

“ PANORAMA ” AND THE JUNIOR RED CROSS

Published every two months by the League of Red Cross Societies, Panorama in 1969 is presented in an attractive form of eight pages with ample illustrations. The first number (January-February 1969, No. 1) gives news of National Societies, an account of the meeting of the Red Crescent of Kuwait, an article on Istanbul, seat of the next International Conference, a chronicle of Red Cross philately, etc. In addition, it devotes two pages to youth, in particular summarizing a UNESCO report analysing the motives for the present agitation amongst the young and, in order to calm the unease, suggests offering the young greater possibilities on the national and international levels.

In fact Youth, which used to be published by the League, now ceases to appear and its integration henceforth in Panorama reflects the desire shown everywhere for the young to play an increasingly active part in each National Society. The last number of this magazine (1968, No. 4) which the International Review has often had occasion to quote, contains interesting items at a time when the Junior Red Cross is facing problems which are as urgent as they are universal.

We now reproduce some extracts of a document in which Mr. Eugene Kirchoffer, Assistant Director of the League Junior Red Cross Bureau, presented a wide and clear analysis of answers received in Geneva from 64 National Societies based on a questionnaire containing 30 questions on the Junior Red Cross in the world today.

Social Welfare. — It is difficult to distinguish where health leaves off and social welfare begins. Health problems often have social implications, and vice versa. As noted in the replies to the questionnaire, National Societies have involved young people in an impressive number of social welfare activities. These generally concern assistance to children, youth and adults in institutions and from families in need, to the handicapped, the lonely and the aged. Occasionally these services include some form of education or instruction related to health. There is, however, probably a lot more which young people could do through education to help meet

specific health needs of these groups, needs which the official health and social welfare agencies are not able to meet alone.

There is also much which could be done to help delinquent and pre-delinquent youth. While a few Societies report working in this area, the problem is becoming universal and is especially acute in countries where rural migration brings more and more youth into the cities seeking jobs which do not exist. Without employment, without income, without education, these young people turn to any activity which will support them: unfortunately this leads many into activities which are harmful both physically and mentally, as well as into conflict with society. Vocational guidance, training and employment opportunities and organised leisure activities in the rural areas, in order to encourage young people not to make the move to the cities, as well as in urban areas, could do much to prevent the human loss which occurs in this process. While the role of the Red Cross may be somewhat limited in this area, National Societies could surely provide support and assistance to the responsible agencies. If service to others has any meaning, this would certainly be an important area for Junior Red Cross efforts by both developing and developed Societies.

Teaching the Geneva Conventions and Red Cross Principles. —

How can one teach children and youth the Geneva Conventions and Red Cross Principles in a practical, interesting way, which illustrates the applicability of the underlying philosophy to daily life? This is something which most National Societies find difficult. But as this instruction is basic to the moral or humanitarian education to which the Red Cross is committed and which Societies feel is increasingly needed, means must be found. At present efforts are made through the schools and particularly with Junior Red Cross groups. A few Societies have been able to prepare special information on these subjects which has been included in school text-books or in materials used in civics, history or social studies classes. It seems that this has been achieved in Societies which have especially close working relationships with educational authorities. Since this is a fairly easy way of ensuring that at least the school-going population receives information on the Red Cross and its philosophy, perhaps more efforts should be devoted to this. At the

same time, the teacher-training colleges might be the best place in which to instruct teachers in these subjects, so that they will be familiar with them once they start professional life.

One wonders at what age young people can best receive this instruction. It may be helpful if National Societies were able, together with educators in their countries, to determine the age at which instruction in this area is most easily assimilated, and consequently to concentrate their efforts on specific age groups. These might, of course, vary from country to country.

The main problem, however, seems to be the great need for simple course outlines, both for teachers and youth, and for adequate training aids. This will require greater study on the part of the ICRC and the League, in close co-operation with those Societies which have developed successful teaching programmes. Finally, teaching aids would probably be more effective if they were produced by writers and artists who were experienced in working for children and youth.

Youth participation in planning and decision making. — The majority of Societies report that their young people have some voice in planning activities, although this is restricted primarily to the local group level. Membership in the Society's committees for older youth is still fairly closed, though there are some exceptions. Their participation on committees would seem to be one of the best ways of interesting youth and keeping them active in the Society. It is understandable that adults in some cases will not welcome young members on their committees, due to the particular social structure and traditions of the country. But one solution, although perhaps not the ideal one, has been found in several Societies: the creation of special committees, composed entirely of young people (18-25), which advise the executive or central committee on youth programmes at both local and national level.

Attracting Youth to Red Cross—Integrating Youth—Adult activities. — Finally, a question which is basic to the youth programme in all Societies: how to attract young people to the organisation and keep them there. In Societies with interesting, dynamic programmes, where young people are able to take part in policy making and decisions, there is apparently little problem. The

idealism and enthusiasm which youth have in abundance leads them naturally to an organisation such as Red Cross if they find there opportunities to give practical expression to their interests, and if they can see clearly the usefulness of their activities. This requires above all that Societies really be interested in young people, and that they recognise that if offered useful activities, good training and supervision, plus a chance to take part in planning and decision-making, youth are vital and responsible Red Cross members.

A lot has been said and written in recent years about the need to close the gap between Junior Red Cross and adults in National Societies. One wonders if this gap has not been created primarily by adults, unwilling or perhaps unable to open their ranks to youth more freely as equal partners in a shared endeavour and to allow them more responsibility when they are ready for it. Young people's efforts in the Red Cross must be seen as an integral part of the Society's activities. And this for some very practical reasons.

There are things which adults can do which young people cannot do. At the same time, it has been seen that young people can often do certain things more effectively than adults. In services to the aged and the handicapped, it has been shown on many occasions that personal communication is easier between these persons and young people. Because they have not yet formed all their ideas and attitudes, young people are often more open-minded, with less preconceived notions about an individual's abilities. They tend also to be more demanding, with the result that they can often help a handicapped or aged person to do more for himself than he has done before. This has also been found in some cases when youth have worked with the mentally ill.

Another factor should perhaps be considered. Volunteer services in National Societies, particularly in the social welfare field, are usually provided by married women whose children are in school, thus leaving them free to devote some time to this work. When school and other holidays come, however, these volunteers are often forced to interrupt their work to look after their families. A basic principle of Red Cross action in the social welfare field is that service should be continuing. Who, then, can fill the void during holidays if it is not young people, freed from school or

without family obligations, who have the time and interest to take up this work? This is already the case in several Societies with highly-developed volunteer services.

Is it not time, therefore, to accept the fact that Junior Red Cross programmes and activities are an essential complement to the work carried out by adult members of the Society, and that therefore greater effort must be made to open both activities and decision-making processes to young people. This will undoubtedly be the best means of interesting them in the work of the Red Cross and of keeping them within the organisation.

Honduras

The Honduran Red Cross has just published the first number of an interesting review under the title « *Superación* » intended mainly for the youth of the country. It is also the organ of the National Society's volunteer relief workers.

The contents include articles on the Red Cross principles approved at Vienna in 1965, the duties of relief teams in many parts of the country, the Society's assistance programme in certain districts of the capital, Red Cross action with student participation, and the 1968 meeting in Mexico of National Society representatives from various Central American countries and the United States. There are also sections dealing with the theatre, psychology and practical first-aid.

It is interesting to note other news items, such as the recent formation by the Honduran Red Cross, under the impetus of its Committee, of twelve first-aid brigades, and the foundation by the San Pedro Sula branch of a new blood bank.

It will be recalled that Mr. S. A. Gonard, then President of the ICRC, called at Honduras in the course of a mission he undertook in several Central American countries in March 1966. In Tegucigalpa he was received by the authorities and was able to see for himself the fine work carried out in the country under the red cross.