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WORK OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS IN 1947.

In 1947, the work of the International Committee of the Red Cross was again exceptional. War work had to be continued, although on a reduced scale, and peace work was particularly important.

Although the Committee was able to hand over to national or international groups a large part of the work performed by its relief services, since it no longer needs to act as a neutral intermediary, certain of its special functions had to be maintained, in particular in regard to prisoners of war.

At the beginning of the year there were still hundreds of thousands of prisoners of war of various nationalities in the hands of the victorious Powers. The first endeavour of the International Committee of the Red Cross was to plead for their *release or repatriation*. Its most recent appeal to Governments and national Red Cross Societies in this connection is dated November 1947. Furthermore, the Committee has tried to accelerate their progressive repatriation, and has given its very special protection to German prisoners of war in France, more than 80,000 of whom have accepted to become civilian workers. The International Committee has had the satisfaction of noting that several countries (Belgium, Holland, Luxembourg, the United States) no longer held any prisoners of war at the end of last year, and that the total number in other countries was decreasing month by month, and will probably be reduced to zero during 1948.

The prisoners having no Protecting Power have had recourse to the *legal and judicial assistance* granted to them by the International Committee. The Committee likewise continued to *visit the camps and working parties*, as is shown by some two thousand reports drawn up in various countries and areas (Africa, Czechoslovakia, Far East, France, Great Britain, Middle East, Poland).

This assistance was extended to "Surrendered Enemy Personnel" captured at the time of the final capitulation. The International Committee obtained from the American Authorities that their status should be assimilated to that of prisoners of war.

Civilian internees, in particular in Australia and India, also benefited by the intervention of the International Committee, which sped up their repatriation.

Valuable relief was forwarded to these prisoners of war, but in an infinitely smaller proportion than previously, as the considerable gifts from their home Governments and Red Cross Societies were lacking. The Committee, however, succeeded in finding new donors of German origin or nationality.

In correlation with these activities the Committee continued to act as an information centre, as provided by the Conventions, and to reply to requests from private individuals and the various military missions, although it passed on to national agencies whatever fell within their competence. Thus, following negotiations relating to prisoners of war deceased or still captive, 50,000 new individual inquiries were opened, while the German files, for example increased by another 1,000,000 index cards, and numerous transfers of funds belonging to repatriated or deceased prisoners of war were successfully completed.

The International Committee helped prisoners of war who had become *invalids* by supplying the Authorities and specialised institutions with scientific documents and practical data, and in procuring funds for installing homes for Invalides.

With regard to *Displaced Persons*, the International Committee intervened through its missions or its regular delegations, in particular in Denmark, the various zones in Germany and in the Far East.

The International Committee and its delegations were very active in connection with *relief to civilian populations*, following on the liquidation of the Joint Relief Commission of the International Red Cross. The League of Red Cross Societies and the "Centre d'Etr'aide International en faveur des populations civiles" took over this task for the most part, but the International Committee and its delegations continued the negotiations required to secure transport facilities. Where necessary it also received, stocked or recuperated supplies, ensured their transit and their delivery to the beneficiaries.

New activities of the same type were inaugurated as a result of the civilian strife in Greece, Indo-China, Indonesia, and Paraguay. The International Committee by its action facilitated the forwarding of relief to the parties concerned and the despatch of medical supplies.

Among its *peace-time activities*, the first place should be given to the Committee's very heavy work to

bring about the *revision of the existing Conventions* and the *drafting of a new Convention for the protection of civilians*. It has moulded into a single coherent whole its own proposals, those of the preliminary Red Cross Conference (Geneva 1946) those of the lay and religious institutions who brought moral aid to the various war victims, and, finally, the sometimes very detailed suggestions of the Government Experts of fifteen countries particularly experienced in such matters, who met in Conference at Geneva under the Committee's auspices in April 1947. Subsequently, the opinions of several Governments absent in April, and those of the "Commission of National Red Cross Societies for the Study of Conventions" were added. A collection of drafts has been established by the Committee's departments, to be submitted to all National Red Cross Societies and to Governments, and examined by the XVIIth International Red Cross Conference at Stockholm in August 1948.

The Committee will report to this Conference on the work carried out on its own initiative, or in accordance with special mandates entrusted to it by preceding Conferences. It will moreover present its proposals, based on its experience in these matters. The drafting of the *General Report* and the special reports have largely occupied its general services during 1947.

The International Committee has given recognition to three new Red Cross Societies: the Lebanon Red Cross, the Philippines Red Cross and the Syrian Red Crescent. It has also worked towards the revival of the German Red Cross, particularly in the French zone, where it has already had the satisfaction of seeing local branches set up.

Various *missions and visits* have enabled the Inter-

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national Committee strengthen the bonds which link it to national Societies, for instance, one of the members of the Central Directorate participated in the Pan American Red Cross Conference at Caracas, and took this opportunity to visit the Governments and Red Crosses of twenty Republics in Latin America. Three representatives attended the Regional Conference of European Red Crosses at Belgrade, and subsequently called on the Governments and national Societies of Albania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Rumania and Yugoslavia.

(*News Bulletin C.J. de la C.R.*)

OLD AGE AND SURVIVORS INSURANCE.

The Federal Committee on Old Age and Survivors Insurance has held its second sitting in Berne on the 22nd of April under the chairmanship of Dr. A. Saxer, Director of the Federal Office for Social Insurance. The Committee examined the draft for an Order dealing with the voluntary insurance of Swiss citizens residing abroad. This draft had been prepared by the Federal Office and submitted in the first instance to a sub-committee presided over by Monsieur Albert Picot, President of the National Council. The draft has been unanimously approved by the Committee.

(As far as the Swiss residing abroad are concerned, an important step forward has thus been made. Before coming into force the proposed Order has, of course, yet to be endorsed by the Chief of the Federal Department for Public Economy and possibly also by the Federal Council itself.)

OUR NEXT ISSUE.

Our next issue will be published on Friday, May 28th, 1948.

We take the opportunity of thanking the following subscribers for their kind and helpful donations, over and above their subscription: A. Schmid, Mrs. H. M. Heinzelmann, O. Bartholdi, J. B. Tschudy, Ch. L. Chapuis, R. Dupraz, H. Bingguely, C. de Mierre.

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