

STRUGGLE OF IDEOLOGIES

How moral is Moral Rearmament?

WHAT is Moral Rearmament? How moral is it? Can it be effective in the struggle between the so-called Free World and Communism?

These questions are pertinent today, for Moral Rearmament, "the Salvation Army of the Middle Classes," is on the march as never before. In the past few weeks it has sponsored, at considerable expense, full-page advertisements — "Tidal Wave of Hope"—in South African newspapers. Similar spreads are appearing in the Press of all countries this side of the Iron and Bamboo curtains.

The most striking feature of the ideology of the Rearmeters is its dogmatism in opposing Communism. Everything is seen in terms of "ideology." In their slogans, Rearmeters say:

"There are two ideologies bidding for the world today. One is Communism . . . the other is Moral Rearmament."

"The man who does not choose Moral Rearmament for himself chooses Communism for his country."

Rearmeters believe that their weapons against the Kremlin are four ideological "absolutes"—absolute honesty, purity, unselfishness and love.

When asked to be more specific about how they propose to make the world safe for democracy the Rearmeters are vague. Resorting to slogans and jingles — which are powerful facets of their propaganda — they give answers such

as these:

"It's not an institution,
"It's not a point of view,
"It starts a revolution,
"By starting one in you."

One major criticism of Moral Rearmament is that it would serve the cause of democracy better if it directed its attention to those Right-wing dictatorships which, through the

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suppression of civil liberty, are inviting Communist revolutions.

The most often quoted remark of the founder and high-priest of the movement, the late Dr. Frank Buchman, was: "I thank God for a man like Adolf Hitler who has built a front-line defence against the anti-God of Communism."

He said this three years before the outbreak of the Hitler War. Buchmanites complain that these words are quoted out of context, or that Buchman never said them.

It is true that Buchman went on to say: "Of course, I don't condone everything the Nazis do. Anti-Semitism? Bad, naturally. I suppose Hitler sees a Karl Marx in every Jew."

Commenting on this, Mr. Tom Driberg, one of Britain's leading journalists, said: "Which seems

to mean that it was slightly more excusable to send Jews to the gas-chambers if they were also Marxists, but may merely be an instance of their general Buchmanite habit of shallow, almost childish over-simplification of every problem."

Moral Rearmament thrives on publicity. It attracts to its ranks public figures: jazz singers, statesmen, pugilists, reformed Black nationalists, generals (too many of them).

It is a wealthy organisation, and has centres, elegantly furnished, in many parts of the world, including Johannesburg. Here potential supporters—there are officially no "members"—are entertained.

Buchman was secretive about the source of the money for all the entertaining and publicity. But magnates like Henry Ford, and Thomas Edison were close friends of his and it is thought that it was from men like them that Buchman obtained money.

Moral Rearmament is a development of the so-called "Oxford Group," which Buchman established as a Christian movement after the First World War. It became known as Moral Rearmament in 1938, and since the end of the Second World War has become less of a Christian movement and more of an anti-Communist organisation. It accepts non-Christians today.

FLAMBOYANT

Buchman was a flamboyant personality, a powerful orator and a sound business man. He annoyed Oxford graduates by claiming to have obtained a degree from the university when, in fact, he was only there on a fellowship for a few months.

Buchman — "Just call me Frank" — died in Germany this year. He left no single successor to lead the movement.

What has Moral Rearmament achieved? It claims to have had impact on world events — "The minute Dr. Adenauer met Frank Buchman the history of Europe took a decisive turn." It claims to have stilled racial trouble in South Africa, thrown the Communists out of Kerala, solved the Cyprus question and ended strikes all over the world. It has even claimed, somewhat prematurely, to have brought peace to the Congo.

In fact, the statesmen it claims to have influenced — Adenauer, Kishi, of Japan, U Nu of Burma, — have carefully avoided attributing their successes to M.R.A. in political debate. All they seem to have done is sign "messages," which M.R.A. later uses in propaganda.

PUBLICITY

Individual supporters of the movement, it is true, seldom share the appetite for publicity that many of the "figure-heads" seem to enjoy. They are hard-working, dedicated men and women who scorn worldly pleasure. There is no doubt that they really try to abide by their ideological absolutes of honesty, purity, unselfishness and love.

In South Africa, for instance, they have made contact with certain non-White leaders — in doing this they have crashed through the race curtain at a time when barriers between the races are being erected almost every day.

Non-supporters of M.R.A. do not complain about their sincerity of purpose; what strikes critics as unfortunate is the apparent failure of many Rearmeters to see the other point of view and their general dogmatism.

Moral Rearmament works energetically, if naively, today as a pressure against Communism. If it exerted any real influence on the destiny of nations it could be an embarrassment to the West because it shares with the Communists a dogmatic absolutism—a "My ideology right or wrong" approach—which is corrosive of the tradition of western democracy.

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