visits the International Committee's delegate was able to ascertain that the essential provisions of the Geneva Convention of August 12, 1949, were being applied. On each occasion he was able to converse, without witnesses, with the officers, or the prisoners' representatives, to collect family correspondence, and take photographs.

Further, M. de Traz started discussions with all the authorities concerned in the hope of promoting the early repatriation of all prisoners of war.