

# NEWS OF NATIONAL SOCIETIES

Formerly: International Bulletin of Red Cross Societies, founded in 1869

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## Canada

As in each previous year the Canadian Red Cross has published its Annual Report, and that of 1961 recently received by the ICRC, is full of interest, since it describes the activities of one of the most enterprising of National Societies. It also contains the report of a man whose death has been a cause of deep sorrow to the whole of the Red Cross movement. National Commissioner W. Stuart Stanbury in fact died at Puerto Rico during the 7th Inter-American Conference of the Red Cross at which he was present as head of the Canadian Red Cross delegation. A man of the Red Cross in the fullest meaning of the term, of remarkable intelligence and great devotion, he was a faithful friend of the International Committee, which will always remember him with gratitude.

He had written the preliminary pages of the report and we cannot do better than to reproduce their conclusion, which shows the broadness of his mind and how effectively he had worked for the Canadian Red Cross, of which he was one of the most enthusiastic animators :

A very responsible burden rested on the voluntary officers of the Canadian Red Cross Society when the peace-time programme was initiated. Much was expected from the Red Cross but its very prominence subjected it to the closest scrutiny from all sources. Had its programmes overlapped official ones or been planned in a haphazard way without consultation, so that they could not continue within the framework of the public health services, governmental co-operation would have vanished. Support and assistance from professional bodies could be retained only by ensuring that health programmes were guided by responsible professional persons. Suitable ways had to be found to channel the great desire to serve into useful avenues within the competence of each volunteer and to provide additional training, where necessary. To reach the people most in need of them, Red Cross must have the courage to take its health services to the remotest frontier

areas. Each programme must be built according to the highest professional and technical specifications, but the Society must not hesitate to surrender its most successful model to the public health authority when the appropriate time came. It must always have a vision of the future, so that with each succeeding development in the official health services, Red Cross could pioneer another area as yet unexplored.

The launching of the Canadian Red Cross Society on peacetime work in 1919 was a milestone in the history of public health services in this country. There was no doubt that a voluntary agency of its potential strength was greatly needed at that time. In the intervening years, Canada's official health services have developed at an unprecedented rate and the measure of the Canadian Red Cross Society's contribution to this development can be judged from the record.

In 1960-61 we enter a new era. Legislation for more generous health provisions has reached a level hardly dreamed of by the public even a decade ago, and yet there is a general feeling that health and welfare services are still inadequate. So strong is pressure in this regard that a Royal Commission has been appointed to investigate existing services and make recommendations for their improvement. Will there be any place for the voluntary agency in a world of ever-increasing paternalism ?

That nation is greatest in which the greatest number of citizens assume self-imposed obligations for the common good. Speaking at a Red Cross meeting in 1930, Dr. Helström, Chief Medical Officer of the Ministry of Health of Sweden, commented that the official services in Sweden were remarkably efficient, but the very fact of their being official imposed certain limits beyond which they could not go. "In the field of preventive medicine", he said, "there are social welfare problems which, as their very name implies, belong to society, must be dealt with directly and freely by the members of society as individuals. When pioneer work has to be done, the initiative that is unhampered by official restrictions is required." A former Canadian Minister of Health, the Hon. Paul Martin, expressed a similar conviction in 1948: "I am convinced that any attempt to concentrate all health and welfare services in the hands of government agencies would be a serious retrograde step. I cannot conceive of a society—however well ordered and advanced—in which the government assumes total responsibility for health and welfare."

The future pattern of Canada's health services is unclear and, therefore, the rôle the Canadian Red Cross Society will play is equally unidentified, but of the need for it to play a rôle there seems no doubt. No matter to how great an extent official health services expand and develop, they can never embrace the total physical and mental infirmities of mankind; there will always be gaps that voluntary organizations must fill. If the official services absorb some current Red Cross programmes, the Society will be able to pioneer the solution of new

problems which are bound to arise as knowledge increases. There will always be crises when Red Cross will be needed to work in collaboration with, or on behalf of, government services. To the end of time, there will be health programmes which, Canadian governments will be the first to acknowledge, can be conducted more expeditiously and economically by a voluntary agency, like the Red Cross, with its permanent corps of voluntary workers and its ability to recruit additional professional and technical volunteers in any emergency.

We have also had occasion to point out that, amongst the multiple activities carried out by the Canadian Red Cross, blood transfusion plays an outstanding rôle<sup>1</sup>. This then drew attention to the success achieved by that Society with its voluntary donors. In this sphere 1961 was of great importance. In fact the report presented to the Central Council's Annual Assembly on May 7, 1962 gives pride of place to that action: "The highlight of the Red Cross year was the opening of a blood transfusion depot in Quebec City on the 3rd November last. This indeed was important locally, providing, as it did, a long-needed service to the hospitals in the eastern part of the province. Its significance, however, was much greater, in that it forged the last link in the chain which would give Canada a blood transfusion service of truly national coverage. After sixteen long and hard years, not infrequently touched with frustration and adversity, a goal had been reached, an ideal had been achieved, which to many, inside and outside the Society had sometimes seemed impossible—a national blood transfusion service of high technical standard, based entirely on the voluntary principle. It is the achievement of hundreds of thousands of Canadians, who give their blood voluntarily, regularly and anonymously as donors, who serve as volunteers in the clinics, in the workrooms preparing supplies and in the multitudinous tasks that ensure a regular and adequate supply of blood to patients in hospitals."

The report also mentions the very close co-operation given by the government, and the total approbation of the public health authorities and hospitals which have taken on an increasing part in financial commitments. But the traditional activities have also been most vigorous, reflecting the spirit of devotion by the members of the National Society. Amongst other things one need only

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<sup>1</sup> See *Revue internationale*, February 1957.

mention the hospitals and nursing stations in the Far North. In five provinces, including Ontario, 26 Red Cross nursing stations carried out their work throughout 1961, with a total number of 36,644 hospital days. Medical personnel made 15,806 visits, whilst 25,985 out-patients were given treatment in the above-mentioned hospitals and stations.

The Canadian Red Cross takes a considerable part in international relief actions and 39 countries received its aid in 1961. It despatched 795 cases of clothing and bedding manufactured in workrooms throughout the country. The Junior Red Cross, always most active, also contributed to international mutual aid to a value of 96,135 dollars. In Morocco, the Society took part in the collective effort made on behalf of paralysed persons, which came to an end on June 30, 1961. Finally, mention should be made of the fruitful work of the National Tracing Service, of which we have already spoken here <sup>1</sup>, and which is being continued in constant co-operation with other Societies throughout the world and with the help of sections of the Canadian Red Cross and of those of other countries. Through the Enquiry Bureaux 892 persons were able to be traced for their relatives. Aid was also given to invalids and unescorted children.

If these few indications only give a pale reflection of the Red Cross of Canada, they do at least show how alive is the humanitarian ideal in that country, an ideal which W. Stuart Stanbury had striven to extend ever more widely, both by his own practical action and through his theoretical writing. It will indeed be remembered that he published a pamphlet summarizing "Red Cross principles" as set forth by Mr. J. Pictet, a director of the ICRC, in a book bearing that title.

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<sup>1</sup> See *Revue internationale*, October 1958.