

IN THE RED CROSS WORLD

THE HENRY DUNANT INSTITUTE TODAY

On relinquishing the post of Director of the Henry Dunant Institute, which he held for four years, Mr. Jean Pictet addressed the Assembly of the International Committee of the Red Cross; we have pleasure in giving here a summary of his speech.

The Henry Dunant Institute has not yet become the "Red Cross Academy" dreamed of by its founders, perhaps over-optimistically, and which they wished to call into existence. Perhaps the word "Academy" was too ambitious. It has nonetheless remained true to the mission attributed to it in its statutes, namely that of making available to its member institutions "ways and means of carrying out studies, research, training and instruction in all branches of Red Cross activities". It has also been a meeting place and, in general, has played the part of a thought catalyst.

The building which, thanks to the understanding of the Geneva municipal authorities and of the Swiss Confederation, serves as the headquarters of the Institute, is in itself an excellent place for its purposes. Its privileged position beside the lake, in the shady Mon-Repos gardens, is admirably suited to meetings, encourages visitors to linger and is conducive to thought and creative work.

In recent times the Institut has continued in the way laid down for it by the three member organizations¹, following the Tansley Report and the recommendations of a working group set up to consider its future. This group, which was headed by Mr. B. Bergman, presented its conclusions at the end of 1977 and practice has shown them to be of considerable value. As regards the structure of the Institute for example, the proposed separation of the Institute's Assembly and its Council in

¹ The International Committee of the Red Cross, the League of Red Cross Societies and the Swiss Red Cross.

terms of their respective legislative and executive powers, the two bodies being independent, has proved to be a wise move.

The group also considered the problems arising from the forthcoming change of director and those related to the difficult matter of finance. For the moment, thanks to strict economy measures and to the unflinching efforts of its treasurer, the Institute has almost balanced its budget and has built up again its initial capital. However, providing the Institute with a stable source of revenue remains one of our major objectives.

The Institute has therefore tailored its aims to its resources, and has not expanded its staff. Temporary assistance from employees on secondment from the member organizations, however, enables it to meet its commitments. It also enjoys the moral and practical support of the Norwegian Red Cross which sent a very able trainee, Mrs. Oraug. This was an extremely interesting experience which could be a source of inspiration for other Societies. The Institute has also elected Mrs. S. Hashimoto from Japan and Mr. J.-J. G. de Rueda from the Canary Islands as corresponding members, both of whom have set up in their respective countries of residence a Henry Dunant Centre, composed of young people.

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What are the Institute's current principal activities? Recently it has been emphasizing instruction and training. The need to make known humanitarian law and the principles and work of the Red Cross is no longer contested. It is considered useful to give people from different environments the opportunity of becoming acquainted with a subject which so far is taught in only a small number of universities in relatively few countries. Similarly, its share in the training of Red Cross personnel in an international sphere corresponds to a real and permanent need.

The Henry Dunant Institute's annual courses, organized with the help and support of the League and the ICRC, have thus become a reality and shall continue, each time in a different language. After the 1978 seminar for French-speaking people, 29 people from 20 countries took part in the Introductory Course on the International Activities of the Red Cross, which was held, in English, at the Institute from 10 to 17 May 1979. Next year, with the generous assistance of the Spanish Red Cross, instruction will be given in Spanish in Madrid.

In Yaoundé at the end of 1977, the Henry Dunant Institute organized, with the Institute of International Relations of Cameroon, the first African Seminar on International Humanitarian Law, with excellent results. Another seminar of the same kind is planned.

In the field of research, the Institute has continued to welcome people on study periods and to supervise their studies. It would be a good idea if a fund could be set up which would provide grants for research workers and help them in having their work published. The Institute itself is also doing research on the Red Cross principles.

Mrs. Y. de Pourtalès and Miss M. C. Junod have completed their painstaking work for the University of Geneva, sponsored by the Swiss Research Foundation, which consisted of gathering and filing at the Institute photocopies and type-written copies of the correspondence of Henry Dunant, most of which has never yet been published.

In May 1978, on the 150th anniversary of Henry Dunant's birth, the Institute took part in the "open house" operation organized by the Red Cross institutions. The Institute decided to organize a little exhibition entitled "The Paths of Peace" on Henry Dunant's ideas and on his work as a pioneer in the struggle for what he himself called the "birth of peace". The exhibition was a great success.

Documentation goes hand in hand with research. To develop its library as a collection of works on specific subjects the Institute asked all States for legal and administrative texts of two kinds:

(1) relating to the application of international humanitarian law. Thirty-seven States have sent a considerable amount of documentary material, including works on principles of law;

(2) on the treatment of detainees. To date, sixteen States have sent many documents.

For the Institute's historical section, Radio Geneva generously gave a number of magnetic tapes which constitute a very interesting collection of records in sound. The tapes contain recordings related to the Red Cross and, in particular, the Centenary ceremony of the International Red Cross in 1963.

The Institute has published a series of very well-received works on humanitarian law and on the history and activities of the Red Cross. The two most recent publications are Mr. Richard Perruchoud's thesis on the International Red Cross Conferences and that of Mr. E. Rosenblad on the work of the Diplomatic Conference in Geneva, 1974-1977.

The Institute's experiment in becoming its own publishing house has proved decisive.

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Fifteen years have now gone by since the founding of the Henry Dunant Institute. The inspiration came from Pierre Boissier, who was the very soul of the Institute until his sudden premature death.

During these fifteen years, the Institute has cleared the path in the world of learning on which it has resolutely set its feet. It might be said that it has grown out of the period of adolescence and has come of age, and the Red Cross world has fully acknowledged its worth.

It is not—and probably never will be—a powerful organization, for that is not what is needed. It may be compared rather to a precision instrument on hand for those who require it.

One can look with confidence towards its future, and all the more because it has worthwhile possibilities which are as yet unexploited.

Jean PICTET