

Is M.R.A. crusade on the wane?

By PETER GILL

LEADERS of Moral Re-Armament in Britain appear unruffled by the disclosure last week that their sister organisation in the United States has had severely to curtail its activities.

Started by Dr. Frank D. Buchman, an American evangelist, and incorporated in this country as the Oxford Group in 1939, M.R.A. describes itself as "a Christian revolution." It is devoted to promoting the four "absolute" values of honesty, purity, unselfishness and love.

In America, where its financial strength lies, contributions to the cause have declined over the past few years. They are now believed to be around the £1 million mark.

This failing support has led the organisation to close all its offices and training centres except its headquarters in New York.

William Jaeger, the son of a Stockport cabinet maker, who is now in charge of M.R.A.'s industrial work in Britain, was particularly calm about the setback. "We'll have to tackle America afresh, that's all," he said.

British M.R.A., which claims to be independent of outside support, has enjoyed a steadily rising income over the past ten years. Leslie Fox, its treasurer, said to Close-Up: "Most of our money—about 80 per cent.—comes from individuals."

In 1959 receipts totalled £129,500. Last year they were £218,900, and when the accounts for 1970 are audited, the organisation expects them to show an income from cash and other gifts of £225,600. "This is not large considering the extent of our work," said Mr. Fox.

Staff at Moral Re-Armament's Mayfair headquarters say that their publications are also reaching a wider audience. There are now 39 separate pamphlets in circulation, ranging from tracts on drugs and the race issue to anthologies of touching reminiscence written by those who have seen the light.

Their sale has increased from 13,700 in 1967 to more than 50,000 in the past year.

Although M.R.A. headquarters are able to reveal such statistics as these to inquirers, they are less confident about the total strength of their movement in Britain. "We have a widespread network throughout the country," said Kenneth Belden, a member of M.R.A.'s Council of Management. "But Moral Re-Armament is something that you cannot 'join' and cannot 'resign from'."

Some of its more prominent supporters are known to the public. Mrs. Mary Whitehouse, leader of the campaign to clean up television, Mr. Patrick Wolrige-Gordon, Conservative M.P. for East Aberdeenshire, and Conrad Hunte, the former vice-captain of the West Indies cricket team who now lives in England, all subscribe to the objectives of the movement.

Mr. Belden, however, was disinclined to name more. "We have links with many men of influence," he said. "All of them have come at one time or another to London's Westminster Theatre, and some come here to our house like Nicodemus in the night."

The Westminster Theatre is one of several M.R.A. centres in Britain. Many of its plays and musicals have been reviewed unflatteringly by critics.

M.R.A. has recently added an arts centre to the theatre at a cost of £550,000, a sum that was raised in two years. It now plans to build two more floors at a cost of £100,000.

Mr. Jaeger, who seeks to harmonise industrial relations by implanting Christian ideals in both workers and management, has 50 full-time members of M.R.A. under him. He said that all of them had had first-hand experience of industry.

Asked whether he could give details of M.R.A.'s achievements in industrial disputes this year, Mr. Jaeger replied: "All we can say is that those who have been touched by the movement do all they can to bring solutions."

M.R.A. workers acknowledge that their efforts are frequently attacked "by those who do not understand the objectives of our movement." Mr. Belden said to Close-Up: "We regard these attacks as a sign of vitality in our work."