

A Hundred Years in the Service of Humanity

The Centenary Congress of the International Red Cross will testify to the extent and universality of our movement as well as to its immense latent possibilities. And from the exposition of so many varied actions in so many countries there cannot but spring hope and encouragement for all who co-operate with the national and international institutions, for all who work under the emblem of the Red Cross, Red Crescent or Red Lion and Sun.

Other events will take place in Geneva, Lausanne and Macolin during this month of August 1963 and they will demonstrate that in a multitude of fields the Red Cross brings help and inspiration and that it is the originator of innumerable gestures of humanity.

The International Committee for its part, inspired by the chosen theme, considers it useful to evoke A hundred years in the service of humanity.¹ In narrating some outstanding episodes, the following pages recall the epic of a century. This is not intended to glorify the International Committee, for how insufficient were its efforts in comparison with the misery and suffering! But the aim is to show that solely in the name of charity, humanitarian solidarity and the Law of Geneva, the ICRC intervened on behalf of victims as soon as conflict broke out anywhere in the world, and that upon its instigation has been constructed a momentous enterprise of humanitarian law.

This narration, which we are illustrating with some significant pictures, comes, except for part of the final chapter, from the pen of Mr. FRÉDÉRIC SIORDET, Vice-President of the ICRC and President of the Centenary Commission of the Red Cross in Switzerland. He has infused the work with an inspiring rhythm. Thanks to him, this number of the International Review thus takes the form of a fitting testimony on the threshold of a new century for the Red Cross. Reference may be made to it to observe how our organization has grown and how it has endeavoured, by repeated intervention, to meet the challenge of the horrors and destruction of war.

It should nevertheless not be forgotten that the aim of the Red Cross is first and foremost to maintain a spirit of peace in the midst of combat ; to temper unbridled hate. It strives for peace, in its struggle against war and its effects. Its very existence proclaims the need for mutual assistance and solidarity among men. (ED.)

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¹ Centenary Congress of the International Red Cross : Report submitted by the ICRC to the Council of Delegates.

1863-1913

Scarcely two years had elapsed since the publication of *A Memory of Solferino* before both Henry Dunant's tentative suggestions at the end of his book had both been acted upon: relief societies and an international Convention. In the "Memorial" ("Chronicle") of the first twenty-five years of the Red Cross, the President of the International Committee writes: "I know of no philanthropic idea which, once realised, has developed so speedily and widely from the practical angle and with such effectiveness as that of the Red Cross. Almost before it had been launched it took shape and, in less than twenty-five years, spread to the antipodes; it has saved hundreds of thousands of individuals and hundreds of millions have been donated for its work."

It should not be deduced from this that everything ran smoothly from the outset—far from it. The early years of the Red Cross were fraught with such difficulties that its practical future raised doubts.

The establishment of Committees for relief to the wounded in several States and the signature of the 1864 Convention by quite a number of European countries were a triumph in themselves. But what was more difficult still remained to be done: the translation of theory into practice. So far as this was concerned, experiments would depend entirely on circumstances and therefore vary from one country to another. The Red Cross, inspired by the horrors of the battlefield, had been conceived and established with a view to future wars. It could therefore act only in time of war. But Red Cross people, whose whole idea and proposed role constituted a reaction against the sufferings of war, were the very last to desire circumstances to put them to the test. Nevertheless, this was soon to be the case. The ink of the 1863 Agreements was hardly dry and the 1864 Convention was still simply a draft in the files of the International Committee, when the war of the Duchies between Prussia and Denmark broke out that very year. While Red Cross Committees already actually existed, they were barely organised, and little prepared. Hence this first conflict was more in the nature

of a practical study field than of coherent action. Once again the willing helpers who promptly came forward to alleviate the resulting distress had to improvise. It was observed that the effectiveness of the Red Cross would depend on the degree of preparedness of its Committee and their voluntary staff and, to an even greater extent, on the understanding attitude of the military authorities. In any case, this first experience confirmed what had been established after Solferino, namely, that the Army Medical Services required to be expanded and improved.

It was again in Prussia, on the occasion of the 1866 Austro-Prussian War, that the second experience was to be made, this time on a much wider scale. Prussia had ratified the 1864 Convention but Austria had not yet done so. The Army Medical Services, which were very well organised, at least on the Prussian side, were theoretically adequate. As to the Red Cross, it had received appreciable support in the form of voluntary staff, material and funds, on a nation-wide impulse. But although it was rationally organised and its efforts were joined with those of other organisations, such as the Knights of St. John and the Order of Malta, its liaison with the Army Services was not sufficiently clearly defined and it was not able to do much beyond providing relief behind the lines. The military authorities hesitated to allow these civilian organisations to work in the front lines. They were afraid that, not being subject to army discipline, their activities might hamper operations. Consequently, only moderate results were achieved and following Königgrätz, just as after Solferino, there was a great deal of unnecessary suffering. Despite unusually efficient organisation, the Army Medical Services were still unable to give first aid quickly enough and to sufficient numbers. Even so, the percentage of lives saved was considerably higher than hitherto. "It will never be forgotten", wrote Dr. Loeffler, Director of Medical Services to the Kingdom of Prussia, in 1869, "that the members of the Red Cross were the first to come to the assistance of the Army Medical Services, completely overwhelmed by the size of the tasks to be performed on the Königgrätz battlefield." Relief, although it was inadequate to cope with so disastrous a situation, was speedier and more effective because it had been organised in advance, instead of being left, as at Solferino, entirely to improvised helpers,

recruited on the spot after the event. This was a striking justification of Dunant's ideas, of those auxiliary Services which the Army had feared might be more of a nuisance than a help. "It was then indeed", Dr. Julius Naundorff declares in his book "Unter dem Roten Kreuz", "that the military authorities began to realise the value of assistance from private Societies. Even some governments grasped that it was in their interests to support the Red Cross Societies and accept co-operation which cost them nothing. The Prussian Government was so aware of this that it convened a Conference in 1876 in Berlin, for the purpose of making practical improvements in the Army Medical Services, following the lessons of the 1866 campaign.

While the idea of the Red Cross had taken firm root in the minds of both the general public and the authorities in Prussia as a result of these two experiences, this was not the case everywhere. Hence the new test it had to meet during the 1870-71 Franco-Prussian War proved rather disappointing. In France the long period of peace that had succeeded the Italian campaign had not been calculated to prepare people's minds to meet the needs of a new conflict. The enthusiasm aroused by Dunant's ideas had waned, all the more so in that the events which had inspired them—the Solferino slaughter—had occurred on foreign soil. French people had not actually witnessed them. The 1864 Convention, duly signed and ratified, had remained hidden away in the files, and had never been seen by those who would be called upon to apply it. No rational liaison system between the Army Medical Services and the Red Cross had been established. But the latter did not remain passive. Its Committees set a huge wave of patriotism in motion, contriving to organise hospitals, supply relief, help the Medical Services here and there. While they were able to claim that they had come to the relief of over a hundred thousand soldiers, once again it had been a question of improvising. The movement was still far from the advance relief preparations for which it had been instituted. In addition there was a certain amount of confusion because civilians or military, ignorant of the precise significance of the Red Cross emblem and the rules attached to its employment, were very apt to indulge in its misuse, thus weakening the force of the Geneva Convention.

All the energies of the International Committee on the one hand, and the National Societies on the other, were required to straighten out the situation and avoid this Convention, which represented such a definite step forward in international law, from becoming a dead letter almost as soon as it had been introduced.

In succeeding years, the Red Cross had many opportunities of facing the realities of war. Each of them served as a source of new experience for the Societies of the countries involved and the International Committee, and helped to accustom the armies by degrees to the intervention of Red Cross auxiliaries and to respect the Convention.

They also enabled improvements to be made in the Army Medical Services and the National Red Cross organisations, even so far as non-belligerents were concerned. But they were too scattered and circumscribed, however, for the idea of the Red Cross really to take root in the minds of the general public. The movement remained confined to relatively small groups of individuals. It was only when the First World War broke out that the Red Cross idea took firm hold of everyone and definitely imposed itself. The world nature of that conflict, its scale, violence, and above all its length, the number of victims of all types, owing to new means of destruction and economic blockade, compelled the National Red Cross Societies to a systematic effort. In a certain way, they opened the eyes of the general public to the realities of war, even in some of the neutral countries. It was at this juncture also that the Red Cross, for the same reasons, began to broaden its original scope of action and launch out into other spheres. For the first time, war added to the wounded and sick of the armies in the field, for whom the Red Cross had originally been intended, just as many if not more victims of other types : war prisoners, civilian internees, refugees, bombed and starving civilian populations. All these people suffered from the direct effects of the war as much as the stricken soldiers lying on the battlefield. The Red Cross principle was that friend and foe should be cared for alike. Could it remain indifferent to the distress of so many of these victims on the pretext that it was hidden beneath civilian clothes instead of a uniform ?

Localised and then world-wide conflicts have made the Red Cross a truly universal movement, not only in the sense (like after

its first twenty-five years) that there are committees almost everywhere on the lines conceived by Dunant, but because it has reached the man in the street and its originally limited aims have been extended to embrace all forms of human suffering. In some countries it has become such a popular institution indeed that people forget it is a spontaneous, voluntary, disinterested organisation and consider it bound by actual duties, in the same way as any official body.

It has been so successful in its achievements in the past that they are now looked upon as natural and it is expected to repeat them as a matter of course. This attitude towards the Red Cross, which is frequent, is the greatest compliment it could be paid, but is not without danger.

The Red Cross, however, exercises world influence in other ways as well. Its achievements are not only to be measured by what has been done under its own flag or its own institutions. A number of relief societies, official or private, have sprung into being in peace or wartime because it has given the first impetus, acting as a pioneer. By giving the example of what *can* be done, it has converted possibilities into duties. In the same way as its first effect was the improvement of the Army Medical Services, more than one government social welfare or health body today is a direct consequence of its initiative.

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What part did the International Committee play when it came to reality and the progressive development of the original idea? Once the mandate entrusted to the Committee of Five by the Société d'utilité publique (Public Welfare Society) had been fulfilled, what role could it assume? Only a minor one, apparently. After the adoption of the 1864 Convention, the small Genevese Committee set itself to spread its ideas by word and pen, promote the establishment of the Committees it had been decided to organise at the 1863 Conference, obtain ratifications or accessions to the Geneva Convention. It was able, in addition, as we have seen, to

study the working of the Army Medical Services during the 1864 and 1866 conflicts and try to improve them, as well as the arrangements for forwarding relief.

When in 1867 it arranged the first International Conference of the Relief Societies, in Paris, 21 countries, including all the large European Powers, were already bound by the Geneva Convention and possessed National Relief Committees. This meant its task was now completed and it could dissolve with the moral satisfaction of having given practical expression to and firmly anchored Henry Dunant's twofold idea, in record time, thanks solely to the enthusiasm of its members, who were devoid of any status or authority. In addition, it had the more material satisfaction of having received the Grand Prix of the Paris World Exhibition. Dissolution seemed so logical that the Committee itself was the first to have the idea. But the National Committees asked it, as founder of the movement, to remain as a moral and historical link between them, and the guardian of their common Charter. Two years later, at the 1869 Conference in Berlin, the International Committee defined its duties in the following terms: "The rôle to which we have confined ourselves hitherto and which satisfies our ambitions is simply that of an office or central headquarters for correspondence, always prepared to serve the interests of the movement when these call for it to enter into play". The Berlin Conference added the following precision to this definition: "In case of war, the International Committee shall see that in a suitably chosen locality a correspondence and information bureau shall be set up to facilitate in all ways the exchange of communications between the Committees and the transmission of relief". The members of the International Committee would have been highly astonished at that time if they had been told what the general interests of the movement would demand, not of their ambitions but their hearts, the huge machine into which their "correspondence central headquarters" would be converted during the two world wars, and the ever wider confines of the fields of human suffering in which they would be called upon to exercise their spirit of initiative.

Barely a year later, the Committee was already required to carry out the decision adopted in Berlin. As soon as the Franco-Prussian War broke out it opened an international agency in Basle,

while maintaining its office in Geneva. This agency's work was speedily to become something more than mere office routine. A relief supplies depot had to be added to the information centre headquarters. It was no longer simply a question of centralising requests and offers but actual relief supplies, in order to forward them as quickly as possible and according to needs. This was not all. Besides the countless requests for relief, personal requests, especially for information with regard to the missing, came flowing in. The number of families without news of their loved ones swelled day by day as a result of the turn of military events, the disorganisation of transport and communications, the growing numbers of civilians fleeing before the enemy or of prisoners falling into its hands. It became a custom to write to Geneva or Basle. What could the International Committee do? The Red Cross had been conceived only for relief to the wounded and sick of armies in the field. There were so many of these that they already fully occupied the Committee. But among the wounded and sick many were prisoners of the enemy and a war prisoner, even if unharmed, is a sufferer, while on the other side of the front his whole family is a prey to anxiety. This led the Committee to promote the establishment of a second information office, for prisoners of war, under the management of one of the members of its Basle Agency. As the red cross emblem was reserved for the wounded and sick, a green cross was made the emblem of this office.

Thus the unambitious "correspondence office", while carrying out the task for which it has been organised, but on a far larger scale than imagined, gradually became the transit depot and distributing agent for relief, organised hospitals and convalescent homes, assisted in repatriating disabled soldiers and, lastly, opened up this new sphere of Red Cross activity: assistance to prisoners of war and the re-uniting of family links across the war front. By the end of the war, the International Committee in Geneva and its Basle Agencies had forwarded relief to a value of over 3,000,000 Swiss francs, which was a large sum at that time, bearing in mind also the unorganised character of the Committee. Apart from this there was the moral comfort it had been able to give the war victims and their families, the value of which cannot be expressed in terms of any currency.

In succeeding years, right up to the First World War, the rôle of the International Committee was to remain relatively small, although it was more important than that of a mere correspondence centre headquarters and the achievements of its Basle and Geneva Agencies had endowed it with greater authority.

New Information Agencies also had to be opened with fresh wars, in particular the Turco-Russian War in 1877, the Serbo-Bulgarian war in 1885 and the Balkan Wars of 1912-13 ; these Agencies were respectively located in Trieste, Vienna (under the supervision of the Austrian Central Red Cross Committee) and Belgrade. The missions sent out by the Committee were not only able to observe the working of the Army Medical Services and the Red Cross, with a view to making improvements, but they co-operated in the collection and distribution of relief and sometimes intervened with belligerents to urge the respect of their obligations under the Geneva Convention. Meanwhile, the Committee continued with its study and endeavours to improve humanitarian law, the defence and spread of Red Cross ideas, the promotion of new Committees, to which it gave international life by its recognition and the notification of their establishment to the already existing Societies.

Its work was fruitful even if it was not particularly spectacular. It helped to give ever firmer root in world soil to the idea of impartial relief of war victims and the necessity of laying down this moral obligation in written law.

1914-1938

The scale and length of the First World War, the number of victims involved and its varying problems were to give the International Committee an entirely new impetus and lead it to conceive and fulfil tasks which it was soon to be the sole organisation in a position to execute.

There is no question here of outlining these even briefly. At most an attempt will be made to give some idea of their nature and scope. In order to grasp the full significance of these developments,

it should be remembered what the Committee was and what authority it enjoyed. At the time of the 1870 war, it had been nothing more than a group spontaneously organised by a few citizens. It did not even possess Statutes. These it had since laid down, but they merely gave it the status of a private society whose members were recruited by co-optation. It had also taken the title of International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Its legal status and authority were no greater than that of some charitable society. From the Red Cross angle, it remained the link between the National Societies. Furthermore, the 1912 International Conference of the Red Cross in Washington had added to the decision adopted in Berlin the following recommendation: "these (Red Cross) Societies should organise, in peacetime, 'Special Commissions' which, in wartime, would collect and forward to the International Committee of Geneva relief for distribution to servicemen in captivity. The International Committee, through the intermediary of neutral delegates accredited to the Governments concerned, shall ensure the distribution of relief to individual prisoners and shall distribute other gifts between the different prisoner-of-war depots, taking into account the donors' wishes, the needs of the prisoners and directions of the military authorities."

So far as international law was concerned, The Hague Regulations annexed to the Convention of 18 October 1907 made the following provision in Article 15: "Relief societies for prisoners of war, which are properly constituted in accordance with the laws of their country and with the object of serving as the channel for charitable effort, shall receive from the belligerents, for themselves and their duly accredited agents, every facility for the efficient performance of their humane task, within the bounds imposed by military necessities and administrative regulations. Agents of these societies may be admitted to the places of internment for the purpose of distributing relief, as also to the halting places of repatriated prisoners, if furnished with a personal permit by the military authorities, and on giving an undertaking in writing to comply with all measures of order and police which the latter may issue".

The legal structure and the legal basis of action of the ICRC were obviously very insignificant. In the absence of any binding

mandate or the material power to impose itself, authority had to spring from its independence. Faith in the idea for which it had agreed to fight was its only arm against the might of States and their military forces.

These were the circumstances in which the ICRC notified the National Societies on the outbreak of hostilities in 1914 that it was prepared to open an office to centralise all the information and gifts intended for prisoners of war, and subsequently announced that it had been opened under the name of "International Prisoners' Relief and Information Agency". After which the handful of persons composing the Committee seated themselves round a table and waited for events.

Their wait was not to be long, letters and telegrams asking for information soon came pouring in.

The first battles of the War had been a veritable holocaust. The invasion of French territory had filled the hearts of countless families with anguish as to the fate of their father, son, or brother who was missing. Dead or alive, prisoner or free, wounded? Government offices, overwhelmed with work, were unable to reply. It was then by some strange phenomenon the word "Geneva" spread from lip to lip. Letters came in an unceasing flow. What was to be replied? The Governments were asked but they had to be coaxed. They had other and more important problems to deal with, in their view, than answering this Geneva Committee. Finally, on 7 September 1914, a first list of French prisoners in Germany was brought along by the President of the Red Cross at Freiburg-in-Breisgau, the first in exchange of the requests from families. It looked as though the members of the ICRC were to have a heavy task. "You'll see, we shall need to be at least 16", said one of them, while his colleagues threw up their hands, protesting that 8 would always be enough. By the next month they were 200, and a few months later 1,200! The premises in the rue de l'Athénée were too small and they had to move to the Palais Eynard, which had been lent by the town authorities. This in turn proved too small for all the Services, and on 12 October 1914, the Agency took possession of the Musée Rath, the former Palais des Beaux Arts of the city of Geneva. What was most difficult was to organise the work. By dint of imagination, however, it succeeded in arranging

a series of separate Services, split up into Sections, according to the nationality of prisoners or the type of work.

The Hague Regulations had duly stipulated that the national offices should enter all information relating to prisoners of war on personal cards. But these were to be handed over to the Government of the opposing Party after peace had been concluded ! Were families to have to wait for months, maybe years ? The heartache of the mother or wife of a missing man is no less painful than a physical wound. Since the Red Cross was there to alleviate suffering, it would try to relieve this suffering too. The Geneva Agency undertook to act as intermediary and immediately forward the lists of prisoners received from the other camp to the authorities. Still more, to shorten administrative delays and reassure the families which wrote to it directly, it would transcribe these lists on to personal cards. 7,000,000 names were to be transcribed in this way. The technical difficulties inherent in the different languages involved, the errors of transcription, demanded the precision of a watchmaker. The requests were so inaccurate that it was often necessary to consult a great many cards before finding the man it was wanted to locate. And there were all those whose name was on no list, all the " missing ". It was decided to trace them. The Agency opened inquiries, first of all by means of lists posted up in the camps and then individually. This meant discovering the names of regimental comrades among the thousands of cards, who might possibly have witnessed the fate of the missing man. It was an almost impossible task, but that did not prevent its being undertaken. This Inquiry Service proved so valuable that the Governments were able to make official use of the statements collected by the Agency.

As they were able to obtain information with regard to the fate of prisoners, families got into the habit of sending messages to Geneva for them. At the beginning there were 5,000 letters a day on an average. This work was not so simple as it appeared. The letters had to be carefully scanned and filtered. It was an unusual means of communication and if the Agency were to have forwarded messages which were insulting for the opposing party, or contained military information, the belligerents could quite legitimately have suspected the Red Cross of failing to be neutral. This activity could compromise the other Services of the ICRC. Subsequently corres-

pondence between prisoners of war and their families was organised through the postal Services of neutral countries and the Agency was able to reduce this type of work, without completely eliminating it.

There were not only letters and telegrams. From the beginning of September 1914, parcels began to arrive—a hundred a day to begin with. But this dribble was soon to become a flood, Pathetic family parcels whose contents, however humble were to be a treasure to the prisoner, as much for the tenderness with which they had been prepared as for the addition they made to the only too often meagre rations of captives. New Services were set up, arrangements were made with the authorities of the forwarding, receiving and transit countries to simplify postal or customs formalities which threatened to slow down the traffic and deprive the parcels of the major part of their practical value. The National Red Cross Societies and the Governments in turn became concerned as to the fate of their nationals who were prisoners and the stream of individual parcels was accompanied by another stream of collective consignments. This was how the Agency came to handle, check or repack and forward nearly 2,000,000 individual parcels and not far from 2,000 goods trucks of collective consignments. The “ Information Office ” had developed into a huge agency for tracing, information, correspondence, translation, inquiries, forwarding and even banking operations, for, in addition to letters and parcels, there was money to transmit.

It is hard to imagine what all that involved in a world at war, in the form of approaches and negotiations with authorities which were more possessed of a will to conquer at any cost than pre-occupied by the welfare of their enemies.

Surely this feverish activity, which sprang from emotional impulses, was all rather a pleasant “ extra ” if not a luxury ? After all The Hague Regulations laid down that prisoners should be humanely treated ; that their food, sleeping accommodation and clothing should correspond to those provided to the troops of the Detaining Power. They facilitated correspondence also. True, but the spirit in which Conventions of this type are concluded in peacetime is one thing, and the atmosphere in which they are applied in the very midst of war is another. These provisions, which com-

A HUNDRED YEARS
IN THE SERVICE OF HUMANITY

Some dates,

A few pictures.



Le Comité International
de Secours pour les Militaires blessés,

Institué à Genève

Par la Conférence Internationale d'Octobre 1863.

Délicie, par les présentes, conjointement avec
Messieurs le Docteur Appia, Monsieur
Van de Velde, Ancien Officier de la Marine Royale Hollandaise,
sur le théâtre de la guerre dans le Schleswig, soit pour
s'y employer, autant que possible, au soin et au soulagement
des blessés, soit pour y étudier l'organisation du service
sanitaire dans l'armée alliée.

Le Comité prend la liberté de recommander
son envoi au bonveillant accueil des Autorités militaires,
espérant qu'elles voudront bien faciliter l'accomplissement
de son mandat, en raison de son caractère exclusivement
philanthropique.

Genève, le 22 Mars 1864.

Le Président Honoraire :

Gen. G. H. Dufour

Le Président :

J. Moynier

Le Secrétaire :

Henry Dunant.

First ICRC
mission (1864)

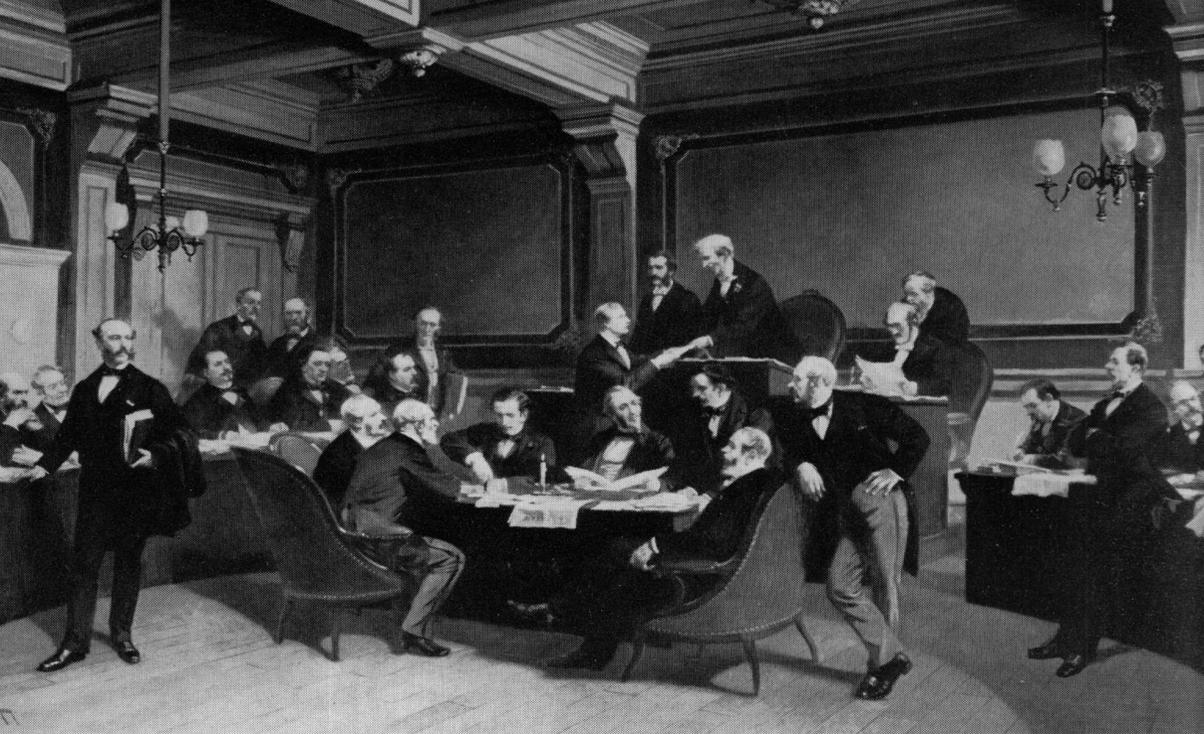
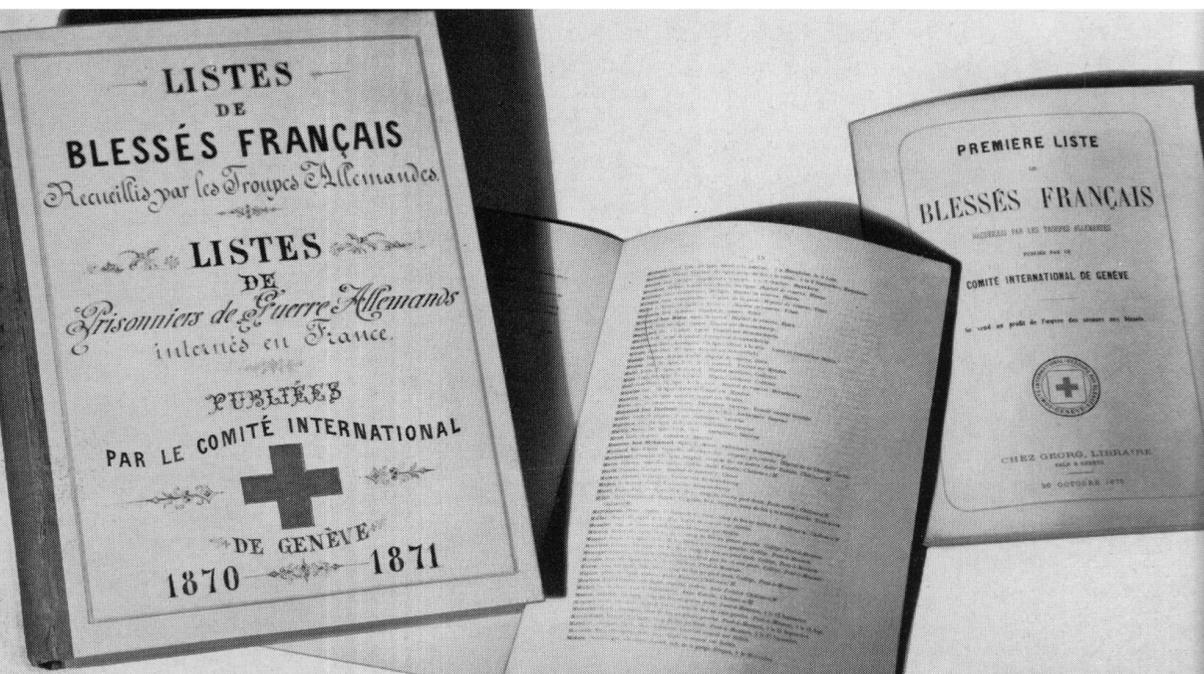


Photo Boissonnas, Geneva

Signing of the First Geneva Convention (1864)

First Prisoners of War Agency, Bâle, 1870.





War in the Balkans (1912) — visit to wounded.

First World War — Prisoners of War Agency (1914).





First World War — Visit to prisoners of war (1916).

Diplomatic Conference, Geneva, 1929.

Photo Jullien, Geneva





Spanish Civil War — visit to political detainees (1936).

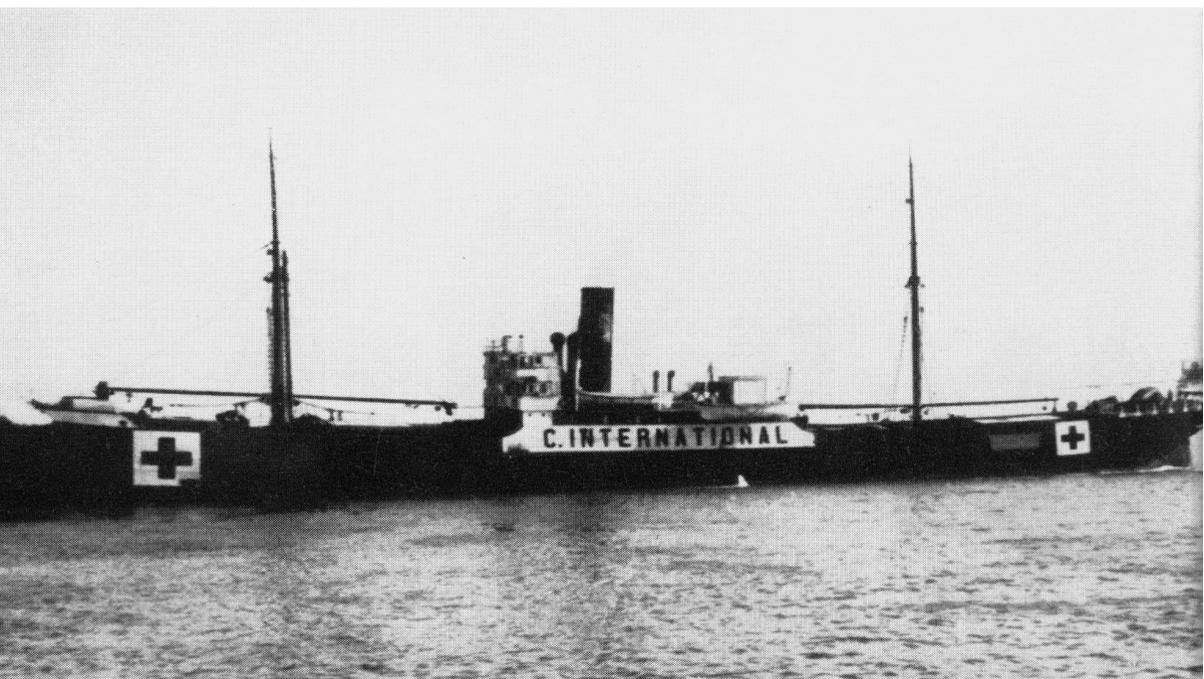
Second World War — visit to prisoners of war (1940).





Second World War — Central Prisoners of War Agency.

On the Atlantic, in 1943 — vessel chartered by the ICRC.





Diplomatic Conference, Geneva, 1949.

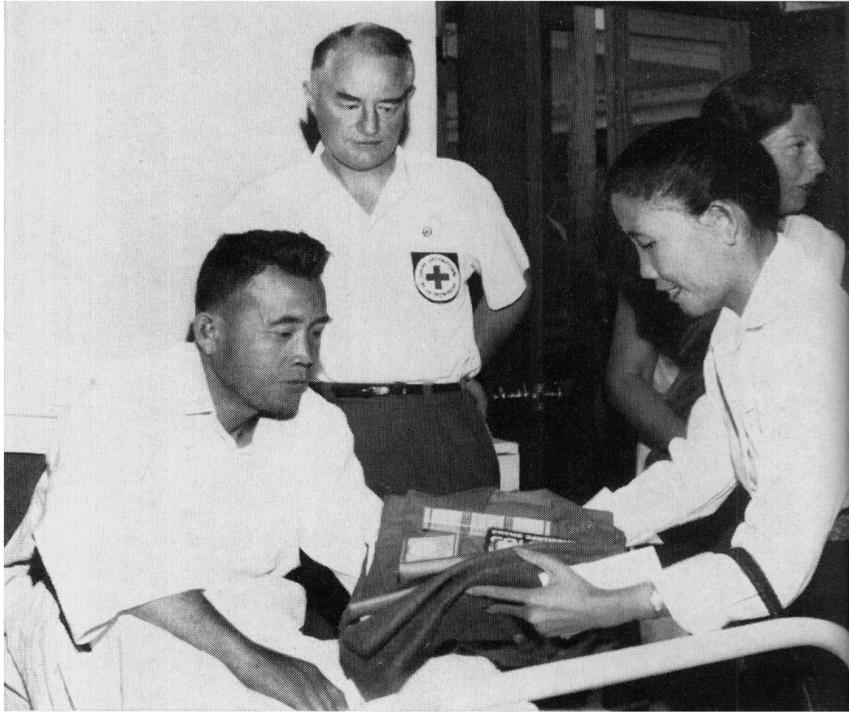
Relief action in Hungary (1956-1957).





in Algeria

in Laos



in Kenya



prised no sanctions or even any supervision, were left to the discretion and honour of the belligerents. The latter were more prone to cite them in order to denounce enemy violations than to exact application by their own agents.

There was no international treaty, no mandate under which the ICRC could claim the right to intervene with the belligerents for the proper respect of The Hague Regulations. Nevertheless, it did so unhesitatingly. Just as Dunant had pleaded for the wounded and sick, the ICRC pleaded for prisoners. Its President and members, who were free from any national or political influence, unhampered by the restrictions sometimes imposed by diplomatic customs simply on the strength of their moral authority approached the different governments in person or in writing. It was probably just on account of its independence and because it held no mandate from anyone but itself, that the Committee succeeded—in varying measure and not without difficulty—in improving the fate of prisoners of war and facilitating not only its own task, by means of its suggestions and intermediary, but also formulating the agreements between belligerents which progressively completed or more clearly defined The Hague Regulations.

More than one temporary or lasting improvement resulted from the missions sent to visit camps. Admittedly, they were only authorised to distribute relief, but the ICRC delegates did not remain blind when doing this. Their observations, assembled in Geneva, gave some idea of camp conditions, how the international regulations were respected—or disregarded. Moreover, there are things of which a government has no wish to let foreigners be witness. It sufficed for a Red Cross visit to be announced for hasty improvements to be made in the daily bill of fare and the huts to be cleaned out. While it may be queried whether this was not merely for stage effect, it was always so much to the good. The delegate was not necessarily gullible and the complaints heard during these visits did not fall on deaf ears. They were noted by the ICRC, which continued to intercede. Its reprimands, based on an ideal, could find support in a more hackneyed argument—reciprocity. Its representatives having access to the camps on either side of the front, the Committee took advantage to vaunt its parallel efforts and their results to both Parties.

As a result of almost permanent repudiation of the 1906 revised text of the Geneva Convention, thousands of members of the Army Medical Corps were not only treated as prisoners of war, but retained even when their assistance was no longer required. The ICRC, although in no way responsible for the execution of the Convention, swamped as it was with protests, constantly intervened throughout the war to explain the spirit in which it should be interpreted.

The most difficult problem, however, was to be the repatriation of prisoners of war in general. As the war dragged on indefinitely, it became not only cruel but senseless to retain captive all those who were definitively disabled on account of wounds or sickness. Here again the Committee undertook long and laborious negotiations. These finally, led, from 1916, to the seriously wounded or sick being repatriated or interned in Switzerland.

It is good to relieve distress, but even better to avert it. The ICRC, with its knowledge of all the difficulties which beset humanitarian undertakings in countries where everything is being subordinated to the war effort, tried to see ahead. Already in 1917, it drew the governments' attention to the great obstacles it would be necessary to overcome at the end of the war to bring back these millions of prisoners of war to their home country. Its good reason for anxiety was to be only too clearly demonstrated when the time came. The repatriation of the prisoners of the Central Powers to Russia and of the latter's prisoners to the Central Powers or their successor States, presented an almost insuperable difficulty in the political, administrative and material chaos which followed the collapse of the Empire in Germany, the dividing up of Austria-Hungary and the 1917 Soviet Revolution. All these countries were impoverished and disorganised by the war. The resulting difficulties were no longer a matter for two or three governments, but for a series of quite new governments barely endowed with an authority which was still contested, unknown to each other or fighting against one another. What could the Red Cross do, except offer a few food supplies, clothing, comfort, through the local branches of its national committees? In a word give expression to human pity, with resources which had been reduced by over four years of war, and in an atmosphere, if not of hatred, at least of unfriendliness. In actual fact it did more than this, and here

again the ICRC had the courage to conceive ambitious plans. It offered its services to the governments, whose goodwill was ill-served by circumstances most of the time. It proposed schemes, suggested agreements, organised escorts. The governments themselves or their commissioner asked for its assistance. In addition to the administrative and material difficulties which delayed solution of the problems, there were questions of ideology. Some authorities claimed the right to oppose the return of Russian prisoners to a country of which they challenged the regime. The German and Austrian prisoners, who were scattered all over Russian territory up to the remote borderlands of Siberia, found insurmountable obstacles in the way of return to their homeland, among which diplomatic difficulties were not the smallest. It was only in the spring of 1920, nearly two years after the close of hostilities on the Western front, that, the diplomatic difficulties having finally been smoothed out, repatriation could actually start. But at what a cost! The Soviet parcelling out of Russia practically closed the direct road. All that remained for the prisoners in European Russia was the Baltic route, while those from Siberia had to travel via Vladivostok, the China Seas and the Indian Ocean. The ICRC opened up these routes, but it remained to use them. Material means were needed for that. The ICRC confided its troubles to the newborn League of Nations. The latter, realising that there was no better basis for its reputation than the encouragement of such an undertaking, established a special Commissariat for the Repatriation of Prisoners, and succeeded in persuading Dr. F. Nansen to take charge. A scheme was then adopted at a first conference, convened and presided over by the ICRC, assembling Dr. Nansen on the one hand, and the representatives of Germany, Austria, Hungary and the Soviets on the other. After that, practical work at last started under the guidance of the Commissioner, who was able to declare, with the work which had already been done by the International Committee, everything already organised, that all he had to do was to find the money, ships and supplies required to take full advantage of the possibilities offered by the opening of the Baltic routes. The aura which still surrounds the name of Nansen is proof of the success with which he carried out his task. The close cooperation between the Commissioner and the Inter-

national Committee, the efforts of a series of German, Austrian, Czech or Soviet organisations, enabled most of these prisoners, lost in a hostile world, to be returned to their homeland.

This shows how greatly the ICRC was led to expand its originally modest work. In doing so it was not only responding to immediate needs. Without knowing, it was helping to establish Geneva Law on a much broader basis. All these activities which have been partly outlined were to supply substance not only for a new revision of the Geneva Convention but for the future Prisoners of War Code. They so perfectly fitted in with the logic of the initial principle of the Red Cross, that in the end they came to be considered as natural. The new Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War would either impose on the signatory governments or at least open the door to a new edition of what a handful of great-hearted men, without any authority, any mandate, almost any material means, had succeeded in obtaining. What was a miracle was to become something that was due, provided for, organised. What was the result of concessions obtained by dint of pleading or insistence would become the right of the weak, the duty of the powerful. As to the ICRC, its freedom from any binding mandate had converted it from a mere moral link between private Societies into a neutral intermediary between the most powerful States.

This very briefly depicts, from certain angles, the extent to which the activities of a few devoted individuals, who in September 1914 had opened an Information Agency for Prisoners of War, had gradually developed. That Agency, it will be remembered, originated from a similar venture in Basle during the 1870 War, when it had not been dared to place it under the sign of the Red Cross, reserved exclusively for the wounded and sick. In September 1914, the ICRC found itself in a comparable position. Alongside, the stream of requests for information concerning prisoners of war the Agency received increasing inquiries concerning civilians in enemy territory, who had generally been arrested and interned as soon as hostilities broke out. The Geneva Convention only applied to members of the armed forces. Civilians, who were by definition non-combatants, were theoretically outside the war. But now they too were affected.

The ICRC, although this new problem was beyond its scope of action, was not prepared to remain deaf to appeals which betrayed suffering just as keen as that of the members of the fighting forces, and equally deserving. It therefore (as in Basle in 1870) established a separate Section for them which was distinct from the Agency.

To begin with it endeavoured, first through the intermediary of the National Red Cross Societies and then directly with the governments, to ensure that civilian internees, or at least those who were retained only because they were enemy nationals, should be assimilated to prisoners of war as regards their material conditions of captivity. It took some pains to do it but the Committee partially succeeded and this simplified the work of the Agency's civilians' Service. But at the same time the latter's work was expanding owing to the existence of other civilians who had fallen into the hands of the enemy : hostages, political detainees, populations in occupied territories. The task was now one of obtaining all it had been successful in accomplishing for prisoners of war for these other victims, but without any legal basis so far as the latter were concerned. The Committee's imagination and obstinacy were constantly required to improvise, as the lengthening out of the war added to the victims and needs grew with destruction, which simultaneously reduced the means wherewith to meet them.

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After the end of the war it was almost worse. A large part of Europe, ruined by it, was a prey to political, national and social upheavals. The repatriation of prisoners of war from the Eastern front has already been referred to earlier. The events which delayed this created other problems. In addition to the millions of prisoners there were millions of civilians : refugees, dispersed families, whole peoples in a state of famine or threatened with epidemics. Warned of these situations by its delegations, the ICRC had to launch large-scale actions, find relief, arrange for it to be centralised, promote—for it could not do everything itself—the organisation of philanthropic movements, official or private bodies.

For example, it brought about the establishment of the International Union for Child Welfare which, under its patronage, was

entrusted with centralising the already existing societies and promoting new ones ; it succeeded, with the newly founded League of Red Cross Societies, in obtaining the establishment of the Nansen Commissariat by the League of Nations. At the same time it was busy organising the allocation of relief in Vienna, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, placing its delegates at the disposal of the governments concerned to organise and supervise transit camps, hiring or purchasing ships, so that repatriation, hampered by the sudden appearance of so many new countries, accumulating hostile frontiers, might proceed.

This was when, for the first time it came face to face with civil war. The new regimes installed in Russia in 1917-18 and in Hungary in 1919 produced another form of conflict : class or ideological warfare, which, alongside the suffering inherent in any war, threw masses of political detainees into prison. Nothing authorized the Committee to intervene in the internal affairs of any State : nothing beyond the fact that the seriousness of a wound does not depend on the legal character of a conflict and that the concern of the Red Cross for its victims has no more to do with their convictions than the colour of their uniform. The International Committee therefore endeavoured to persuade the ruling authorities to allow the National Society to subsist and permit the Committee itself to continue with its own activities. As can be guessed, in the circumstances of the moment, its efforts were not always crowned with success, far from it. Nevertheless, its delegates, in contrast to more than one disappointment, recorded two great triumphs : on 7 August 1918, a Decree signed by Lenin recognizing and maintaining the Geneva Convention and all the other international agreements relating to the Red Cross, was officially communicated to the International Committee and all the governments parties to the Geneva Convention.

In 1919, in Hungary, the ICRC delegate successively obtained from the Bela Kun revolutionary government and the Hungarian government which overthrew it, permission to visit, assist and on occasion free the political detainees and hostages imprisoned by both sides.

It was necessary to stress the huge efforts of the ICRC, which have almost been forgotten nowadays, but whose value was twofold.

Not only did they alleviate countless sufferings, but, having started out very modestly, they spread to every form of distress engendered by war. New bases of action were evolved and new laws hammered out which saved the Red Cross from being swept away with so many other blessings of civilisation in the storm of the Second World War.

Eventually, as the world gradually returned to order, the ICRC was able to reduce its activities, but it never interrupted them.

There were now large intellectual and legal tasks to be performed : further revise the Geneva Convention in the light of what experience had taught ; elaborate the 1929 Prisoners of War Code to complete, clarify and strengthen the insufficient provisions of The Hague Regulations for Prisoners of War and make it a Second Geneva Convention ; study legal means whereby to protect the various categories of civilians, internees, deportees, refugees, etc., for whom the war had been just as harsh as for the armed forces ; and finally, in the light of the threat to the civilian population arising from the terrifying development of weapons and new means of destruction such as poison gases, to awaken public opinion to this danger and urge the governments to come to an agreement on the necessary limitations and prohibitions.

Moreover, peace was fragile. Conflicts broke out here and there. While these were localised and did not always demand large-scale actions on the part of the ICRC, they kept it on the « qui vive » and constantly obliged it to plead for the respect of the principles of the Conventions.

Two events, however, were to call for the direct intervention of the International Committee and prepare it for the major test of 1939-1945, while draining its coffers to the last farthing. These were the Italo-Ethiopian war in 1935 and, from 18 July 1936, to a far greater extent, the Civil War in Spain. In the latter, the equality of the opposing forces, the existence of two rival governments, both enjoying the recognition of foreign governments and benefiting from the participation of a great many foreign volunteers in organised formations, were speedily to vest it with almost all the features of an international conflict and hence raise the same problems. Nevertheless, it was an internal conflict and, as such, eluded the Geneva Conventions and The Hague Law. It was there-

fore no small affair and no trifling a result to demand and obtain that not only the ICRC but foreign Red Cross Societies should be allowed to give assistance, the emblem respected, information agencies established and visits to prisoners arranged, and to get written undertakings not only for the intervention of the ICRC but the at least implicit application of the Conventions, in spirit if not to the letter. It would be overbold to claim that the Red Cross was successful in relieving all the suffering caused by that conflict between brothers. But its intervention in this civil war constituted a precedent of the greatest importance and a new victory of the Red Cross over national sovereignty. What the ICRC succeeded in achieving not only in respect of material but also moral relief and the observance of Conventional principles (always brought back into question again), was almost a miracle in the light of the circumstances, the unyielding nature of a struggle all the more bitter because between compatriots and for ideological reasons. It should be added that if it aroused universal interest from the political and even the military angles, the interest of the world of charity was no less keen. The ICRC's actions were substantially supported by the financial relief which came from 50 different countries.

1939-1963

The Spanish war was hardly over and the International Committee was still busy with its immediate consequences when the fateful Second World War broke out. Was it to be a Blitzkrieg or a worse repetition of the 1914-1918 conflict? What could the ICRC do with an empty cash-box? It was impossible to foresee how military operations would develop, or, consequently, the place, type and scale of the problems they would raise. All that could be done was to set up a Central Information Agency. For the rest it was a matter of "wait and see". Several of the Committee's members had helped to organise and run the 1914-1918 Agency and the experience gained in the Spanish war was still fresh in the

minds of those concerned. Everything could therefore be organised in advance, without trusting to improvisation. The Committee proceeded accordingly. As in 1914, it notified all the belligerents of the opening of the Agency, but, aware of what lay ahead of it, the Agency was immediately installed in premises with an area of 4,700 square metres. Then the first lists of prisoners were awaited, but before these had even arrived in Geneva (insofar as they had been made out) the campaign in the East was already over. Poland, occupied, annexed, had been wiped off the political map by its opponents. In the eyes of the Reich Government, its appropriation eliminated the Geneva Convention, and the fate of its inhabitants, whether military or civilian, was a purely internal affair. The ICRC failed to share its views, but only succeeded in obtaining incomplete authority to concern itself with prisoners of war. As to the Soviet Government, it had not ratified the 1929 Prisoners of War Code and was not bound thereby.

Then came the period of the "phoney war". The ICRC was not idle, of course, but its activities were very limited, almost laughable in the face of the huge premises prepared. Advantage was taken to improve the mechanism of the Agency for whatever purpose this might serve.

But in 1940 everything changed. Millions of civilians became scattered along the roads, millions of prisoners of war were thrown into camps by the invasion of the Netherlands, Belgium and France. The Agency was flooded almost overnight. Up to 60,000 letters a day came in! People no longer knew to whom to turn, with the general confusion, the constant retreat of the authorities. And so it was that, just as in 1914, they appealed to Geneva. Then lists, endless lists, came rolling in, for whole armies had been captured in a single day. As in 1914, all this information had to be transcribed, entered on cards, reforwarded, but at what a pace and on what a scale. The requests for information had to be examined, sorted, compared with cards, answered. The Red Cross was not an administration. Its workers, who for the most part were volunteers, had come to help. To them each card represented a man each letter a tearful woman. In order to find everyone therefore, they conceived and invented new and ever more efficient systems. It was a stupendous task if one only stops to think that in the Agency's card

index there were 15,000 Martins, of whom 1,500 had the same Christian name, and still more Jones, Smiths or Mullers ; that the same man might be registered on four, five or even ten different cards because his name had been misspelt. It was no longer 7 million cards, but nearly 40 million that had to be established, sorted, filed, handled. In the second part of the war, machines came to the help of men. With these alone 8,600,000 perforated cards were established, 66 million sorted, 24 million transcribed on to lists. In all, 240 million cards passed through their delicate mechanisms. These last figures give some idea of the work involved in the other millions of cards which were not machine handled and had to be made out by hand.

Apart from the Central Agency, it was camp visits which had been most useful for the prisoners of war during the first world conflict. The Committee reintroduced these. Having promoted the Prisoners of War Code, after the Geneva Convention, it despatched delegates to ascertain how this was being applied. The very existence of this purely de facto supervision, which supplemented that of the Protecting Power without overlapping it, sometime sufficed to avoid too flagrant a disregard for the Conventions. According to cases, remarks were made to camp commanders or approaches undertaken by the ICRC to the highest authorities. These visits were, moreover, a real source of moral comfort to the prisoners. However fleeting, however small the number of prisoners with whom the Red Cross delegate could talk in a day, they showed millions of people they were not completely abandoned to the will of their captors, that friends were thinking of them, concerned as to their fate. It was a breath of fresh air from the outer world, the sight of a new but friendly face. The gates of prison camps swung open 8,000 times in the course of the war to let in these unknown friends. They did not come empty-handed, moreover, but brought material as well as moral relief in their wake. It will be remembered how the ICRC in 1870 added assistance to prisoners of war to relief for the wounded and sick and how this new activity developed from a secondary to a main activity during the First World War. With greater reason, this occurred again during the Second World War. The 1907 Hague Regulations and their sequel, the 1929 Prisoners of War Code, had laid down that recognized relief Societies should

be admitted to camps for distributing relief. Originally, the Red Cross Society of the Detaining Power had been primarily in mind. Obviously, the true spirit of the Red Cross and the Conventions demanded that it show solicitude for the conditions of enemy prisoners, just as a nurse on the battlefield or in hospital cares for compatriots or enemies alike. Without accusing anyone, however, it is a fact that, with few exceptions, little attention was paid to the fate of enemy prisoners. On the other hand, the National Red Cross Societies, with the whole population of their countries, concerned themselves with compatriots who were prisoners of war. Would they at least be authorized to enter enemy territory, under the Red Cross emblem, in order to bring comfort and relief to their friends? There was no hope of this. In the atmosphere of hatred and feverish excitability prevailing in the world, and with the general "spy complex", belligerents were not prepared to authorise enemy nationals, even if they wore a Red Cross armband, to penetrate into their territory. They barely allowed in the smallest possible number of neutral Red Cross Societies' representatives. Thus it was that, once again, people turned to Geneva.

The ICRC was very soon a target for individual parcels to be forwarded or money to make them up. Did this simply mean reforwarding? Far from it, the parcels' contents had to be ascertained, they had to be repacked, and often new routes found to send them on to their destination. The necessary arrangements were accordingly made. But, valuable as they were, these individual parcels soon proved insufficient. The ICRC then renegotiated with the National Red Cross Societies. The latter made up standard parcels which were grouped and placed in a transit warehouse in Geneva, from where they were forwarded to the enemy and divided up into camp consignments on the spot. This was easily done on paper, but when it came to practice, in full wartime, it was another matter. How were the seas to be crossed when every day ships were attacked and often sunk, except friendly vessels? How were the consignments to be forwarded inland in countries disorganised by war, where railway equipment had been mobilised for war needs and was constantly dwindling as the result of bombing? The Committee hired and bought ships, established warehouses in ports, and concluded agreements in Geneva.

Its agents besieged transport undertakings. In the end, strange paradox in the midst of total warfare, ships flying the red cross flag, and trains plastered with the emblem, were to be seen transporting supplies from one continent to another, a challenge to the bombs pouring down each day on towns. Crates of food and medical supplies which were to help the prisoners to survive; books—a million and a half—religious articles, musical instruments, games and sports equipment, which were to keep their souls and minds alive and uphold their morale, for man “doth not live by bread alone”. The total weight of all this relief was 450,000 tons, i.e. 45,000 goods trucks, equivalent to 90 million 10-pound parcels. All this was the work of a few great-hearted men without any official authority or material means.

It should not be imagined that the Central Information and Relief Agency functioned automatically once it was organised. Every day new difficulties arose, every year there were fresh problems. After the invasion of the Netherlands, Belgium and France in 1940, came the invasion of the Balkans, the war in the East, the war in the Far East, the landing in North Africa, the Italian armistice, the landings in France. All these episodes involved new masses of prisoners up till 1945, when whole armies belonging to the Axis fell into the hands of the Allies. Each time this meant fresh negotiations, the establishment of new services, each time it grew more difficult. This is where figures assume their full value, and at the same time invest with horror the complete fruitlessness of other Red Cross efforts. Alongside the millions of captives who directly or indirectly benefited from the action of the ICRC, just as many never saw a delegate, never received an ounce of relief. Why? Because their country or their country's opponent was not bound by the 1929 Prisoners of War Code.

The Red Cross proposes Conventions. The governments sign them or do not. They alone are responsible as regards their application or violation. To the ICRC these texts are purely and simply the expression of a higher righteous principle. Where they are lacking it is just as obstinate in what it endeavours to obtain in the name of this principle and on the basis of the Conventions as where they exist. The ICRC makes no discrimination among war's victims, but governments act otherwise. Thus the gates of Soviet prisoners'

camps in Germany or Axis prisoners' camps in the USSR remained firmly barred to the Committee, while in the Far East conflict it was authorised to intervene only to a tenth of what was allowed in Europe or America.

Things were just the same for civilians. They were covered by no Convention, for at the time the Red Cross and the First Convention had been established they were not included in war. If they sometimes suffered from its effects, it was only now and again, to a limited extent, when enemy troops passed through the country or if they happened to be close to a battlefield. It was only a matter of casual episodes, which were not of long duration. With the First World War everything began to change; with the Second everything had definitely changed. The Red Cross had tried to protect them too, on the strength of experience during the 1914-1918 war. A draft had been drawn up, adopted by the Red Cross Conference in Tokyo in 1934 and was to have been submitted to a Diplomatic Conference in 1940. When the war broke out it was still in the form of a draft. The ICRC in vain asked the governments to put this draft into effect. This might have confined its interventions to traditional activities on behalf of prisoners of war, which at least could find a basis in legal texts, and wash its hands of a situation outside its work. But this would have been contrary to its line of conduct. As a comprehensive set of rules was not attainable, it did what it could in detail to alleviate distress with its own means and wherever it was possible. It placed the Agency at the disposal of civilians for inquiries, tracing, correspondence. Here again letters flowed in. After some negotiation, it was finally permitted to forward civilian messages limited to 25 words. A standard form was drawn up in agreement with the National Societies. When the messages passed through Geneva they had to be entered on cards, censored, checked, grouped, stamped, and finally forwarded to their destination. From 1,000 a day in the beginning, at each decisive juncture of the war they swelled to tens of thousands. By the end of it, 24,000,000 such messages had passed through the Agency's hands.

Then there were all the civilian internees. Those for whom the mere fact that they happened to be on enemy territory when hostilities broke out was enough for them to be thrown into camp from one moment to another. And all those arrested by the police,

day after day (and often night after night), who disappeared without leaving any trace. The Committee finally succeeded, as in 1914, in arranging for civilian detainees to be assimilated to war prisoners and by analogy receive the same treatment. As to the second category, they were to remain lost for the Red Cross as for everyone. The "security of the State" which was invoked as the pretext for the disappearance of these people placed the ICRC before a blank wall. This was the most painful tragedy of the Committee's whole existence. Only in the ultimate phase of the war did it succeed, by dint of repeated attempts, in obtaining permission to send a few parcels. These piled up and in the end rose to 700,000. At that time also it succeeded in obtaining the liberation of a few thousand internees whose health was poorest in order to transport them to Switzerland. But what were these rescues "in extremis" as compared with the suffering and extermination of so many years.

Still another tragedy was that of hungry populations. Has anyone forgotten the terrible famine which struck Greece, for example, in 1941-1942, when day after day thousands of people (especially children) died like flies and the health of a whole country was in danger of being ruined for a generation? The International Committee began by setting up soup kitchens with the foodstuffs supplied by the Turkish Red Crescent Society. But this was not enough, the situation called for massive assistance. Only the Allied Powers could furnish this and they were anxious to do so. But the blockade rules which they themselves had issued prohibited an ounce of food being sent to the other side of the front. The ICRC, with the help of neutrals like Sweden and the Swiss Red Cross Society, intervened with the Allies. A derogation from the rules was obtained on condition that relief was distributed under the supervision of neutral delegates. It was only then that a fleet of ships was able to transport the 18,000 tons of Canadian wheat or other foodstuffs to Greece which were to save the country from losing all its inhabitants. A host of other small or large operations was carried on besides. Conceived, negotiated, arranged with great difficulty, these were all in the nature of adventures, heroic expeditions, in a world as much disorganised by hate as by material destruction.

The close of hostilities in 1945 was not to let the ICRC lay down the arms of charity any more than in 1918. Months and years are required to build up again what a bombardment destroys in a few moments. The camps were emptied of millions of prisoners of war only to close their gates again on new millions. Bread did not fall from the skies as bombs had done. Millions of uprooted, transplanted individuals were to be found wandering over the face of the earth searching for a country which no longer existed or was no longer willing to recognise them. Nothing, or almost nothing, was ready in a large part of Europe to take over right away, with all the material means available to governments, most of the actions the ICRC had conducted all alone, single-handed. War was no longer rife, but peace had not yet taken possession of men's hearts. Too many people were still considered as enemies for the Red Cross always to meet with the necessary understanding in its various approaches.

Hence the ICRC had to come to the assistance of a great many prisoners of war and civilian internees, defend their interests, distribute relief and organise their repatriation. It was only at the end of 1948 that all the prisoners had regained their homes.

It also came to the help of countless refugees and "displaced persons" in particular by instituting a "travel document", which was a sort of passport to facilitate their repatriation or emigration. Furthermore, it organised the regrouping of families scattered by the war. The International Tracing Service at Arolsen (German Federal Republic), which has been managed by the ICRC since 1955, performs similar work. All the information and documents relating to deported, displaced or missing persons in Germany and in the territories occupied by the German Forces during the Second World War are deposited and filed there. This Service carries out inquiries and replies to requests which still run into thousands every month.

Finally, the ICRC was entrusted with another duty resulting from the Second World War, under Article 16 of the Peace Treaty between Japan and the Allies, namely, the allocation of indemnities to former prisoners of Japan. The funds were handed over by the Committee to all the countries having submitted sufficiently

accurate lists of prisoners, which involved a good deal of checking.

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The ICRC undertook heavy relief tasks when new conflicts broke out after the end of the Second World War, to assist their victims. First of all in Greece it occupied itself with the needy civilian inhabitants, exiles and political detainees, to whom it distributed relief to a total value of 4.15 million Swiss francs.

Its action in connection with the Palestine conflict was on an even larger scale. The Geneva delegates endeavoured to obtain respect of humanitarian rules, establishing safety zones round the hospitals and alleviating the conditions of prisoners of war, while distributing large quantities of relief to the civilian inhabitants affected by hostilities. But its biggest task was the provision of relief to the Arab refugees. For fifteen months, it was responsible for assistance to the hundreds of thousands of refugees in the areas which had been hardest hit by events. The relief distributed to these, most of which was from the UN, represented a total value of over 144 million Swiss francs.

The ICRC was also called upon to intervene in a whole series of troubles and conflicts in different parts of the Asiatic Continent : Indochina, Indonesia, Burma, the Malay States. Everywhere it came to the relief of the military and civilian victims of events and visited prisoners of war and political detainees in large numbers.

During the troubles which followed India's accession to independence and the establishment of Pakistan it assisted some of the millions of refugees who flocked to one or the other side of the new frontier. It brought relief to the victims of the armed conflict which broke out in Kashmir and visited those taken prisoner, many of whom were freed as a result of its intervention. In Bengal, where the refugees were often living in utter distress, it organised extensive medical assistance and set up hospital centres, more especially for children.

Again the ICRC intervened in the Korean war, offering its services to both parties as neutral intermediary to carry out the humanitarian duties demanded by the conflict. Unfortunately, it was unable to act in the North of the country, but at least in the

South it could assist the numerous prisoners of war and distribute relief to the civilian population.

The Suez conflict in 1956 was the first occasion on which the new Geneva Conventions of 1949 were fully applied. The ICRC ascertained that these were respected by the belligerents and assumed the responsibilities they entrusted to it in cases of international warfare. Its work on behalf of prisoners of war, the wounded and civilians, was very effective, especially in Port Said, where it distributed large quantities of medical supplies and clothing. Relief trains were able to enter the town, under the protection of the ICRC, when it was still occupied by the Anglo-French expeditionary force, and leave again loaded with wounded and sick. In Egypt, the Geneva delegates assisted internees and stateless persons, while on the Israeli side, it visited the prisoners of war and saw that the Fourth Convention was applied for the protection of civilians in occupied territory.

Almost simultaneously, the tragic events of Hungary burst into flame. There the ICRC was extremely active in helping the unfortunate inhabitants. It organised an airlift for the transport of relief supplies to Budapest, comprising 90 tons of blood plasma, dressings, medicines, foodstuffs and blankets, largely gifts from various National Red Cross Societies. These demonstrated untold generosity throughout this episode and enabled the ICRC to send further consignments of relief by road, rail or river. The Committee was the only organisation authorised to distribute relief on Hungarian soil, by virtue of an agreement concluded with the Budapest Government. Thus the lines of ICRC trucks were able to cross a frontier which was closed to all other convoys. In Budapest itself, the ICRC saw that the relief was fairly distributed, while in Austria other organisations, like the League of Red Cross Societies, received the refugees. The ICRC's work in Hungary continued some way into 1957 and the relief it was able to distribute represented a value of 85 million Swiss francs.

In Algeria, it offered to carry out its traditional humanitarian activities from the beginning of the conflict. The French Government accepted this offer and between February and April 1955 a first mission of three delegates from Geneva visited 43 prisons where people had been confined on account of events. It was

followed by seven others up to the spring of 1961, during which the Committee's delegates visited most places in Algeria where there were prisoners. Apart from the moral and material comfort brought to detainees, the prison and camp regimes were considerably improved as a result of the observations, suggestions and reports to the detaining authorities. Similar visits were made in France itself, where many of the prisons and internment camps for Algerians were periodically visited by Committee delegates.

At the same time the ICRC multiplied its interventions in favour of French prisoners held by the Algerian National Liberation Army, and succeeded in securing the release of about 50.

It also came to the assistance of the populations victims of events. First of all it organised large relief actions for the Algerian refugees in Tunisia and Morocco, until the League of Red Cross Societies took over this activity. Afterwards it forwarded foodstuffs and medical supplies to the displaced populations regrouped in the interior of Algeria. These supplies, representing nearly 900,000 Swiss francs in all, were distributed with the help of the French Red Cross Society.

The ICRC has set itself to alleviate the suffering arising from most of the conflicts which have broken out in recent years in various parts of the world. Just to mention the most important of its actions, there were Cyprus, the Lebanon, during the troubles of the summer of 1958, Cuba, where that same year it obtained a truce to permit evacuation of the wounded, Kenya, where it visited the Mau Mau prisoners, Rhodesia and Nyasaland, where it made similar visits to persons imprisoned as the result of disturbances, Indonesia, where it distributed two tons of medical supplies, Laos, to which it forwarded various emergency relief supplies, and Nepal, where it endeavoured to alleviate the distress of the Tibetan refugees.

Two other ICRC actions should be mentioned in rather more detail. In the first place, its part in the repatriation of Koreans living in Japan. This was a relatively new task for the Committee, which it accepted after having been approached by the Japanese Red Cross Society. Its responsibility was to supervise the various phases of the repatriation operations up to embarkation, ensuring that humanitarian standards were adhered to. The presence of the

Geneva delegates was a guarantee that no one was embarked against his will. By the beginning of 1961, nearly 50,000 of the 600,000 Koreans residing in Japan had been able to return to wherever they wished in their home country, i.e. to the Korean (North) People's Republic.

The ICRC's activities from the beginning of the troubles which followed the proclamation of independence in the former Belgian Congo were even more important. The delegates immediately established neutral zones round the hospitals, sent ambulance columns to several areas, organised the evacuation of civilians and members of the armed forces and arranged for milk and other food distributions to the inhabitants in the various provinces, as well as to many refugees.

In Leopoldville the ICRC delegation organised a tracing service for missing persons who had disappeared in the course of events. It also carried out a series of visits to political prisoners in the different provinces of the Congo and intervened for the release of civilian and military detainees.

But the biggest operation of the Red Cross in the Congo consisted in its medical action, thanks to which the hospitals in the main centres could continue to care for inhabitants. Several of these hospitals had suddenly found themselves deprived of doctors ; the ICRC and the League of Red Cross Societies consequently launched an appeal from Geneva to different National Societies for the immediate despatch of medical teams. The League recruited these while the ICRC co-ordinated their work and assigned them to the areas in the Congo where they were most needed. A hundred-odd doctors, nurses, men and women, from some 20 National Red Cross, Red Crescent and Red Lion and Sun Societies joined in this action, which provided large sections of the Congolese population with the medical care of which it would otherwise have been bereft.

Still more recently the Bizerta and Goa conflicts, the Sino-Indian conflict, the Yemen, have furnished opportunities for the ICRC to intervene in accordance with its traditional mission. Towards the end of 1962 it was even asked to assume a task outside its usual scope, in connection with the Cuban incident. Political tension was running very high and war could break out from one day to the next, a war which, by resort to nuclear weapons, would

have led to mass extermination. The United Nations turned towards the ICRC as the only body which could still save the peace : it had to be ascertained that the ships en route for Cuba were not carrying long-range atomic weapons. The ICRC did not feel it could evade this responsibility, but surrounded its assistance with all the conditions demanded by prudence and the requirements of neutrality. Finally, the strain was eased without the ICRC actually having had to act. But it has the feeling of having facilitated this to some extent ; it also believes that by contributing to the maintenance of peace it remained loyal to its duty.

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The above shows how the ICRC, year after year, in conflict after conflict, constantly repeats the same gesture, offering its services as neutral intermediary. Its activities, on a smaller or larger scale, never vary : Agency, relief, camp visits. Events and camps bear different names : war is called rebellion or liberation, re-establishment of order or oppression, according to the case ; combatants are qualified as outlaws, tyrants or martyrs. Equal hatred, equal suffering always prevail. For the ICRC, therefore, its duty is unwavering.

Mention must still be made of the Geneva Conventions of August 12, 1949, the work and cornerstone of the ICRC. Whilst it is true that from the very origin the Red Cross was conceived with a dual aspect of relief on the one hand and Conventions on the other, and although the two are inseparable, it is nonetheless a fact that, in practice, action each time anticipated the law. We would stress that the Conventions are but the attempted expression—ever imperfect—of a pre-eminent principle. They facilitate renewed action; they do not generate it. The Convention of 1864, in its moderation, contained three essential points :

The first of these was contained in article 6 : “ Wounded or sick combatants, to whatever nation they may belong, shall be collected and cared for.”

The second, which springs directly from the first, is contained in article 1 : “ Ambulances and military hospitals shall be recognised as neutral”.

The third, a tribute to the action of Henry Dunant and the women of Solferino, is intended to enable those relief Societies which are being formed in various countries to be prepared for the repetition of such action and to do so with the aim of making it more effective. This point is covered by article 5, which starts: "Inhabitants of the country who bring help to the wounded shall be respected and shall remain free . . .".

The 430 articles contained in the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 are the direct issue of these texts. The principle has not varied, it is extended to all categories of victims of war and is completed by an array of rules for implementation. This extension from 10 articles to 430 also reflects the spirit in which the 1949 Conventions were signed. In 1864 the Governments of Europe were moved by Dunant's chronicals, and if it was not without difficulty that they managed to ratify a Convention, they did so because they recognised the need.

Since then, two full-scale wars have plunged the entire world into the miseries of war. These have multiplied, have become more protracted and have been extended to a point where they spare no one. During a single war, we have seen on the one hand, the means of destruction make such headway that they could exterminate humanity, and on the other hand, we have seen civilisation stoop to allowing the perpetration of crimes of all sorts which stagger the imagination. Legislative assemblies in 1949 were not thus called upon merely to harness themselves to the performance of a useful task, they were confronted with an imperious necessity. The results of their deliberations, these Geneva Conventions, spring from remorse, condemnation of the past and a quest for salvation. Moreover, as we have said, they are but the repeated affirmation of a single idea that is that a man who has been placed "hors de combat" and who does not take part in the fighting, shall be respected as a man; if he is in suffering he shall be succoured.

The first Convention is none other than that which was initialled in 1864, relative to wounded and sick troops, revised and brought up to date in 1906 and 1929. The second extends the application to naval warfare. The third, concerning the treatment of prisoners of war, is a revised version of the 1929 text which itself issued from the Hague Convention of 1907. Their principle being

uncontested, it was sufficient to revise them and bring them up to date in the light of experience. Only the fourth Convention is new. Its purpose was to afford to civilians fallen into enemy power protection equal to that applicable to troops. Although distinct from one another, these four Conventions have been conceived as forming integral parts of a whole.

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In 1963, the Red Cross should have the same attitude as Dunant when he wrote his book *A Memory of Solferino* a hundred years ago. If he described his efforts and those of the women of Castiglione for the wounded in such detail, it was not in order to boast or win compliments, but to show the scale of the catastrophe, make readers feel the useless suffering of war. He tells what a handful of kind-hearted people were able to do in order to underline what they were not able to do and, in conclusion, seek for proper means to make relief speedier and more effective in future.

The Red Cross should view its first century of work with the same feelings. The great development of the movement deserves emphasis, but it should not be a pretext for vainglory. Proof of the usefulness of the Red Cross, the value of the individual self-sacrifice of which it is the sum total should be drawn from history. Past experience should thus give the conviction that still more can be achieved in future and means sought to this end. In other words, the Centenary should be more in the nature of a new step forward towards years still richer in results, than the end of a hundred years' journey.