

Towards a better world

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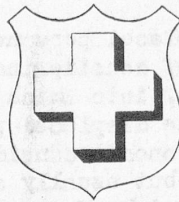
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TOWARDS A BETTER WORLD.

By: Theo Chopard.

The United Nations Commission for Human Rights has decided to include in its project for a World Charter, that "every person should have the right to seek and be given refuge from persecution" and that "every human individual" has a right to have a nationality." But - three years after the end of World War 2, hundreds of thousands of displaced persons are not yet enjoying those rights. According to estimation the number of those people, depending on whether they are registered or not, varies between 600,000 and 1,600,000. Some 6 to 700,000 of them are living in Germany and Austria and the Near East, and the International Refugee Organization is doing what best it can to save them from starvation. The organization does its best, but strangely enough while an abundance of money can be raised to wage a war, it proves extremely difficult to get together the money and the means of transport which the International Refugee Organisation should have to carry out its task successfully. The credits which the organisation has asked for, however, are not exaggerated. The reintegration of displaced persons into a normal life can only be done step by step.

Until the end of October last year, only 76,000 of them were able to find a new home. And there are vast territories in Africa, North and South America, Australia - not to speak of the Soviet Union - which could absorb millions of people. By opening their doors these countries would perform nothing more than an act of humanity. They would also show a lot of wisdom and far-sightedness, for only the presence of human beings can turn those vast empty regions into fruitful ground. The Brazilian delegate to the IRO Conference has clearly admitted that. But human nature remains human nature and those vast countries are just as filled by a strong feeling of nationalism as any other small country. Everybody is afraid of being flooded by those new arrivals. And, furthermore - and there is no use trying to hide this fact - there is a strong competition between the displaced persons on the one hand and all those nations who even in normal times have a population which is too numerous for them, such as Italy, Great Britain and other European countries.

Great Britain considers the migration of her nationals as a means of tightening the bonds between the Homeland and the Dominions, and the latter are giving preference to British citizens. In Italy there are about two million unemployed. One tenth of all Swiss are living abroad. In short, there is a strong competition between those people who have a home and have all their papers in order and who still wish to emigrate to another country, and those who have no home, no paper, no rights and no place to go. This is one of the most important aspects of the whole problem. This problem also illustrates one of those extraordinary contractions of which our world is so rich.

On the one hand, the displaced people are recognized in their right not to want to return to a country where a regime is in power which is incompatible with the rights of man, and on the other hand, the world is incapable of

offering and granting those displaced persons the right which they are entitled to. There is also a tendency of considering these masses of displaced persons as some sort of labour reservoir, into which one can only reach and fish out the best qualified. Most of the displaced persons who have been picked so far, have been picked according to economic considerations and have been sent to factories, coal-mines, forests, but usually alone without their families. The destruction of the family, started by National-Socialism, is being continued. One then feels surprised if those men, torn from their wives, their children and their old parents, find it impossible to adapt themselves to the new life and circumstances. From this point to the statement that they cannot be assimilated by any Society, is only one step. Finally, they will be considered as a bothersome burden, and not as what they really are, as what all human beings are without distinction, the most important element of this world, the element without which no human progress is thinkable.

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

"A FRIEND IS ANXIOUS TO REASSURE....."

The Agency was a small workshop under the direction of members of the Committee and its secretariat - a handful of voluntary workers at their tables, card-indexes and filing-cabinets.

What was the work in hand? "This agency," says Article 79 of the Convention, "shall be charged with the duty of collecting all information regarding prisoners which they may be able to obtain through official or private channels, and the agency shall transmit the information as rapidly as possible to the prisoners' own country or the Power in whose service they have been."

Remarkable office work, and useful at that. But the Red Cross is not an office. It cannot content itself with waiting for information in order to file and transmit it to another office. For the Red Cross, a list of prisoners of war is not a document; it is a herd of human beings in a barbed-wire enclosure. A regimental number is not a piece of information, but a man, and a man in trouble. It stands, too, for a family in which something has snapped because the man has stopped writing home. Those who had worked with the 1914 Agency well knew that these families would not always have patience to wait until the military bureaux of their country had found them and put an end to their anxiety with the words "Killed in action" or "Taken prisoner;" or else intensified it with the word "Missing." When they received one or other of these brief notices, they would ask a thousand questions. Killed! How did he die? Did he suffer? Where is he buried? A prisoner! Is he wounded? Is he ill? Is he not hungry or cold? Missing! Where is he? Heavens! Where is he?

In the confusion of war, with a hermetically sealed battlefront, to whom other than the Red Cross could they address these questions? So, either to the National Societies, who would send their letters on, or direct to Geneva, all these people would write, write, write.....

They would have to be answered. Even if the card-index had nothing to say, those who asked must know that they were being attended to, and that everything humanly possible would be done to send them information. For this purpose, the Agency must keep track of all that happened, and not just vaguely, but with full particulars. Each man in whatever camp must have his "duplicate" at Geneva, where he could always be found and followed up. Moreover, when further information was required, the Agency would not be content to wait for it; it would go to seek it, if necessary. It would seek it through every possible medium, through the official bureaux or the National Red Cross of the opposite side; through the military authorities and the commandants of camps; through the Committee's delegates and even from other men in the same unit as