

M I S C E L L A N E O U S

FOURTH INTERNATIONAL MEDICAL CONGRESS OF THE INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF RESISTANCE MOVEMENTS

The International Federation of Resistance Movements which has its headquarters in Vienna, invited the ICRC to attend its Fourth International Medical Congress. This important meeting took place in Bucharest from June 22 to 27, 1964 and Mr. Moisescu, President of the Red Cross of the People's Republic of Rumania kindly attended the Plenary Sessions as an observer on behalf of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

The general theme of the Congress was Etiopathogenesis and therapy for fatigue and senilism. It gave participants an opportunity for an ample exchange of views concerning which Mr. Moisescu sent Geneva documentary material and some interesting comments.

Detention in concentration camps resulted in the victims' suffering from nervous strain and senilism, due to a number of factors. Intense physical over-work, without rest and sleep, chronic hunger, abject conditions of accommodation and clothing, inhuman living conditions, emotional shocks, forced labour ; these may all be contributory causes of "concentration camp ailments" typified by a chronic progressive asthenic syndrome and the premature aging of the subject. Treatment has been studied intensively and a number of scientific and practical conclusions have been put forward for the prevention and treatment of fatigue and premature senility.

Delegates from several countries took part in the work of the Congress and we think it useful to give an account of one aspect which is of particular concern to our movement, by reproducing below the paper presented to the Congress by Dr. Jan Nowak, from Poland. This is concerned with the activities of the Polish Red Cross on behalf of the victims of pseudo-medical experiments carried out in German concentration camps.

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Following the negotiations undertaken by Poland after the Second World War and under the subsequent pressure of world opinion, the Parliament of the Federal Republic of Germany on May 5, 1960, passed a bill under the terms of which the Government of the Federal Republic was to grant "adequate compensation to Polish women still alive who, under the Hitler regime, had been subjected to medical experiments which seriously affected their health".

There being no diplomatic relations between Poland and the West German Government, the latter turned to the International Committee of the Red Cross in Geneva to act as mediator in the settlement of the arrangement known as "financial assistance for recovery of health" to Polish victims of the Ravensbrück concentration camp. Poland proposed that compensation be calculated in direct ratio to the consequences suffered by claimants.

Towards the end of 1960 the Polish Red Cross was authorized to represent the interests of the Polish victims and accepted with satisfaction the good offices of the International Committee of the Red Cross for the discharge of this humanitarian function.

Following its discussions with the Polish Red Cross, the International Committee persuaded the Government of the Federal Republic to accept the Polish Red Cross postulate of increasing the indemnity initially proposed by Bonn. The view held by the Polish Red Cross was that the very fact that Poles were used as "guinea pigs" for experiments recognized as criminal, entitled the victims to compensation and that there should be a basic standard amount for all victims, over and above which compensation would vary, depending on the extent to which health had been affected as a consequence of the experiments.

The International Committee of the Red Cross came to an agreement with the Polish Red Cross and the Association of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy (Z.B.O.W.i.D.) concerning the procedure to be followed for the settlement with Polish victims. Under this agreement the Central Commission of Enquiry into Nazi Crimes in Poland is responsible for obtaining evidence to establish justification of claims to compensation, on the basis of current jurisprudence introduced by the courts at the Nuremberg and other trials involving criminal experiments on persons held in concentration camps, as

well as on the basis of documents and proofs in the Commission's possession. Victims enter hospital for medical examination and subsequently the medico-legal sub-commission of the Central Commission of Enquiry will certify that the person was the victim of an operation and will determine to what extent that person's health has been impaired as a result.

A neutral commission of legal experts and doctors, convened by the International Committee of the Red Cross, examines the Polish claims in the light of documents presented by the Poles or in the possession of the International Committee and the German Federal Republic. This neutral commission decides the amount of compensation to be paid by the Federal Republic of Germany.

On each application a report is made to the neutral commission by a medical expert of the International Committee. He goes to Poland prior to the neutral commission's meetings, interviewing each claimant in the presence of the person's doctor and representatives of the Polish Red Cross and gives preliminary approval of each case.

In addition, one medical and one legal expert from the Polish Red Cross attend the meetings of the neutral commission as observers.

After concluding the agreement with the International Committee, the Polish Red Cross, in view of the fact that many victims of pseudo-medical experiments in other Nazi concentration camps had in the meanwhile approached it, requested the International Committee to approach the West German Government. After lengthy negotiations the Government in Bonn agreed to an examination of the cases of Polish victims of pseudo-medical experiments in other concentration camps, on the same conditions and at the same rates of compensation as those applicable for Ravensbrück detainees.

In 1961 the Polish Red Cross started to register surviving Polish victims of criminal pseudo-medical experiments. Time allowed for registration expired on June 30, 1964. The Polish Red Cross has submitted 277 claims to the neutral commission in Geneva, which accepted 240 of them.

Recently the German Federal Republic demanded that the Polish applications be submitted to them before the neutral com-

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mission, and that a German medical expert be admitted to the commission as an observer.

The applications received by the Polish Red Cross are broadly speaking divisible into two groups, although subsequent examination of a case which has been classified in one group, may show that it really belongs to the other.

The first group includes claims to compensation for experiments which are recognized criminal experiments known to jurisprudence, for example, experiments relating to :

- regeneration of bones, muscles, nerves, and bone transplanting ;
- malaria ;
- phlegmons and sulfamides ;
- sterilization ;
- human resistance to cold and various atmospheric pressure ;
- typhus and related diseases, as well as vaccins. Most of the victims of this first group have already applied to the Polish Red Cross.

The second group includes applications from victims of experiments not mentioned in law and of which the criminal pseudo-medical character must therefore be substantiated. Such experiments are :

- experiments involving pharmaceutical products other than sulfamides, unspecified pharmaceutical products, as well as injections of various types and strength giving rise to symptoms and effects ;
- unwarranted surgical operations ;
- gynaecological operations ;
- tuberculosis ;
- lumbar punctures ;
- extraction of blood ;
- sundry surgical operations.

Examination of the applications, particularly those of the second group, often revealed that we were faced with an isolated particular type of criminal experiment, carried out in a concentration camp, that is to say experiments and camps which are not mentioned in jurisprudence arising, for example, from the Nuremberg trials.

It is no easy task, twenty years after the event, to bring all these cases to a satisfactory conclusion. Human memory is often unreliable where dates and precise details are involved, particularly when the persons concerned have been cruelly affected in mind and body and consequently are reluctant to recall the terrible sufferings of the past.

Therefore, if we are to settle successfully the cases still in abeyance, there is only one solution : the collection of all possible documents dealing with pseudo-medical experiments performed on detainees in various Nazi concentration camps. For this, the help of all survivors from the camps is necessary, and especially the help of doctors who witnessed the experiments. Once these testimonies and details have been studied by the Central Commission of Enquiry, they will enable the Commission to establish documentary material which will constitute a cogent argument in cases not provided for by present jurisprudence and also for cases in respect of which the Federal Republic of Germany produces conflicting original documents from the camps which, as we all know, were for the most part falsified by the Nazi authorities.

The Polish Red Cross will continue to undertake everything humanly possible, in co-operation with the Central Commission of Enquiry into Nazi crimes in Poland, the Governing Body of the Association of Polish Combatants for Liberty and Democracy and with Polish doctors, to conclude this action, which is certainly a difficult one necessitating considerable humanitarian efforts in favour of former concentration camp detainees, the most unfortunate among survivors, those whose dignity as human beings suffered the greatest, that is to say the victims of criminal pseudo-scientific experiments.
