

The work of the International Committee of "The Red Cross" during the Second World War

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corresponds to the requirements set forth in the introductory part of this talk. The short training period is not expensive, and yet it suffices, in view of the fact that the Swiss militia man, as a general rule, continues his military training outside his military service. As regards the arming of the people, this guarantees a rapid mobilisation which minimises the risk of a sudden attack. This is of vital importance, as it safeguards the most important task of an Army which exists only for purposes of defence, and is not intended for a war of aggression.

THE WORK OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF
"THE RED CROSS,"
DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR.

"TO HELP....."

Article 78 seems to permit Red Cross Societies to enter enemy territory, in order to distribute relief supplies. This had been done, to a certain extent, during the first World War; but in the last War, no welfare associations, not even Red Cross Societies, were in practice allowed to cross the fighting zone. Furthermore, the senders of collective relief were unwilling to entrust the issue of food-parcels to the welfare societies of the Detaining Power, even if they worked under the emblem of the Red Cross.

Why this twofold veto on the services of the Red Cross Society of the opposing side? Surely, the emblem under which these societies acted offered sufficient guarantee of their doing neutral work, either as agents in enemy territory or on behalf of the enemy, in the execution of a humanitarian task. The above attitude certainly involved a step in the wrong direction. It might be explained, but not excused, by the nature of the war. In each country the entire nation was, in varying degrees, enlisted in the war effort. The enemy was not merely an army, but an entire nation, seen in every citizen wherever he might be, in every institution of whatever kind. As auxiliaries of the Army Medical Service, National Red Cross Societies are necessarily connected in war-time with the military authorities of their country. Some of them are at all times linked by their charter or statutes to the Government.

What was required, therefore, was a neutral intermediary, who might be acceptable to both sides. Such is the distinctive nature of the International Committee. No Convention, be it remembered, called upon it to play this part in relief work; but its position, its former achievements and the establishment of the Agency allowed it to act usefully in this field.

Negotiations began - to gain approval, first of its intervention, and then of a plan of action. It is not enough that relief supplies and a neutral intermediary should be available. Food and medical supplies had to be shipped from the country which furnished them, cross the fighting zones and be received in the country to which they were sent. The war was not a war of armed forces only; it was economic too. Blockade and counter-blockade were weapons to cripple the enemy, if not to bring him to his knees. Blockade regulations were strictly enforced - so strictly indeed that an exception was not readily granted even to help fellow-nationals who had fallen into enemy hands. Governments, Red Cross Societies, the prisoners' next of kin were all anxious to send relief to the captives. This humanitarian and patriotic enterprise might, however, weaken the effect of the blockade, since so many goods would enter enemy territory. Even if the enemy did not profit by them direct, he might find pretext therein to reduce still further the already inadequate rations in the camps.

In consequence, the Allies allowed relief to be sent only to camps in which the Committee was able to exercise effective control of issue. One can understand this restriction up to a certain degree; but it remained a sore point, for it offered one of the most serious obstacles the Committee

encountered in its endeavours to assist other war-victims than the prisoners and internees to whom it had access.

On the other hand, the Detaining Power sometimes saw little advantage in encouraging such relief work. Though the extra supplies were useful in maintaining millions of prisoners, and increased the output of the workers, they put an additional strain on railway systems and means of transport already overtaxed by military demands and damaged by air raids. Besides, as the economic situation of the Axis countries grew worse, wholesale consignments of scarce foodstuffs, comforts, clothing and shoes for prisoners of war excited growing discontent among the camp guards and the population. To meet such complaints, the German authorities often had to point out that prisoners of war in Allied hands enjoyed similar privileges.

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CONGRATULATIONS ON THE OCCASION OF THE 1st of AUGUST CELEBRATION.

The President of the United States, Mr. Truman, sent a note to the President of the Swiss Confederation on the occasion of the Swiss National Day. President Truman said "On this day when the Swiss Confederation is celebrating the 100th Anniversary of her Constitution, I deem it a pleasure to send your Excellency and the Swiss people, the sincerest wishes and congratulations of the American people."

The Indian Prime Minister, Mr. Pandit Nehru, has also sent a note to the Swiss Minister in New Delhi, Mr. Daeniker, in which inter alia he says "Switzerland is almost a unique example of a country where peoples of different religions and of different languages can work together in harmony and mutual devotion for the ideal of peace."

The Prime Minister of New Zealand, Mr. Peter Fraser, sent a note to the Swiss Consul in Wellington, Mr. E. Theiler, for transmission to the Swiss Government. The note reads as follows:

"I have the honour to ask that a message of Greeting and Goodwill be conveyed to your Government on the occasion of the 657th Anniversary of the Swiss Confederation.

The ancient and historic traditions of Switzerland are held in the highest esteem by the people of New Zealand, as indeed they are esteemed by the peoples of all the freedom-loving nations of the world.

It is pleasing also to recall the close and friendly relations which so happily exist between our two countries and I take this opportunity of expressing the warmest greetings and good wishes of the Government and people of New Zealand to you and to the Government and people of the Swiss Confederation on this significant occasion."

The Swiss Government replied in the following terms:

"Very moved by friendly message of Ministry. We ask you to thank the latter for the sentiments so warmly expressed and to transmit the wishes of prosperity and happiness that we are forming in Switzerland for the far away but friendly people of New Zealand."

ABOLITION OF VISAS.

The Governments of Switzerland and New Zealand, in an exchange of notes between the Prime Minister, Mr. P. Fraser, and the Swiss Consul, Mr. E. Theiler, have