

# CHRONICLE

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## HOW THE JUNIOR RED CROSS WAS BORN

*The importance of the Junior Red Cross in the world today is well known. But how was it born and how did it develop? Mr. José GOMEZ RUIZ, Deputy Director of the Junior Red Cross Office of the League, gives the answer in an article in the review Junior Red Cross (Geneva, October-December 1963), of which we are pleased to present large extracts to our readers :*

It has often been said that if the adult Red Cross issued from the horrors of war, the Junior Red Cross was born in the happiness of peace. The first statement leaves no doubt and the events organized to commemorate the Centenary took care to remind us of this fact. But is the second affirmation as undebatable? Here again there are two answers which are likewise positive and negative.

But before replying to these questions, let us take a step backward in time and examine certain historical facts which although they did not result in the actual establishment properly so called of the Junior Red Cross, probably helped to create a favourable atmosphere for our movement.

According to the information in our possession, the first attempt to associate young people, particularly schoolchildren, with the work of the Red Cross was made in 1870 in the Netherlands, only 7 years after the foundation of the institution. On 13 August 1870, the Inspectors of Districts Nos. 3 and 4 of the Province of

Zuid-Holland, together with members of the Leiden Red Cross Branch, forwarded a letter to the schoolmasters for their pupils, asking them to read it out in class. It began "Boys and Girls of Holland, we need your help". After explaining the reasons for this appeal, it asked the children to collect funds to provide relief for wounded and sick victims of the Franco-Prussian War, pointing out that "a series of small gifts can add up to make a large gift ... Each of you can contribute something by depriving yourselves of a luxury, thus helping to save a fellow creature ... Perhaps the sum you collect will enable a son to return to his mother or a father to his children ... show us that we can rely on the altruism of Dutch boys and girls."

If this was not really the first service or international friendship action of the Junior Red Cross, then what was it—above all when it is realised that the sum of 1,200 florins was collected, an amount which even today is large and in 1870 represented a great deal more.

The second attempt was made in 1885 in Bulgaria. The idea was carried out and a young people's movement dedicated to social work established. Once again it was a question of service.

In 1892, at the 5th International Conference of the Red Cross in Rome, the Women's Committee of the province of Moravia submitted a report recommending the association of schoolchildren with Red Cross work. But at that time the Red Cross confined itself to the relief of the wounded and sick of the armies in the field; the recommendation therefore met with only slight response and was rejected. Nevertheless, it attracted the attention of several leading personalities who felt the proposal would be taken up again sometime or other.

In 1896, a scheme was conceived in Spain for admitting schoolchildren to Red Cross membership, but the Spanish-American War prevented its realisation.

In 1899, when the South African War broke out, the pupils of St. Mary's school in Ontario, Canada, worked for the Red Cross. A club called "The Maple Leaves" was organized, under one of the teachers, which could justly claim to be a forerunner of the modern Junior groups.

However, these various new ventures did not give birth to the Junior Red Cross properly so-termed and they all sprang to some degree from a desire to relieve the sufferings caused by war and decrease its horrors.

The first peacetime initiative was in 1906, in the United States. On 18 April of that year a terrible earthquake destroyed San Francisco (California) resulting in a large number of casualties. The children and adolescents helped the Red Cross to alleviate the victims' sufferings.

In 1909 Swedish schoolchildren started to cooperate with the Red Cross by making garments and bedclothes for the National Society's charitable activities. Some 300 schools took part in this action up to 1922, when the Swedish Junior Red Cross was established. From then onwards schoolchildren worked under its direction.

In 1914, the First World War broke out and the sufferings and distress caused by it were so extensive that all the willing helpers available were not enough. That same year groups of children in New South Wales (Australia) and Saskatchewan (Canada) began to work for the Red Cross, helping their National Societies with relief activities. During this same period, and almost simultaneously, large numbers of schoolchildren in the United States started to join the ranks of the Red Cross in order to assist in providing small comforts for the soldiers and sailors by their efforts.

In 1918, at the end of the World War, the Junior Red Cross was actually organized in three countries : Australia, Canada and the United States, and in 1919 the first two Junior Red Cross magazines appeared in Australia and the United States.

Thus the Junior Red Cross, as we have just seen, began its work in the midst of war, with the desire to help victims but its organization was actually confirmed in 1919, by the establishment of the League of Red Cross Societies. The first Resolution mentioning the Junior Red Cross was one adopted by the General Council of the League (which later became the Board of Governors) in 1922, recommending " That every National Red Cross Society should endeavour to organise the enrolment of schoolchildren as Junior Members, the conditions of Junior Membership being adapted

in each case to the school system of the country". In point of fact, by 1922 Junior Red Cross had already been organized in 21 countries, which was very striking if one bears in mind that four years earlier, at the end of the World War, it only existed in 3, and that the governing bodies of the International Red Cross had not yet adopted any recommendation encouraging National Societies to organize the activities of their Junior Sections.

The Junior Red Cross then—and this is the reply to the questions asked at the beginning of this article—was born in peacetime, since the first Resolution referring to it dates from 1922 and was adopted at a time of complete peace. Nevertheless its activities can be said to have started in wartime, with the desire to render "Service" a word which later was to become its personal slogan.

As to its country of origin, Australia and Canada can both lay a legitimate claim. But we have no desire to make any final affirmation in this article as to whether the Junior Red Cross first saw the light of day in the one or the other, as we have not enough precise information as to the exact dates when these activities are said to have started.

We would not close this brief historical review without reminding you of two important events. To begin with, the Junior Red Cross Congress, held in 1924 in Prague (Czechoslovakia) on the occasion of the "Red Cross Truce". During the annual "Truce" the Czechoslovak Red Cross was in the habit of encouraging individual groups throughout the country to let themselves be inspired in their mutual relations by the spirit of understanding and help personified in the Red Cross movement. The National Society at the same time suggested that the press tone down the vehemence of its political controversies. Children delegated by the schools in all the Czechoslovak provinces, and delegates from the following countries: Bulgaria, Hungary, Rumania and Yugoslavia, attended this meeting in 1924, and a member of the Junior Red Cross read the Truce Declaration in the Czechoslovak parliament.

The second historical event was in 1930. For the first time the members of the Junior Red Cross appeared at an International Conference of the Red Cross, the XIVth in Brussels. The Juniors in attendance presented school correspondence albums to the

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delegates for transmission to the members of the Junior Red Cross in their respective countries.

What a long road has been travelled since ! In 1963 the three Sections that existed in 1918 have become 83. Nor have the hopes of their predecessors been in vain. On the contrary, from many angles the results have far exceeded expectations. The idea of associating children with Red Cross work, which seemed to figure among projects of a difficult and even risky nature, has triumphed over every obstacle and at the present time the Junior Red Cross is offering 63 million members splendid opportunities for devotion. It inculcates a fine spirit of service in them as members of a vast spiritual and moral family, which for the whole Red Cross is a precious reality today and firm hope for tomorrow.