

## Mr. BOISSIER RECEIVES THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE'S GOLD MEDAL

Mr. Léopold Boissier celebrated his seventieth birthday in July. The institution of which he is President had decided to award him its gold medal for that occasion. It was presented to him at a ceremony held on July 4, 1963, at which the members and staff of the ICRC were present. <sup>1</sup>

Mr. Frédéric Siordet, Vice-President of the ICRC, paid tribute to Mr. Boissier in the following terms :

... It was in 1946 that you were asked by the Committee to become one of its members. It was well aware that by family tradition you set great store by its principles and its action. It counted upon all that you could bring to it as a professor of law, and upon your experience of men and institutions, as Secretary-General to the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

In the early days you were no doubt only able to devote a limited amount of time to the ICRC, on account of your professional activities which suited your tastes and your temperament so well. However, you accepted to undertake, in addition to regular participation in the work of the Council, as President of the Legal Commission, amongst other tasks, the negotiation of agreements with the League and then that of Chairman of all groups charged with making a study of the reorganization of the ICRC.

During the course of the last World War, the ICRC having been forced to leave its modest quarters in the villa Moynier, had extended itself to a vast extent. Under the pressure of events and taking bold initiatives, it had ceaselessly to create and expand new sections in a great variety of fields with continual improvisation, since the war never gave it sufficient chance to arrange ahead nor the time for organization.

After 1945, a gradual decrease of its activities led progressively to a contraction of a number of its sections, but the general structure, a heritage of war time, was too heavy for its actual requirements. It was therefore necessary to take advantage of a period of apparent calm in order to build up a coherent organization, adapted to the needs of the moment as well as to its weak financial situation, yet capable in the event of some great conflict of rapid but rational development. It was also a question of re-examining and normalizing certain methods of working

---

<sup>1</sup> *Plate.*

## INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE

acquired through improvisation during the war years. One had also to lay down some directing lines for the ICRC's future action and draw up a programme. It was to be thought and hoped that the International Committee would be constrained less often than in the past to make hasty interventions in cases of conflict, that it could, whilst being prepared to undertake the necessary practical action, once more devote itself more to the elaboration and dissemination of the doctrine and the Conventions of the Red Cross.

It was under these conditions that you became President of the Committee, abandoning both your university courses and your position at the Inter-Parliamentary Union, in order to devote yourself entirely to it. The three-fold reorganization had scarcely been completed, it was just beginning to be in operation, with its staff reduced to a bare minimum, when the disturbances in Hungary and the Suez conflict were to follow in rapid succession.

We could then see the high standard you set for the rôle of the International Committee and for its President's task. You immediately identified yourself completely with the ICRC with your whole mind, being concerned only with its possibilities of action and with its reputation.

Since the events of Hungary and Suez, the Committee has not known one single month of respite. It would be difficult to make a list of the major or minor conflicts which have kept it in a state of alert or have required its intervention in any part of the world. In order for these to be localized and not to provoke action on a spectacular scale, these conflicts raised and still raise problems bristling with difficulties.

It is often a matter of ill-defined disturbances or conflicts, of wars which do not go by that name, of subversive warfare which affords only too many apparent pretexts to one or other of the parties to the conflict to dispute the application of the Conventions or to decline the Committee's offers of service.

Throughout all these new problems, the difficulties of their approach, the variety of their particularities, the diversity of the results obtained, whether positive or negative or indifferent, you have shown your constant concern not to compromise the authority of the ICRC in actions in which its competence was disputable, but to preserve it intact to enable it always to fulfil its rôle and save lives in the future.

How does the International Committee's authority stand in the world of the Red Cross and outside? Within the Red Cross, those of us who listened to your final intervention at the New Delhi Conference or who took part in the Council of Delegates meeting at Prague over which you presided, know that it is in good hands.

As for its authority outside, we have recently been able to see what that was, when the Secretary-General of the largest inter-governmental organization the world has ever known asked the ICRC, whose status



**GENEVA** — On presenting the ICRC gold medal to Mr. Léopold Boissier, the institution's gratitude is expressed to him by Mr. Frédéric Siordet, Vice-President.

**TANANARIVE** — Visit of Mr. Hoffmann, delegate of the ICRC, to the Red Cross Society in Madagascar. Mr. Rakotobé, its President, making a welcome address.



in law is nothing more than that of any parochial body, to undertake an action of military control making exorbitant demands on the Red Cross, giving its reasons for so doing that such an intervention could save the peace then being threatened!

One could make a long speech describing all your activity at the head of our institution. I know, however, that you would suffer in your modesty. In any case, this is not the right moment to do this. But I would like you to know with these few words of mine that the ICRC has taken your birthday as a reason for expressing to you the affection and best wishes especially from its members, as well as its attachment, gratitude and esteem. Need I add that we all associate our thoughts with Mrs. Boissier, to whom we pay tribute.

It is with these feelings that your colleagues here present now beg you, Mr. President, to accept the Gold Medal of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

After Mr. Boissier had, in moving terms, expressed his thanks and stressed the part being played by all his colleagues in the common task, Dr. Hans Meuli, member of the ICRC, then presented the President of the International Committee with another Medal, that of the *Alliance Suisse des Samaritains*, which is this year celebrating its 75th anniversary. This organization, which works in close co-operation with the Swiss Red Cross and under the same emblem, has chosen to offer, in this Centenary year, its medal to the President of the ICRC. Dr. Meuli pointed out that the *Alliance* had in the past awarded that same medal to two founders of the Red Cross, Henry Dunant and Gustave Moynier. In expressing his gratitude for this honour, Mr. Boissier underlined the fundamental importance of the movement of the Samaritans, those indispensable first-aid workers whose good services we might all of us one day require.