

50 years of Moral Rearmament



Dr Frank Buchman, who founded the MRA movement, with a multiracial group of delegates. The author of this article is fourth from left.

Fifty years ago, as Europe feverishly rearmed to resist Hitler's onslaught, Dr Frank Buchman was convinced that while material rearmament could win a war, it would take moral and spiritual rearmament to win the peace.

He initiated the world-wide movement known as Moral Rearmament.

In 1946 one hundred Swiss families invested their savings in purchasing a derelict hotel in Caux-sur-Montreux and restoring it as a world conference centre to heal the hurts and hates of individuals, families and nations.

In this 500-bed complex hundreds of South Africans of all races have forged bonds of friendship and understanding with Nigerians, Kenyans, Tanzanians, Ugandans as well as our neighbour countries, and become comrades in building the new Africa.

This 50th year of MRA sees the publication of the first definitive biography of the initiator of the movement, "Frank Buchman: a Life".

It documents events at Caux that have affected the history of our times — reconciliation between France and Germany, peace between America and Japan, Tunisia and France, France and Morocco.

It details the part of moral and spiritual forces in the resistance movements against Hitler, causing the Gestapo to put leaders of MRA, including the author

BREMER HOFMEYR, the first of three brothers to win a Rhodes Scholarship, has been associated with Moral Rearmament since its inception. He looks at some of the effects of this "movement for change" over half a century.

of this article, on a death list.

In South Africa it pioneered inter-racial assemblies. In the 1950s there were no desegregated public facilities, so conferences for hundreds at a time were held in large marquees on a private property in Witkoppen.

Several great Africans were part of the movement, including former Soweto editor Seloape Thema, Dr William Nkomo, first president of the ANC youth league who was to become the first black president of the Race Relations Institute, and Mr P Q Vundla, a militant leader from Soweto.

MRA is not a human pressure group. Its appeal is to the heart and conscience. It encourages each individual to explore for himself the truth that "when man listens, God speaks" and to seek his unique task and destiny under God. On the world scene this has led to initiatives like Alcoholics Anonymous.

Far reaching

In South Africa it touched off some far-reaching moves:

● At a time when black housing was vastly worse than today, the town engineer of Springs, seeing a new direction for his life, wrote down a thought quite new to him: "You are not town engineer for 30 000 Europeans but for 100 000 people of all races".

He accepted responsibility for the shocking state of black housing. He got the town council to sponsor a housing project called kwaThema. He got government finance. He tackled the white trade unions and got their agreement that they would not interfere with blacks building their own homes.

He won the trust of a radical black leader and together they enlisted men for training in building skills. He invited members of the Johannesburg City Council to see the first sod turned, and a month later to see the first families moving in.

They invited him to become the director of black housing for the Johannesburg City Council. It was a

notable breach in the industrial colour bar.

● Alec, son of former Rhodesian prime minister Mr Ian Smith, studied in South Africa and became a drug addict and a drop-out. He found a Christian experience that changed his life. Then he wrestled with the question "What is the relation between my personal faith and the crisis in Rhodesia?"

This led him to link up with some black nationalist leaders for whom Mr Smith was public enemy number one. The Rev Arthur Kanodereka, who had been in detention, and Alec became a centre for unity. They toured Rhodesia and South Africa. Alec's story in paperback, "Now I Call Him Brother", has sold widely in this country.

● A Karoo farmer embarked on this search. It led him to take initiatives which have had a wide influence, even on legislation, in four vital areas — protecting the environment, race relations, black farm education, unemployment.

The story is told in a video, "Promise of the Veld", which is currently being widely used in schools, churches, community groups, farmers' organisations, management training courses. In Europe it has been issued in French and German and it is included in the Finnish educational curriculum.

● October this year saw the national convention of a black women's organisation, "Ikageng".

Its founder, a black housewife from the East Rand, and her husband found the secret of unity at a Caux conference. She felt called to carry this inspiration to women across the land and founded Ikageng as a movement dedicated to sound homes, self-help and community service. Today it has 5 800 active members.

These actions rest in the belief that beneath our political, social and economic injustices there lies pride, selfishness, arrogance, fear, hatred and bitterness in human hearts.

These are the root of the problem and any radical answer must deal with the root

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