

International Committee tribute

As a mark of its deep gratitude to Mr. Hans Bachmann, who was recently nominated an honorary member, the ICRC has awarded him its silver medal. Mr. Bachmann was presented with the medal on 7 April 1976 at an informal meeting. In his address of thanks to his fellow-members, he said:

“ When, early in 1942, Carl-J. Burchhardt agreed that I should join the International Committee as a novice—who had everything to learn—it proved to be a major blessing in my life ! The extraordinary personality of this exceptional man, the warmth of his heart, his sense of true proportions, his perspicacity in judging men and events—everything in him added up to make him a master who guides us through the whole course of our existence. His conception of the mission of the Red Cross—simple and effective provision of aid to those in distress—was in keeping with what he himself deeply felt. He placed the high competence he had acquired as a diplomat entirely at the service of a humanitarian task, and he believed that the art of diplomacy had to be performed with that same instinct with which natives found their way through virgin forests.

To achieve success in his missions, Carl Burchhardt was aided by his persuasive powers, backed by a remarkably authoritative mien constantly apparent in his whole being. He was thus an ideal ‘partner’ for Max Huber, who was more inclined to analyse situations, who knew how to encompass them in the light of the principles which must govern the institution, and who was ever mindful of the harm which might arise from such situations. His mind, critical and far-sighted, measured all aspects of a problem. It was indeed providential that, at the time when the International Committee had to face the challenging events of the Second World War, it had at its head those two personalities: the man of law and principles, and the man endowed with a creative imagination and with the power of influencing men. Both were deeply conscious of the

very special nature of our work, which demanded that we should tread warily as if on a razor's edge: on the one side, the only motivation for action being the desire to provide moral and material assistance to persons in the hands of an enemy Power; on the other, world political and military factors on which the practical implementation of that assistance depended, together with the aspirations of Powers and their representatives' ambitions, jealousies, susceptibilities and fears. The ingenuous idealist is as little suited for Red Cross work as he who would set his personal interest or comfort above the requirements implicit in the institution's mandate. It is upon the balance between the inspiration found in the spiritual value of our cause and the qualities of efficiency, intelligence, self-denial and sacrifice of those who serve it that the ICRC's future depends.

My warmest wishes therefore go out to our institution; whenever technical considerations, red tape, cold-hearted indifference or egoism would seem to predominate, may our institution have the strength to seek anew and rekindle the spirit wherewith alone it should be imbued."
