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Geneva Red Cross Denounced For Hiding Prison Camp Facts

A bitter indictment of the International Red Cross Committee for its failure to tell the world what it knew about barbarous conditions in prison camps of Nazi Germany, at a time when public indignation might have eased the tragic plight of millions, appears in the May issue of the magazine *Jewish Frontier*, out today.

The author, S. Z. Kantor, an international lawyer, emphasizes the fact that the IRCC must not be confused with the American National Red Cross, which he praises for its "spectacular work within its sphere."

The IRCC, with headquarters at Geneva, he explains, is composed of 25 Swiss citizens whose obligations under the Geneva Conventions require it to denounce breaches of the Conventions and urge Governments to secure their observance.

The argument that civilian internees did not come within the province of the IRCC is torn to shreds by Kantor, who writes:

"Civilian internees are entitled to at least the same rights as prisoners of war. . .

"A special mandate to watch over the protection of all victims of persecution has been entrusted to the International Red Cross Committee by all International Red Cross Conferences held since 1921 . . . The special mandate granted to the IRCC refers to relief work not only for civilian internees, deportees, hostages of enemy nationality, but also for national or domestic civilian internees, deportees, and hostages."

Kantor reports that under the Conference's 14th Resolution, the Red Cross "states its right and its duty to do relief work in case of civil war, or social and revolutionary circumstances, extending its aid to all victims without exception."

In a situation in which a national Red Cross Society either because of "incapacity or ill will," is unable to do its duty, the IRCC has the obligation to insist that relief authority be delegated to another national Red Cross Society and if the government of the country involved refuses its consent, to issue 'a public expose of the facts, based upon the documents referring thereto.'"

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Red Cross

“Nevertheless,” Kantor continues, “the IRCC declared on Jan. 16, 1945, that it had not published the information in its possession, allegedly because ‘this is essentially in the interest of the internees themselves, and in order to obviate a reduction in the Committee’s means of action, through any inopportune publication of facts.’”

“There is no resolution of the International Red Cross Conference by which the Committee would have authority to withhold publication of facts . . . The duty of publication is a compulsory one. And for good reasons: In cases of such flagrant violations of international law, the conscience of the entire civilized world must be aroused. No concealment and no appeasement can be of any practical value.

If the IRCC had issued a “public expose of all the facts based upon the documents referring thereto,” if it had informed the civilized world of repeated refusals to allow visits to the death camps of Treblinka, Oswiecim, Mauthausen, Birkenau, Majdanek, Buchenwald, etc., or refusals to allow letter and parcel service, of the cutting off of all intercourse of the internees and deportees with the International Committee and their relatives, if it had published all these cruel facts, instead of keeping them in its secret archives, a world-wide storm of indignation would have broken out, at a time when the prevention of the terrible crimes committed by the war criminals still might have been possible.

“The suppression of facts by the IRCC has given a sense of security and impunity to all war criminals. The Germans have been very assiduous in destroying every trace of their crimes.”

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