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Practical application of MRA in South Africa

By Corrie Dreyer

EARLY this year a well-known Mine Workers' Union organiser, whose work covers some of the Rand's biggest mining areas, astounded his hearers by announcing that he had collected £24,000 in union dues for the current year, whereas for the previous year the dues had totalled a mere £757.

The reason, he explained, was that not a single strike had been called in his area for a year, as compared with the almost weekly strikes of former years which, when called, had cost the union £8 per head per week.

When as an unprejudiced observer, I undertook a "one-man committee of inquiry" to investigate what tangible results were to be found of Moral Re-armament's impact on the national life of South Africa, this story from Johannesburg's gold mining area was only one of innumerable facts which were made available from many different spheres of life.

The brief and isolated reports that have appeared in the South African Press of the activities of Moral Re-Armament have given little hint of the practical applications of its ideologies. Rather the emphasis invariably has been on the V.I.P.'s attending the movement's meetings and conferences, so that accounts of them have read like snippets from some social register.

COMMON KNOWLEDGE

It is common knowledge by now that politicians, leaders of industry, high military officials, educationists, social workers, etc., all have testified, on M.R.A. platforms, to the new start in life they have received under the impetus of the M.R.A. ideology.

Such facts as those given above concerning the gold mining industry, derive from the association of both workers and their leaders with the M.R.A. ideology.

The Chamber of Mines, which undertook the cost of sending a delegation of its own representatives to Caux (European headquarters of M.R.A.) reports that there is a 100 per cent. change in the relationship between itself and the Mineworkers' Union as a result of M.R.A. influence.

Personalities such as Mr. Paul Visser, president of the Union, and Mr. R. P. Erasmus, vice-president (and formerly "Kommandant-Generaal" Erasmus, who led the 1922 strike when over 700 lives were lost), declare that they have found a new way whereby disputes can be amicably settled, with employer and employee meeting on a common ground and considering matters in the light of the M.R.A. ideology.

A FIGHT

This change of heart was graphically described by Mr. Erasmus on one occasion. After seeing the M.R.A. play, "The Forgotten Factor," it came to him that people were annihilating one another in the world. "I once saw a fight between a baboon and a bulldog," he said. "At the end the baboon lay dead, and the dog had to be destroyed."

There have been, naturally, many moving episodes at M.R.A. meetings, when former enemies decided to sink their differences and hatred. Typical was the reconciliation effected between a former British soldier, now resident in Johannesburg, and an agricultural official who, since the South African War, had grieved bitterly over the memory of a sister lost in the concentration camps.

The influence on South African

racial strife of such men pledging themselves to help build a new age for the country no doubt will be slow in making itself widely felt, but at least it is worth recording that the seed has been sown.

The more impressive contributions towards the evidence I sought were the active repercussions in industry, agriculture and other relative spheres.

Into this category must fall the testimony made by Mr. Roland Kingwill, Chairman of the Farmers' Association and the Soil Conservation Committee for the Willows District in the Cape.

Mr. Kingwill pioneered the system of rotational grazing in his area, and after coming into contact with M.R.A. he decided, through applying the principles it advocated, to reduce his stock by one-third.

As a result, recovery of his land, which he had expected to take five years, has taken place in three.

"Unless we can find a way to touch the hearts of the farmers, soil erosion cannot be stopped," he said, "I have often felt tempted to leave this country and go to the Argentine or the Rhodesias. But with Moral Re-Armament, South Africa has the greatest opportunities of all."

(To be continued)