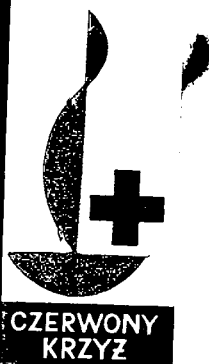


1863 1963

Report

of the activity of the Polish Red Cross

1919 - 1963



The Polish Red Cross, founded officially in 1919, could not come into being before Poland had reconquered her independence and sovereignty as a state. Poland had, however, had a long tradition of voluntary assistance to victims of war and other trying occasions in the course of the two last centuries. The Polish Red Cross is the heir and continuator of this tradition. It should be recalled here that already towards the end of the XVIII century Polish women offered their voluntary assistance to the sanitary service of the Polish army. They extended in an organized manner aid and treatment to wounded and sick soldiers, both Poles and foes, during the national insurrections of 1794, 1831, 1848 and 1863. They also tended the detained persons and victims of the persecutions and oppression on the part of the powers occupying Poland in the XIX century and the beginning of the XX century. There also existed numerous organizations of assistance bringing aid to victims of the First World War.

After its foundation, the Polish Red Cross developed its activity chiefly among school youth and in towns, and became an important social organization numbering about 800.000 members in 1938. At that time the PRC was engaged in the formation of voluntary cadres of nurses and "secouristes". It had an important voluntary service of social assistance, several hospitals and sanatoria, as well as three professional nurses schools.



The PRC was first in Poland to initiate the creation of blood transfusion centres and had undertaken to develop sanitary education.

The PRC activities were particularly valuable during the Second World War and the nazi occupation of Poland. Assistance imparted at that time by thousands of PRC volunteers in most dangerous situation, not only saved numerous human lives, but contributed to the restoration of confidence in human goodness and generosity to those who had continuously seen with their own eyes horrible examples of crimes committed by the hitlerites.

After the liberation in 1945, the Polish Red Cross, faced by tremendous needs and suffering - consequences of the war - greatly expanded its activity. It was necessary to assist the public authorities in helping thousands upon thousands of victims of the war, returning from all European countries, from concentration camps and forced labour camps, from prisons and prisoner-of-war camps, homeless and displaced persons, etc. It was necessary to provide a shelter for them and create decent living conditions with the modest means then at the disposal of the country after the frightful war devastation. It was necessary to help the state to organize the health and public welfare services. The PRC was able to cope with all these urgent needs owing to the numerous volunteers whom it was able to interest in its work, owing to the interest shown for its activity by the widest strata of the population, and owing to the support of the government of People's Poland.

The accomplishment of this extremely difficult task was also made possible by the aid the PRC received from numerous nationales Societies, the International Committee and the League of the Societies of the Red Cross.

Absorbed by this tremendous work, the PRC could organize its first national congress after the war only in 1951. This congress drafted a new PRC programme, adapted to the new needs of the country engaged in a vast effort of the construction of its national economy on new foundations.

The Congress established the tasks of the PRC as an auxiliary of the Public Authorities, namely in the domain of sanitary education of the broad masses of the population and of the formation of PRC Secouristes, of the organization of first aid posts and teams at all places of work and in schools, of the extension of sanitary education and health propaganda in town and country, of the development of the Junior Red Cross in schools, of the formation of very numerous cadres of professional auxiliary nurses to face the ever growing needs of the public Health Service, and finally of continued assistance to victims of war. The Congress emphasized the important role that the Red Cross should play as a factor of peace, both on the national and international plane. The Congress also worked out the new statute of the Society and elected the Central Committee of the Polish Red Cross.

In the period 1951 - 1963, the PRC has become an organization numbering about 4.000.000 members out of a population of 30.000.000. Almost 300.000 volunteers of the PRC are working at first aid

posts and teams in enterprises, in dwelling blocks and in schools. 5.000 specially trained volunteers, called rural hygienists carry out the Red Cross work in the country side. More than 2.000 voluntary auxiliary nurses and nearly 50.000 professional auxiliary nurses have been trained at 43 PRC schools.

Assistance to victims of war was particularly expressed in that period by the continuation of the tracing of missing and dispersed persons /10.000.000 applications have been filed since 1945 with the PRC, 1.000.000 were satisfactorily answered/ as well as in assisting the government in reuniting families /about 700.000 persons/.

The PRC also had to assist victims of natural calamities, particularly during the floods of 1958 and 1959. This assistance consisted in considerable sums of money and gifts in nature, donated generously by the population. Several sister Societies have also made their contributions, sending important quantities of gifts in kind and in cash for the victims of the floods.

In the course of recent years, particular attention was paid to the development of the Polish Junior Red Cross which now has a membership of more than 2.000.000, and groups in 83 % of the schools.

The PRC has also undertaken a number of new initiatives among which one should note the recruitment of blood donors donating their blood without remuneration /100.000 donors in 1962/, as well as home nursing, care of the sick at home, assistance to sick persons without families and to old persons in public assistance establishments.

All these achievements were made possible by the fact that the PRC had succeeded in becoming a big mass organization, the largest organization of a social nature in Poland, enjoying popularity, sympathy and support on the part of the entire population, as well as the esteem and attention on the part of the public authorities. This appreciation of the activity of the PRC has been expressed recently by the award to the PRC by the Council of State of the highest decoration - the order of the "Banner of Labour" first class during the commemorations in Poland of the 100 anniversary of the Red Cross, of which the President of the Council of State of the Polish People's Republic, Aleksander Zawadzki, had accepted the high patronage.

As regards its plans for the future, the Polish Red Cross will devote its greatest efforts to problems pertaining to work in the countryside, both in the domain of organization and of sanitary education. The programme of the first aid courses will have to take more widely into account the specific character of the rural milieu and its local needs. Posts and teams of first aid will be created there in larger numbers in order better to serve the rural population on all occasions. Rural hygienists who have been trained in the course of recent years will attend special formation courses in the field of home nursing. In its work of sanitary education, the PRC will more frequently resort to the radio, television and press, and will see to it that this form of education should become as attractive as possible. The rural committees of the PRC should so conduct their activities as to arouse the interest of all peasants, namely by way of initiating cleanliness competitions, the construction of facilities serving the entire popula-

tion, such as water taps, showers, baths, etc., capable of contributing to an improvement of the sanitary conditions and hygiene in the rural environment.

As regards work among youth, the PRC will concentrate its efforts to increase the number of school groups - to include all Polish schools.

The Polish Red Cross will display a particular interest in the development and organization of services of home nursing. This activity will call for the training of a larger number of voluntary auxiliary nurses, called in Poland "first aid nurses".

Another important task is the development on a bigger scale of teaching to the Polish women home nursing. This will call for the training of a large number of voluntary instructors recruited among the nurses.

Another important humanitarian activity which the PRC intends to develop still further is the recruitment of voluntary blood donors so as to make it possible to cover entirely the needs of the Public Health Service in this domain. It is to be hoped that the broad campaigns organized on the occasion of 100th anniversary of the Red Cross in Poland will contribute to this end.

The Polish Red Cross will devote its attention to the recruitment of new members and to the creation of new local committees wherever their presence is necessary. Parallel to the efforts to increase the number of committees in towns, the PRC plans to increase its membership in the countryside where its activity is particularly needed considering the importance and urgent character of the problems to be solved.

Finally, while planning to develop and improve its activities, the Polish Red Cross considers that it will be able to achieve its objectives only if it obtains ever greater support on the part of the entire population. With this aim in view, it will seek a more systematic and more regular cooperation of the radio, television, the cinema and the press in the propaganda of the Polish Red Cross.

The PRC will continue to participate in the work of the International Red Cross in contributing the best it can to the development of the international programme of the Red Cross, to humanitarian campaigns and all activities serving to promote better understanding and cooperation between all the national Societies, as well as to the efforts of the Red Cross to preserve peace and develop friendship between nations.