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MORAL RE-ARMAMENT IN WEST AFRICA

Help in Uprooting Corruption

By a Correspondent



Dr. Frank Buchman greeting Paramount Chief Barimo Otu Achampong I, of the Gold Coast, in London.

"THIS is Africa's hour. Before a God-led unity every last problem disappears." This passage from Dr. Buchman's message to the Moral Re-Armament task force which left for Africa in 1953 summed up the ideological purpose of what was in effect a spiritual invasion of a large part of the African continent. It began in Central Africa, spread to Nigeria and the Gold Coast, and will probably, in due course, reach the other West African territories. It is not the purpose of this article to investigate the merits or demerits of M.R.A. as a spiritual institution, but rather to give a factual account of what it has done and is doing in West Africa.

Before Dr. Buchman sent his task force to West Africa the movement was not unknown there, although any knowledge of it was confined to a small section of the literate community. What was known of it was originally promulgated through the "Zik" Press, for Dr. Azikiwe, one of Nigeria's first and leading politicians, had visited the European headquarters of M.R.A. at Caux in Switzerland so far back as 1949. There is little doubt that Dr. Azikiwe found at Caux something which he intended to apply in his struggle for Nigerian independence. Subsequently, numerous articles and editorials referring to Moral Re-Armament appeared in his newspapers. In July, 1952, he delivered an address to Nigerian students in London entitled "Spiritual Rebirth for Africa," and in this he emphasized that Moral Re-Armament was offering "to make life worth while for humanity at large, irrespective of race or nation or class or caste." It may well be that within the terms of this reference he found something which he could offer to his political colleagues, for it must be remembered that Dr. Azikiwe was American trained and no doubt had heard of Dr. Buchman and Moral Re-Armament in America. One thing is certain; as a result of his visit to Caux he determined to make use of M.R.A. in Nigeria. Summing up his own personal reactions to his new-found doctrine, he said: "I have learned that it is not so much whether the Nigerians are right or whether the British are right, but the question is, what is right for Nigeria?"—a statement which is not without its enigmatical content. There is a possible connexion between Dr. Buchman's message to the task force setting out for Nigeria and Dr. Azikiwe's statement, for at the time Dr. Azikiwe was a firm believer in Nigerian unity; in fact, few visualized then a Federation of Nigeria as it exists to-day.

MINISTERS' INVITATION

But Dr. Azikiwe was not the only prominent African to go to Caux in those days. Quite a number of African students who were studying in this country also went there, and in many cases they are men who are at present prominent in Nigerian and Gold Coast politics.

Early in 1954 a formal invitation to come to Nigeria was sent to the headquarters of Moral Re-Armament, and was signed by 29 Nigerian personalities who represented all political parties and all walks of life. The invitation stated: "We are doing this with the realization that a self-governing Nigeria must be built on a firm moral foundation, and with the conviction that M.R.A. by its performances in Europe, Asia, and other continents, can give to our people and country the moral revolution which is the only basis of survival." Among the signatories were: Mr. Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, Central Minister of Transport; Mr. R. Amanze Njoku, Central Minister of Trade and Industry; Sir Kofu Abayomi; Chief Ona Ishokun of Oyo; Chief Baba Isale of Lagos; Mr. Akinpelu Obisesan,

president, Cooperative Union of Western Nigeria; and Chief J. E. Obaseki, Benin City.

After this invitation a party of 60 Moral Re-Armament workers arrived in Lagos on April 28, 1954. They had come from 14 different countries and during the seven weeks they remained in Nigeria they presented their plays and addressed audiences totalling some 20,000. This was exclusive of their Press publicity and radio talks. They visited the three regional capitals, and altogether travelled about 2,000 miles by special train. In Nigeria the Governor (now Governor-General) attended one of the plays with a party, while seven of the eight Ministers in the Central Council of Ministers also attended. But the most significant aspect of the whole tour in

their ideology at a time when the territory was having the first all-African Parliament, and when it was just settling down after the turmoil and excitement of a general election. The M.R.A. plays were performed in the Gold Coast, and again they were sponsored and attended by all manner of Africans, official and otherwise. The African Church dignitaries extended to it a considerable welcome, and this is important. In Nigeria, apparently, the existing missionaries of all denominations accepted Moral Re-Armament as something good; at least, there is no record of any opposition to it from any responsible churchman. Perhaps in the Gold Coast the actual warmth of the welcome given by the Church was more apparent. The Gold Coast Press, too, probably more than any other,



The Oba of Lagos, Adele II, being welcomed to an M.R.A. meeting in Lagos by Mr. Bremer Hofmeyr, of South Africa.

West Africa was the fact that in Kano, the heart of the Muslim stronghold, the Emir, accompanied by prominent Muslim leaders, attended. From the early days any form of missionary activity in Northern Nigeria has been most unwelcome, and has received scant support from the administration and none from the Emirs. In consequence educational achievement in the north is very much behind that of the south.

Before the advent of Moral Re-Armament missionaries had been active in Nigeria—and in fact in the whole of West Africa—for over 100 years. In the field of education they had achieved remarkable results, and in doing so it is to their credit that they kept themselves free from any serious political entanglements. In fact, it is only recently that they have shown any tendency to seek political influence. Yet in a hundred years apparently they failed to achieve the acknowledgment which, judging from the statements of Africans, Moral Re-Armament appears to have merited in a short time. What is the reason? Moral Re-Armament has not launched any new political doctrine, nor has it been accused of attempting to bolster up any particular existing political ideal. It did, however, aim at the political leaders, and, apparently, has successfully influenced a large number of them, both in Nigeria and in the Gold Coast.

What has prompted responsible Nigerian politicians from all the regions to give their support to this movement? Moral Re-Armament's impact on Nigeria came at a time when it was able to utilize the wave of political consciousness which was sweeping through the country. The avowed theme of the M.R.A. doctrine was to purify that political feeling, and it may well be that many responsible leaders, conscious that they had to bear the burden of responsibility which accompanies constitutional development, have looked to Moral Re-Armament to help them bear it. Although as a moral principle basically the idea was not new, it was so far as Nigeria was concerned.

From Nigeria the M.R.A. team went to the Gold Coast, and here again they launched

acclaimed the arrival of Dr. Buchman's task force. The *African Morning Post* summed up its findings as follows: "The Moral Re-Armament task force now in the Gold Coast have made four things clear, which, if followed to the letter, are likely to obliterate bitterness and other social ills in this country in particular and the world in general. These

four great standards are absolute honesty, absolute purity, absolute love and absolute unselfishness."

Tolan Na, president of the Northern Territories Council, became one of the great advocates of the M.R.A. doctrine, but it was the Rev. E. V. Asihene, Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in the Gold Coast, who answered a question frequently asked: "What does M.R.A. mean to West Africans?" He said: "Moral Re-Armament is not a new belief, denomination, sect or movement, as some unfriendly people seem to take it. It is a Christian way of life. It has no congregation, no membership. You cannot join or resign from it. It is really a practical Christian life of unity of all nations which is the fulfilment of God's purpose in Christ."

Of all the statements made by West Africans about Moral Re-Armament this is the one which would appear to have that simple and fundamental content which can be understood by all Africans.

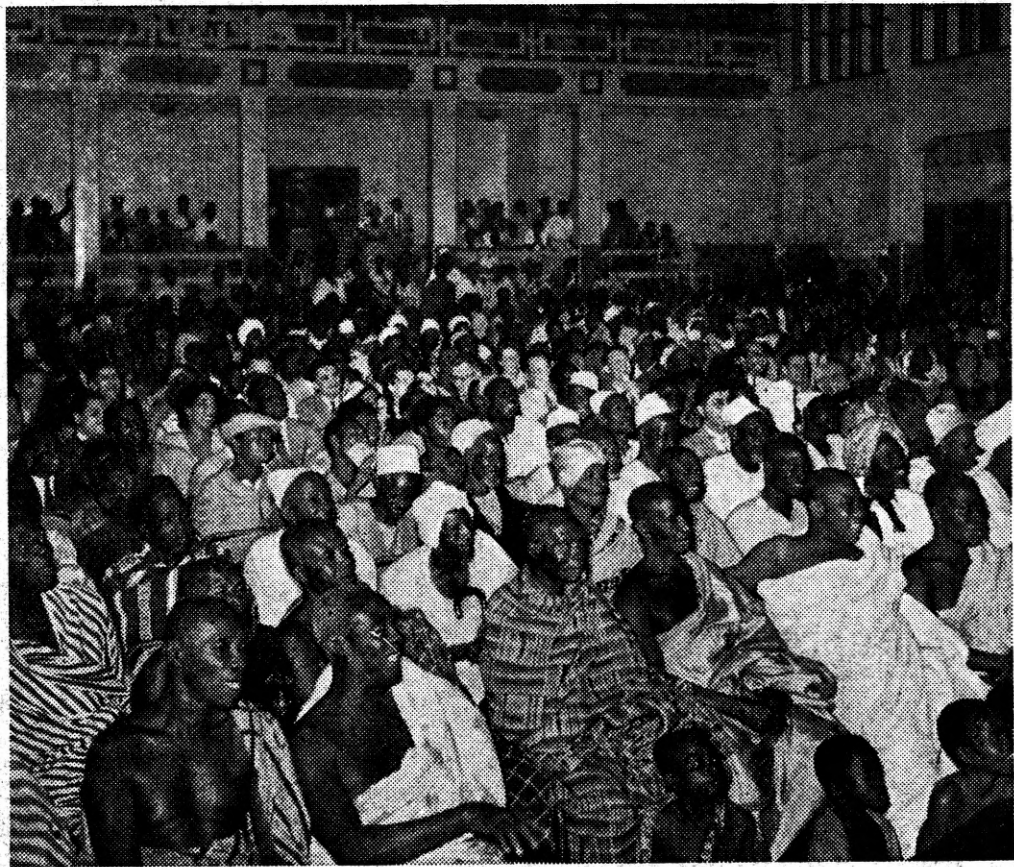
One other important question which has frequently been raised is the source of the finances of M.R.A. Although collections were made after performances of the M.R.A. plays, no organized appeal for funds has ever been made in West Africa. The M.R.A. authorities declare quite openly that they have been entirely dependent on gifts, which have been received with astonishing regularity.

VISITS TO AMERICA

The main M.R.A. task force has now returned from West Africa, although full-time members still remain both in the Gold Coast and in Nigeria. There is a constant movement of West African politicians between the West Coast and M.R.A. headquarters. A group of prominent West Africans went to the World Assembly at Lake Mackinac, Michigan, a few months ago, and on their return many of them made further public pronouncements on the need for M.R.A. in Africa. Quite recently Tolan Na, Mrs. Azikiwe (wife of Dr. Azikiwe, the Prime Minister of the Eastern Nigerian Government), Mr. Michael Ogon, and Mr. Fred McEwan went to Washington to attend a new conference which was to investigate the theme "An Idea to Win the World." This assembly was called at the request of Congress leaders in Washington, and brought together political and industrial leaders from all over the world.

The significance of asking West African personalities to be present at this kind of conference is of great importance, for it makes the West African politicians feel that their views on world affairs are sought. This may be one of the reasons why M.R.A. has made such appeal in West Africa.

One final question remains to be answered: What, if anything, has M.R.A. achieved in West Africa? Only the Africans themselves can answer it, although there will always be one yardstick available to all—the uprooting of that lack of integrity which identifies itself with bribery and corruption in public life. Even the most sympathetic of Africa's friends are unhappily aware of that lack, and it is in this field that M.R.A. can help Africa.



Members of the Ashanti House of Chiefs watching a performance of M.R.A. plays in the Gold Coast.