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1974-1980

Moral Re-Armament

Rhodesia/ Zimbabwe

Background

Starting with Ghana in 1957 African countries began to win back their independence from their colonial masters. In the 1960s France relinquished control of its African colonies, in some cases (such as Algeria) reluctantly. The British did the same, with the majority of countries achieving independence by the mid 60s.

In Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) the story was different. In 1962 the right wing Rhodesia Front (RF) came to power, their goal being Rhodesian independence under guaranteed minority rule (less than 10% of the population was white). In 1965 after several attempts to persuade Britain to grant independence, Ian Smith, leader of the RF government announced the Unilateral Declaration of Independence on Nov. 11, 1965. Soon after, Zimbabwe became the focus of international sanctions as well as attacks spearheaded by ZANU and ZAPU, the two prominent African nationalist organisations fighting for Zimbabwean independence.

The violence rapidly escalated and the country descended into a full scale and protracted war that caused thousands of deaths and vast population displacement. Between 1966 and 1979 countless peace initiatives were launched and failed, the Rhodesian economy began to collapse, 20% of the white population fled abroad and the violence showed no signs of abating.

However in late 1979 at a landmark conference at Lancaster House in London, the warring parties agreed on a cease fire, a transitional government and a settlement on a new constitution. While greeted with much jubilation many people feared that whichever side lost the upcoming elections would re-ignite the war. These concerns were not without foundation. One month before the elections it was discovered that a Rhodesian army General was preparing a coup in case the whites lost the elections. Said one witness to the unfolding events, 'People were told that Mugabe would butcher whites, a bloodbath was feared and the whites were panicking.'

Conversely, had the whites won the election the ZANU/ ZAPU Patriotic Front forces were waiting with 'pangas (machetes) in hand to kill every white in sight' if the word was given.

Involvement

Joram Kucherera, a member of Moral Rearmament knew that if bloodshed was to be prevented ‘Two people have to meet- Smith and Mugabe. There’s no other way.’

Moral Rearmament (MRA) had been active in Southern Africa since the 1920s and many African nationalist leaders, including Nkomo and Mugabe had heard of their work. Through key members such as Alec Smith, Ian Smith’s son, MRA flourished in Rhodesia and between 1975-1979 they launched a variety of initiatives aimed at ‘building bridges of reconciliation’ and finding a solution to the war that was devastating the country.

MRA’s focus on personal transformation as the key to social transformation is evident in the numerous events that were organised by the group. At a major MRA conference held in 1975 which was attended by many people directly involved in the war, Alec Smith, in classic MRA style, apologised to the audience for his own early naivety, prejudice and ignorance and appealed for forgiveness as well as for a renewed effort to help end the war.

This MRA belief in the power of personal apology as a way of breaking down barriers between people and opening dialogue had a significant impact on several members of the audience, one of whom was a man called Arthur Kanodereka who recruited young men into Mugabe’s guerrilla force. He formed a close friendship with Smith and the pair travelled the country sharing their message of peace and reconciliation.

Other people personally transformed by the MRA approach included Gordon Chavunduka, secretary general of the ANC who with MRA member Desmond Reader (a well known professor at the University of Rhodesia), went on to help organise many intimate meetings between ANC leaders and members of Ian Smith’s cabinet. These meetings, coupled with others arranged by Alec Smith, brought his father in contact with many of his political rivals, and were vital in paving the way for the crucial encounter between Mugabe and Smith on the eve of the elections. As Alec Smith recalls in his memoirs ‘There’s no doubt that during these years my father’s attitude softened... over a period of four years or so I exposed him to men who had a different way of looking at things.’

Kucherera, who had close contacts with ZANU-PF, made a few exploratory phone calls to see whether his idea for a meeting between the two men had any mileage. To his surprise he discovered that Mugabe was provisionally interested.

Alec Smith then set to work on his father, persuading him that a meeting with his nemesis, whom Ian Smith had called ‘the apostle of Satan’, was essential as the country teetered on the brink of a renewed war. After several days of deliberation both sides gave their consent. Given the precarious security situation which had seen several assassination attempts on Mugabe’s life within the space of a few weeks, it was agreed that the meeting would be held at Mugabe’s house at night.

Kucherera was the only person to accompany Smith that fateful night. When Smith met Mugabe, recalls Kucherera he ‘was surprised with the warmth of their welcome. It was the contrast of what he expected to see. The man he regarded as a terrorist was very disarming.’

Both men knew that the election would see Mugabe elected a leader of the country. For the next two hours, the men talked. Mugabe explained that he wanted to retain the confidence of the white population and he sought the advice of Smith in this matter. He also offered Smith an olive branch: two cabinet posts would be given to white ministers nominated by Smith.

When the meeting was concluded Smith was driven back to his house by Kucherera. During the journey Smith said 'This is a remarkable day for Rhodesia.'

Outcome

The next morning, on Tuesday March 4th 1980, almost 14 years since the start of the war, came election results. Mugabe had won. Smith made a public announcement to the people of the country accepting the results of the election and urging his fellow white constituency to remain in the country, as he would be doing. He went on to say that he had met Mugabe and found him to be a 'reasonable man'. Later on that day, Mugabe made a similar conciliatory speech asking all Zimbabweans to 'beat swords into plowshares.'

The much expected white exodus was averted, a renewed war was almost certainly prevented and the transition of power was relatively peaceful. Lord Soames, responsible for governing the country during the transition period reflected, 'Every time we thought the thing would explode in our faces, some miracle came about. When we went out there I was not one who believed in miracles. I think I am reversing my position now.'

1967-1972

Moral-Rearmament

India

Background

Following India's independence in 1947, the North East of the country was plagued by a series of secessionist uprisings. In 1956 the struggle for an independent Nagaland by indigenous peoples turned violent, and even the promise of full statehood within India did little to quell the uprising. In 1965 another armed movement was launched, this time in the Mizo Hills area.

Against the backdrop of increasing tension and escalating violence throughout the entire region, a new conflict began to emerge, this time in the hill area of Assam and headed by the All-Party Hill Leaders Conference (APHLC). The roots of this conflict began in 1960 when Assamese became the state's official language. This angered the indigenous peoples in the hill area, who had been largely left alone under British rule and were accorded special status under Nehru in order to preserve their way of life. Now, through the APHLC, the hill people of Assam were clamouring for their own state.

The media of the time predicted a catastrophe on two fronts: one, that the struggle for an independent state carved from a part of Assam would become violent; second, that

the threatened break-up of their state and the inflammatory language from some of the hill leaders would provoke clashes between the people living in the plains of Assam and those in the hills. Given the instability that characterised the region during this time, both scenarios were likely.

Involvement

In October 1967 the beleaguered General Secretary of the APHLC, Stanley Nichols-Roy, attended a dinner in New Delhi organised by members of Moral Re-armament (MRA). Extremist factions within Nichols-Roy's party were becoming more aggressive in their agitation for statehood and increasingly hostile towards him, accusing him of weakness and of being 'too soft' on the issue. In the eyes of many commentators, there was a real risk that the APHLC would be hijacked by these extremists who would lead the party down the path towards violence.

However, around the dinner table that night, listening to his MRA hosts, Nichols-Roy began to hear how non violence can work, how it has been used elsewhere to resolve conflicts and how MRA were willing to help him, if he would let them. He was intrigued. MRA had already gained a reputation around the world for its pioneering work in industrial and interclass relations and so when they invited Nichols-Roy and other key officials to the opening of their centre in Panchgani, in nearby Maharashtra state, he readily accepted.

MRA was launched in the UK in the 1920s by an American Lutheran pastor called Frank Buchman in response to what he saw as a need for a 'moral and spiritual awakening.' The core MRA philosophy is that social change can only be achieved through personal transformation. MRA encourages the individual to search, through 'times of silence' which connect the individual to God, for spiritual growth and a clear sense of direction.

MRA's approach to conflict resolution is to 'engender a heightened spiritual sensitivity in both parties and to thereby induce them to enter into a genuine and deep dialogue marked by a reciprocal sense of moral obligation.'

At the MRA centre Nichols-Roy and his delegation met political figures from all over the world, including French Socialist MP Irene Laure, who had tirelessly worked to build bridges of reconciliation between Germany and France following the war. Her story, of how she had cast aside her hatred for the Germans and now embraced them in order to build a new future, profoundly inspired Nichols-Roy. The personal care given to the APHLC leaders at this formative and tense time was critical. The visit became the first of many, and while the details of the talks that were conducted during this time are unavailable, they clearly had a deep impact on the leadership of the APHLC.

Said Nichols-Roy 'My visit to Panchgani convinced me that MRA is the ideology to bring sanity and peace to India's troubled North-East, and to help it play its rightful part in Asia and the world.' Others noticed the change in Nichols-Roy too. B.P. Chaliha Chief Minister for Assam since 1956, said 'You know, that man Nichols-Roy is different. He used to be hard. He used to be stubborn. I am so impressed with his change that I am now prepared to work unitedly with him.'

With this Nichols-Roy, B.P. Chaliha and the policy makers in New Delhi began working together to resolve the issue of statehood for the hill people, and with the threat of violence began to diminish.

What then followed was a remarkable 'outreach' programme in Assam which saw thousands of people from all walks of life watching a range MRA produced morality films and plays based on true stories drawn from around the world. This initiative was not in fact intended to 'prepare' the population for the inevitable secession; rather it was part of MRA's ongoing mission to promote tolerance, peace and interclass relations.

For instance, the MRA film 'Voice of the Hurricane' called for humanity and racial understanding in British East Africa, telling the story of a group of white liberals attempting to bridge the divide between black revolutionaries and right-wing white colonists.

Indeed, Nichols-Roy and B.P. Chaliha were so impressed with these films when they first saw them that not only did they request that every legislator in Assam watch them, but Nicols-Roy personally accompanied MRA, sometimes even acting as projectionist, as they travelled the region.

For the everyday man and woman, most of whom would never have seen a western film or musical, these stories of personal transformation may well have made a significant contribution to the process of tolerance building and understanding amongst the people of the area. After seeing the MRA films one Assamese soldier said 'We are pointing our guns at someone we claim to be our countryman. You can do this for a time, but at some stage you must say something to him. Our trouble is we don't know what to say to him that will reach his heart. You have shown us the way'

The films and plays, which were also shown in other areas experiencing violence such as the Mizo Hills, had a similarly deep impact. After 25,000 people in the area had watched the MRA plays and films a member of the District Council said 'But for Moral Re-armament there would be bloodshed and violence in the hills of Assam today.'

Outcome

The profound change in Nichols-Roy and many others, which ushered in a new level of cooperation with the Assamese leaders and the Indian government, finally paid off. On April 2nd 1970 the new state of Meghalaya ('Abode of the clouds') was born. At the official inauguration of the state, the Indian Express wrote 'Since the Meghalaya formula emerged there has been little tensions between the people of the hills and of the valley. The birth of 'Abode of the clouds' seems to have generated a climate of goodwill what few believed possible even a few months ago. For many people, the role of MRA was clear. B.P. Chaliha said 'MRA has transformed the climate of Assam. This is a fact.' Even Nehru agreed, saying that they had 'abated the hate in the hills.'

1946-1950

Moral Re-armament

France and Germany

Background

The post war relationship between France and Germany was unimaginably bad. France had fought three wars with Germany in the past century, which had left deep physical and psychological scars. Under German occupation (1940-1945) the French had suffered a massive and prolonged humiliation.

Germany on the other hand, its people little more than enemy civilians under military occupation, was almost universally reviled, more so as the revelations about the Holocaust became clear through the Nuremberg trials. Furthermore, large parts of their country were destroyed with around 25% of the nation's housing damaged beyond use; the German people faced malnutrition and they were denied movement within and outside their country. Indeed, even if they had managed to leave the country, virtually all other nations refused to issue visas to them.

Involvement

In 1946 a group of Swiss members of the 'Moral Re-armament' movement (MRA), guided by the founder, Dr. Frank Buchman, set in motion the process of reconciliation between French and Germans. Ostensibly to discuss labour management relations and inter-class reconciliation MRA organised a series of conferences at their new centre, known as Caux, overlooking Lake Geneva. This marked the first time senior French and Germans had met following the war.

Through well-placed MRA members in the Swiss, American, British and French Governments, entry and exit permits for all German participants were arranged. This, given the restrictions on travel for Germans, itself was a remarkable achievement. In total, over 3,000 of the most influential Germans and 2,000 of the most influential French took part in the Caux meetings between 1946 and 1950, drawn from government, industry, the media, religion, education and other key areas.

On the German side this included Konrad Adenauer, then Chairman of the Parliamentary council, and over 82 key government officials. The French contingent was similarly impressive and included the most influential of statesmen, Robert Schuman, who maintained close contact with MRA founder Frank Buchman throughout this period.

Three of MRA's central principles were used with remarkable effect at Caux during these years. They were:

(a) the centrality of the individual- that in every situation there were one or two key people who held the key- **(b) peacemakers had to start the process of peace-making and reconciliation with themselves-** that one's own experience was an essential element in helping people filled with hate to become free, **(c) the centrality of the experience of forgiveness-** that the process of repentance, asking for and accepting forgiveness for personal and community or national wrongs, liberates all.

An example of these principles in action can be seen in the case of Madame Laure, French Member of Parliament. As a member of the French resistance, she wanted nothing more than the total destruction of Germany. Her son had suffered extreme brutality at the hands of the Gestapo and yet through her experience at Caux in 1947, through talking about her feelings of hatred and anger towards Germans and through apologising to them for this hatred at the conference, she underwent a profound change.

Speaking to six hundred people at Caux, she said ‘I have so hated Germany that I wanted to see here erased from the map of Europe. But I have seen here that my hatred is wrong. I am sorry and I wish to ask the forgiveness of all the Germans present.’ Peter Peterson, later to become a member of the German Parliament, had been ready to answer back if Madame Laure attacked the Germans. But as he said later, ‘I was dumbfounded. We knew, my friends and I, that she had shown us the only way open to Germany if we wanted to join in the reconstruction of Europe.’

For Madame Laure, Caux became her Damascus and she, along with her husband who died in 1960, spent the next forty years travelling the world carrying her message of personal apology, forgiveness and reconciliation. In Germany alone they spoke at over 200 meetings, addressing 10 out of the 11 state parliaments. Her relentless bridge-building between France and Germany was praised by Konrad Adenauer who said that she and her husband ‘had done more in the past 15 years than any other two people to build unity between age old enemies.’

The barriers that were broken down and the relationships built at Caux were also a highly significant factor in the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), fore-runner of the EU. The aim of the ECSC, unveiled as the ‘Schuman Plan’ in 1950, was to ‘make war impossible’ by the arms industry. As Edward Luttwak comments, in Schuman’s eyes it was both a guarantee of non-aggression and the promise of full reconciliation.’

That top level officials from the coal and steel industries from both Germany and France were present at Caux on numerous occasions, and that they had developed warm relations over these years, was a decisive factor in the success of the ECSC negotiations.

Outcome

In 1946, on a victory tour of war devastated Europe, Winston Churchill gave a speech in Zurich which shocked his audience: ‘If Europe is to be saved from infinite misery, and indeed from final doom, there must be an act of faith in the European family. The first step in the re-creation of the European family must be a partnership between France and Germany. But I must give you warning. Time may be short. The fighting has stopped; but the dangers have not stopped. We must begin now.’

So soon after the war, such thoughts of reconciliation were inconceivable. At a time when virtually no major initiatives were taken to bring together these two bitter enemies, MRA achieved something of almost incalculable significance; what Luttwak calls, ‘one of the greatest achievements in the entire record of modern statecraft.’

When Frank Buchman died, the German Government Bulletin wrote that ‘the foundations of the understanding between Germany and France were laid by the first meetings between Germans and French at Caux.’ Ultimately, MRA’s greatest achievement lies in the myriad of personal transformations and the relationships that were forged at Caux.

The profound personal transformation of Madame Laure, what Joseph Montville in ‘The Psychodynamics of International Relationships’ singles out as ‘perhaps the signature event in terms of psychological breakthroughs in the Franco-German conflict’ and ‘one of the most dramatic examples of the power of a simple appeal for forgiveness’ was by no means unique. ‘I am accustomed to international conferences’ said Robert Schuman at one Caux conference session. ‘They usually end with great disappointments. Here we find nothing but satisfaction and a great hope. I will never give up.’

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