

IN THE RED CROSS WORLD

HENRY DUNANT INSTITUTE

PANEL DISCUSSION ON THE MODERN STATE AND THE RED CROSS

The Red Cross must reconcile two diametrically opposed imperatives. It is thus faced with a contradiction which is perhaps its major problem.

To follow its calling and safeguard that which is its quintessence and force, it must remain true to itself. That is why it is increasing measures to ensure its constancy; it is hedged in by its statutes, it lays down rigid conditions for the recognition of new National Societies, it enunciates intangible principles. But to continue to be effective in its struggle against suffering, it must, on the other hand, continually change. Its methods, means and structure, its very language, must vary and diversify to suit the times and places where it discharges its mission.

We must admire the Red Cross for having, for more than a century, accomplished a feat in remaining true to its ideal and, at the same time, in evolving to a remarkable degree. However, the question remains: has the world around it not changed even more rapidly and radically? Has the Red Cross nevertheless been lagging behind?

It is within the purview of the Henry Dunant Institute, as a centre of study and research, to endeavour to answer such a question. The Red Cross is an auxiliary to the public authorities; the State is its main interlocutor. There consequently, is where a beginning must be made; hence the theme "The Modern State and the Red Cross" for this first discussion panel in Geneva, from 11 to 13 September 1968.

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The discussion was conceived and desired by the President which the Henry Dunant Institute has just had the sorrow of losing, Mr. Leopold Boissier. Who could have foreseen that it would be the last Red Cross event on which he was to leave the mark of his so vigorously original personality!

“ We hope ”, he said at the beginning of the first day, “ that this meeting will be further testimony to the vitality of the Red Cross, to its adaptability to present-day demands, and to the solidarity which unites all who have the privilege of serving it ”. This hope was not to go unfulfilled.

Some hundred participants, including representatives of the International Committee, the League and fifteen National Societies, heard the delivery of some remarkable papers, all of which showed how wide is the scope for the Red Cross in the modern world.

General André Beaufre and Mrs. Denise Bindschedler, member of the ICRC and professor at the Graduate Institute of International Studies, demonstrated that, in ethics and law, the Red Cross, provided it continues to be realistic in its approach, has the means of alleviating the evils of war.

Dr. Pierre Dorolle, Assistant Director-General of the World Health Organisation, was well placed to give proof that the more medicine becomes an affair of the State, the more it becomes apparent that there are certain tasks which private bodies alone can carry out.

What is the Red Cross function in emergent countries? Canon Burgess Car's exposition made clear how great it was, but also how difficult.

International Review of the Red Cross will publish several of the papers which were delivered. In addition, the Henry Dunant Institute has announced its own forthcoming publication which will reflect the wealth of subject matter of this useful three-day discussion.