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UNDER THE RED CROSS

Proposal for the Protection of Civilians in War.

Task before the Stockholm Conference.

By Dr. PAUL RUEGGER,

President of the International Red Cross Committee.

Representatives of national Red Cross Societies from all over the world, as well as of many Governments, met in Stockholm on 20th August for the seventeenth International Red Cross Conference. They had before them an agenda involving issues some of which are of considerable importance for the development of international law and may, in certain circumstances, affect the fate of a vast portion of humanity.

The conference will have reached one of its main objectives if the Red Cross world represented at this gathering can take decisive steps towards the revision and implementation of the Geneva Convention protecting war victims. It will also be faced with the preparation of a convention for the protection of civilians in war time, the need for which was stressed many years before the last war by the International Committee of the Red Cross.

With the assistance of government experts and after consultation with national Red Cross Societies and other associations, the International Committee in Geneva has prepared four draft conventions, covering the relief of the wounded and sick in armies in the field, the adaptation to maritime warfare of the principles of the Geneva Convention of July 6th, 1906, the treatment of prisoners of war, and the protection of civilian persons in periods of hostilities.

It will be the task of a diplomatic conference, to be called at a later stage by the Swiss Federal Council, to give final expression to the new rules regarding the protection of war victims. The Stockholm conference will, however, once it has dealt with the voluminous material prepared with great care by the International Committee, be in a position to pave the way for the decision of many individual Governments. It may also determine whether at last a satisfactory convention can be established for the protection of civilian populations and of individual citizens of belligerent countries whom circumstances have placed in the power of an enemy State.

CHANGED CONDITIONS.

The 10 years that have elapsed since the last conference, which took place in London in 1938, have witnessed great changes. New weapons and new methods of warfare have transformed military strategy. The whole perspective of war has changed. The conventions as they stand at the eve of the Stockholm meeting cover clearly defined classes of persons subject to strict discipline, but international law has always drawn a sharp distinction between combatants and non-combatants.

In modern warfare all the forces of belligerent nations, civil as well as military, help to build up power and are just as important to armies and nations as the endurance of the soldier and the strategy of the staffs. Against the changed conditions of modern warfare the civilian needs protection but the problems thus raised are not easily solved. It is the purpose of the new convention to extend to civilians humane principles now applicable only to the members of the armed forces. The International Committee has devoted itself to this task with meticulous care.

In 1914 the only protection for prisoners of war was contained in the inadequate provisions of the Hague Convention; in 1939 their situation was regulated in detail by the 1929 Convention, which constituted a precise legal code. The International Committee's delegates were called upon to watch over its application. The camps over which they exercised surveillance were widely scattered, ranging from the battlefields of Europe to India, the Far East, South Africa, Australia and the United States. This required the services of a large number of delegates competent to take prompt and decisive action in emergency. Their tasks were both delicate and exacting, for prisoners of war and internees were not always adequately protected by conventions, and there were classes of persons who enjoyed no treaty protection. The International Committee was not always able to dispatch delegates as quickly as circumstances required, since the belligerents were not in every case disposed to receive them.

In a detailed report of three volumes, dealing with its general activities, with those of the Central Agency for Prisoners of War and with relief actions, the Geneva Committee has set out fully all that was achieved and also what could not be carried out, in spite of every effort during the last war for the benefit of the Stockholm conference. Its files have been opened to all members of the Red Cross, in the hope that a complete review of its activity may help in the drafting of future rules.

In a short supplementary report the International Committee of the Red Cross also gives evidence of its activity in various parts of the world. India, Indo-China, Indonesia, Greece, and Palestine may be named

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in this connection, for it is not in cases of open warfare only that the International Committee of the Red Cross is in duty bound to offer its services, but also in periods of civil war and internal disorders. In Palestine, for instance, the Geneva Committee was active even before hostilities broke out, with the full support of the mandatory Government from the outset. Later on it received formal assurances from Arabs and Jews that the essential principles of the Red Cross would be respected. A team of about twenty delegates, physicians and nurses, have been strenuously at work since April, and suffered heavy casualties, but have through their efforts, according to statements made by both parties, saved several thousand human lives.

NEUTRAL ZONES

New ground was broken by the Red Cross team in Palestine with the establishment of neutral safety zones under the flag of the International Committee for the purpose of giving the civil population greater protection from the effects of war. On two occasions before the outbreak of the second world war safety zones had been tried as an emergency measure in China and in Spain. In Palestine for the first time the experiment has been effective and will afford a valuable guide for the future. The delegate of the International Committee made the first moves to safeguard the lives of non-combatants by establishing places of refuge in Jerusalem. The importance of maintaining neutral safety zones open to all refugees without distinction of nationality, race, or religion was in line with the expressed wishes of both Jews and Arabs.

Those for whom the safety zones were prepared were refugees and not prisoners or interned

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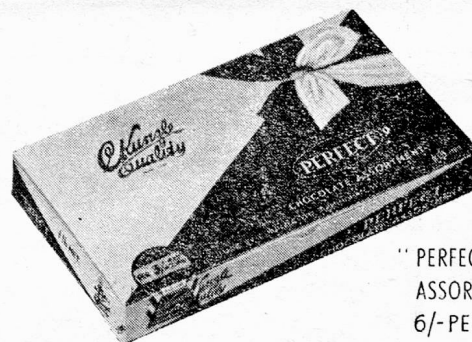
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persons and the safety zones had to be organized in accordance with this principle. Strict regulations were laid down for their reception and for the maintenance of order. Within the safety zones each belligerent had responsibility for its own inmates on all matters. The external relations of the zones, particularly with the higher civil and military authorities, proved the importance of a neutral intermediary in maintaining neutrality within the zones and close contact with the authorities. Its object was to ensure the safety of the refugees, and no local authority had power over the zones superior to those of the Committee delegate.

UNIVERSAL CHARACTER.

That "genius of charity," Henry Dunant, felt, from the outset, that the Red Cross ideal could only be realized if supported both by voluntary associations in every country as well as by the neutral intermediary at the Headquarters in Geneva. Thus the International Committee of the Red Cross, together with the 66 Red Cross and Red Cross Societies founded throughout the world since 1863 will endeavour to perform as hitherto their often burdensome duties. The Committee must be supra-national in outlook, international in its activity, though its members are exclusively Swiss.

This homogeneous composition has enabled it to act rapidly and efficiently in tragic circumstances. It must and will retain its entirely unpolitical character, its independence from every Government, from every group of States, from every State-sponsored organization, and this in the interest of the war victims, who must remain its only concern. Any form of association, even for instance with the United Nations, would therefore

be dangerous, as the latter organization may by collective sanctions become party to a conflict.

The International Committee of the Red Cross will continue to fulfil its task wherever the need arises and irrespective of views and trends of thoughts born of political considerations of the moment. It will never forget that its universal readiness to give assistance rapidly is the very basis of its existence.

"The Times," 20th August, 1948.

AT CAUX CONFERENCE. 500 Delegates From 16 Nations.

Among those attending the Caux Moral Re-Armament Conference in Switzerland is the Rev. Ian Miller, former curate of St. Nicholas, Strood, who afterwards went to Battersea, then became Vicar of All Saints', Hatcham Park, and is now holding a temporary chaplaincy near Caux.

Against the background of the Berlin dilemma and the fall of the French Government 500 delegates from 16 nations are at the Caux Conference. They are there to learn how to make democracy a workable and winning world force.

One hundred and fifty German leaders came to Caux last year with the backing of General Clay and Lord Pakenham. German delegates here this week reported on the action these leaders had taken during the year. They had been giving Germany: (1) Teamwork to see it through its present difficulties; (2) an ideology which is a positive answer to every totalitarian ideology; (3) the hope for the future which is the only permanent incentive for reconstruction.

A delegate from the Ruhr area told of a conference for Ruhr miners and managers. At the close of this conference a Communist chairman of a workers' council spoke. "This is a completely different side of the world," he said. "I have never seen it before. If you can carry out the ideas you have got here in the Ruhr area, Communism, in which I have believed for so long, will disappear overnight. And I would like to fight with you."

Stressing the importance that millions of Germans attach to Caux, Herr Guy von Hahn, secretary of Central Relief Organisations, Stuttgart, said: "There is a terrible vacuum in Germany to-day, but a spiritual vacuum of that kind does not stay empty for long. The question is whether that vacuum will be filled by totalitarian forces or by an inspired democracy. This decision faces us. And here at Caux is where it will be decided."

Thirty French labour delegates from the industrial region of Lille are taking part in the assembly. André Louillet, administrative secretary of the C.G.T. Force Ouvrière Trades Council at Roubaix, northern French textile centre, reported on the "tremendous change of atmosphere" which "The Forgotten Factor" drama produced in the industrial regions of North France, and with German delegates before him in the audience, he told how in his own heart he had got rid of an "exceedingly stubborn hatred of the Germans" which began when he came home crippled from reprisal camps in 1914 to find his family ruined. "Caux," he said, "is known in every section of French society and has become a magnet in Europe."

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