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VII. Relief

PRINCIPAL RELIEF ACTIVITIES

In 1947-1948, the ICRC had at its disposal for relief to German and Austrian prisoners only some 554,700 Swiss francs — a wholly inadequate sum. Efforts to raise funds had little success, and as had happened before¹, the ICRC could do no more than supply the most urgent needs of the men detained in France, Poland, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia.

France. — Miscellaneous goods to the value of some 279,000 Swiss francs were sent. An important item was 87,936 pairs of part-worn shoes from American Army stocks; of these, about half needed mending, and repairs were done free of charge by the French Government.

Poland. — Prisoners were given clothing, soap and food.

Consignments were made to *Czechoslovakia* (underclothing and condensed milk) and to *Yugoslavia* (underclothing and soap).

Gifts in kind received by the ICRC for German prisoners included 1,000 blankets from the South African Red Cross (sent to Poland), and ten tons of dried figs from the Turkish Red Crescent (issued to men returning from Russia to Berlin and Vienna).

Next of kin parcels. — The assistance of the ICRC was for some time necessary in sending family parcels from Germany and Austria to Eastern Europe, but was later confined to the distribution in Poland of parcels from Germany.

¹ See *General Report of the ICRC, 1939-1947*, Vol. III, p. 102.

Surplus Kit. — From 1946, the ICRC took responsibility for the transmission of excess personal luggage that German prisoners repatriated from the United States had left behind them¹. By June 1947, there only remained a small amount of baggage, the owners of which had not been traced.

Medical and pharmaceutical supplies for German prisoners of war reached a total of 37,500 kilos, valued at 384,710 Swiss francs; the greater part was sent to France and Germany², and the remainder to Austria, Poland, Yugoslavia and other countries. Supplies worth 114,180 Swiss francs were sent to the Dental Clinics set up by the ICRC in France and Poland, and to camps and repatriation centres in Germany and Austria. German prisoner doctors, chiefly in France, but also in Great Britain, Poland, Yugoslavia, Germany, Austria and the Near East were provided with over 20,000 Swiss and 6,000 German medical publications, and more than 800 medical and scientific textbooks.

As will be seen later, the International Centre for Relief to Civil Populations and the League of Red Cross Societies' Relief Bureau were seconded by the ICRC's technical services and Delegations³, the ICRC being still the only international relief organisation formally authorised to operate in the Soviet Zone of Germany and in the four Sectors of Berlin.

In 1947, the gradual resumption of postal services dispensed the ICRC from handling individual parcels.⁴ National Red Cross Societies were therefore informed that the service would cease from December 31, 1947. In 1948, however, as donors persisted in sending parcels to Geneva, the ICRC requested Red Cross Societies to inform the public that parcels would be reforwarded until June 30, 1948; after that date, all parcels received would be added to supplies for collective relief.

Relief supplies worth 20,300 Swiss francs were sent by the ICRC to DP camps; they included 3,160 kilos of cod-liver oil for

¹ See *General Report*, Vol. III, p. 115.

² See above, p. 73.

³ See below, p. 83.

⁴ See *General Report*, Vol. III, p. 400.

Latvian refugees in Germany and Austria. The same beneficiaries received ten cases of restoratives given by the South African Red Cross.

In response to urgent requests, medicaments and medical stores to a value of 18,450 Swiss'francs were sent to South-East Europe (Rumania, Bulgaria, Jugoslavia, Albania and Hungary). In September 1947, 700 kilos of medicaments, vaccines and tonics, and in June 1948, 770 kilos of vitamins and tonics were despatched to Greece.

Details of relief work in Indo-China, Indonesia, India and Palestine will be found in Part. II (pp. 87 to 116).

REDUCTION OF OPERATIONAL SERVICES OF THE ICRC

During the War and for two years of the post-war period the ICRC itself handled the packing, storage and shipping of relief supplies. Early in 1947, trade conditions being now normal, the ICRC altered its policy and had the work done by commercial firms.¹

From November 1947 onwards, the ICRC made a distinction between the more or less commercial work and its approved work as a neutral intermediary. Of the commercial operations, financially the most onerous, the ICRC continued only the purchase of supplies, since it could often obtain wholesale prices and special rebates.

Storage and transport were henceforth to be handed over to private firms, while the ICRC continued its careful check on the use of the Red Cross markings, whenever the Conventions provided for exemptions from financial charges.

On the other hand, the ICRC retained its special functions, studying the needs of the beneficiaries (prisoners of war, civilian internees, Displaced Persons, and so forth), drafting general relief schemes, collecting funds and gifts, preparing detailed plans for donors and for representatives of beneficiaries, supervising issues and furnishing reports to donors.

¹ See *General Report*, Vol. III, p. 105.

The object of this reorganisation was to cut down, as far as possible, overhead charges on gifts, in the interest of both the recipients and the donors.

COLLABORATION OF THE ICRC AND THE LEAGUE OF RED CROSS SOCIETIES ¹

When it was decided in 1946 to wind up the Joint Relief Commission of the International Red Cross, the League placed its services at the disposal of National Red Cross Societies anxious to send relief to civil populations, and, in this, received the full support of the ICRC.²

While the League organisation was being set up, over 650 tons of supplies were handled for its account in the ICRC warehouses. The cost of the work done by the Committee's transport and warehouse staffs amounted to 13,000 Swiss francs, which costs the ICRC agreed to bear. The Committee advanced 30,000 Swiss francs to the League to cover the cost of transporting supplies from Antwerp to Geneva. Finally must be added the considerable item, which it would be difficult to evaluate accurately, of the help given by many of the Committee's Delegations abroad.

CO-OPERATION OF THE ICRC WITH THE INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR RELIEF TO CIVILIAN POPULATIONS (CENTRE D'ENTR'AIDE)

By the first months of 1947, the ICRC had greatly reduced the scale of its relief work for civilian populations — firstly, because of its practice to cease activities whenever they are no longer indispensable; secondly, because the wishes of donors made it increasingly difficult to distribute supplies in conformity with the ICRC's principle of impartiality.

An agreement of December 26, 1946, modified and extended on August 18, 1947, however, assured the Centre d'Entr'aide of the

¹ See also p. 25.

² See *General Report*, Vol. III, p. 391.

support of the ICRC, on the understanding that the principle of impartiality would be respected, as far as was at all possible.¹

In spite of the Committee's efforts, this provision was increasingly difficult to respect, because the proportion of gifts for specifically named beneficiaries increased steadily at the expense of those for *collective* relief, i.e. bulk relief for distribution at the discretion of the ICRC. The ICRC then proposed to Governments and Occupation Authorities that they should grant the Centre the right of acting directly and independently. Meanwhile, the ICRC continued for several months longer to take part, through its Delegations, in the forwarding and distribution of *semi-collective* relief. This period of transition ended on December 31, 1947, by which time the Centre, with the active support of the ICRC, had obtained free transport and customs exemption in Holland, Belgium, France, Italy, Austria, Hungary, Rumania, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and Western Germany. The ICRC also requested and obtained for the Centre special financial facilities in Great Britain, Egypt, South Africa, Canada, the United States and the Philippines.

From 1948, the ICRC no longer shared in the work of the Centre, except where special conditions laid down by the authorities so demanded, namely, in Greater Berlin, the Soviet Zone of Germany, and Poland.

It should be observed that, while helping the Centre to obtain the facilities necessary to independent operation, the ICRC did not renounce the privileges previously granted by the Occupying Powers in Germany. In order to make its position clear, a memorandum was sent on August 27, 1947, to the OMGUS Public Welfare Department in Berlin, indicating that in future the semi-collective and individual relief supplies would be shipped by the Centre, whilst the ICRC would, as formerly, deal with collective consignments, particularly when donors so desired. It is as well to point out that this policy was imposed by circumstances. The German Commission for the Distribution of Foreign Relief was

¹ See above, p. 82 and *General Report*, Vol. III, pp. 385 and 400. Until the end of 1947, pending the recognition of the Centre's autonomy, it was unofficially represented by ICRC Delegations in most countries of Europe and the Near East, as well as in South Africa and North America.

disposed to open the Soviet Zone only to collective consignments.

To glance for a moment at the figures for Greater Berlin and the Soviet Zone of Occupation, it will be found that from January 1947 to December 1948, the Centre sent 32 sealed trains, composed of 454 wagons, to the Berlin Delegation. The weight of goods carried was 4,506 tons and their value over nine million Swiss francs. Over two-thirds of the gift supplies were from Switzerland.

From May 29, 1946, to December 31, 1948, the Soviet Zone alone received some 3,994 tons of supplies; 2,675,000 persons benefited from the work of the ICRC Delegation, and 8,997 distributions were made in hospitals in the Zone.

It is only fair to mention the willing help, both inside and outside Germany, which enabled the ICRC to accomplish so much.

CO-OPERATION OF THE ICRC WITH INTERNATIONAL WELFARE ORGANIZATIONS

The relations of the ICRC with the Young Men's Christian Associations (YMCA), Young Women's Christian Associations (YWCA), American Friends' Service Committee, Caritas Catholica Internationalis, International Centre for Relief to Civilian Populations, World Council of Churches, World Student Relief, International Union for Child Welfare and O.S.E. Union, continued to be cordial.¹ The representatives of these nine institutions meet each month with the representatives of the ICRC at the headquarters of each of the institutions in turn, to exchange information and experience. These meetings have led to better co-ordination of relief to civilian populations.

In December 1947, the above group appealed on behalf of the victims of the war, civil and military, child and adult. In 1948, a similar appeal was devoted, without distinction of category, to the world problem of refugees.

¹ See *General Report*, Vol. III, p. 397.

