

A new beginning

The 17.45 train from Montreux to Caux hauls itself up the rack-and-pinion mountain railway tracks into the mist and cloud – ‘like a London fog’ one of the passengers thinks. Unseasonable weather for a first of June. The train is almost full. Among the travellers, a group of twenty-five friends, all in their twenties or thirties, German- and French-speaking Swiss, a handicapped English baronet, a rather fragile slim Frenchman, a decorated hero of the resistance to the Nazi occupiers of his country. The year is 1946. In the village of Caux, they squeeze into the ‘Repos’ snack bar for a cheerful simple meal. Then they eagerly make their way up to the main entrance of the vast old hotel that dominates the village, ready to take over as ‘the new management’, and launch into a strange adventure. Spontaneously, they break into an energetic folk-dance in the deserted entrance hall. Then they make their way to the Hotel Maria for the night. A thunder storm greets them.¹ The Caux-Palace has been bought by a group of people involved in something called ‘Moral Re-Armament’ and a new life for the old lady on the mountain, the Caux Palace, begins.

Writing later, at the end of the first summer’s conferences, some of the founders wrote, ‘When we arrived, the building was for us a symbol of what Europe is today. Neglected, battered, filthy, upside down, cold and empty – it waited for a new era to dawn. Coming into the vast and desolate-looking hall that first evening, we were gripped by fear of the huge task before us. We had six weeks in which to transform this cold gaunt giant of a place into a home. We had to prepare two hundred bedrooms from top to bottom, 600 mattresses and beds. There are 15,000 window panes, several miles of corridors, acres of parquet flooring and all the hundred and one things that make a home a home.’

One man had been thinking of this place, and the new life that could be brought to the ruined European continent through it, for some time. In the spring of 1942 there was a meeting in Macolin of some 60 of the Swiss Moral Re-Armament team and members of the patriotic Gothard League. Philippe Mottu recalled² that a thought came to him there in a morning time of quiet reflection which turned out to have major consequences: ‘If Switzerland is spared by the war, our task will be to make available to Moral Re-Armament a place where the Europeans, torn apart by hatred, suffering and resentment can come together. Caux is the place.’ Mottu added that he kept the thought to himself – it seemed so crazy. He didn’t even dare to mention it to his wife, Héléne. But a seed was sown. In 1944, with Europe – and the Pacific – still in the throes of the world war, the Mottus had flown to spend six months with Frank Buchman and his team in America, at Mackinac Island in the Great Lakes. Together they looked to the end of the conflict, and the massive task of reconstruction to come – and they saw something of what could be done in the way of creating a residential conference centre. Then in 1945, the Mottus returned to the US with a small group of Swiss. ‘During those months was formed the trio of Swiss –

¹ *From a 167 page hand-written diary of 1946, by Robert NUSSBAUM, Caux Archives.*

² *‘Pile et Face’, by Philippe MOTTU, p.76, Ch.13, p.2.*

Robert Hahnloser, Erich Peyer and Philippe Mottu – which became the pillar of Caux... We felt we had to prepare for a great task: the rebuilding of Europe, torn by hatred, bitterness and suffering,¹ Mottu recalled later.

I cannot speak from personal experience of this period, but those of us who were not around can usefully try to make an effort of heart as well as head to understand the emotions and motivations of that time. Those long, long years of the Second World War cost humanity between 48 and 60 million in killed alone. Civilians outnumbered military casualties by about three to one. The old lady on the mountain was not just a bystander – she had sheltered some of the victims in the last three years of the war. By 1945, a horrified world was starting to discover the industrialisation of death in the heartland of our Christian civilisation: the death camps and the Shoah. It was hard then, almost impossible, to grasp, to accept the truth, the scale of the evil. Now, 70 years later, the victorious allies who paid such a price to destroy the evil power of fascism can admit to some of the moral ambiguities of their ‘just war’, their industrialisation and mass-production of death, with the area bombing of cities and their civilian populations in Germany and Japan. Over half a million German civilians were killed, and the conventional bombing of Japan’s cities killed twice the 200,000 plus of the atoms bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and destroyed two million homes.²

At the close of his masterly *A History of Warfare*, British historian John Keegan concludes, ‘Unless we unlearn the habits we have taught ourselves, we shall not survive... Politics must continue; war cannot.’³ In this century, the frequency and intensity of war-making, he argues, has distorted the outlook of ordinary men and women, and has touched a majority of families over two, three and four generations. The Western way of warfare has proved irresistible, but turned in on itself, it has brought disaster and threatens catastrophe. ‘Yet, in their everyday lives,’ Keegan says, ‘people know little of violence or even of cruelty or harsh feeling. It is the spirit of cooperativeness, not confrontation that makes the world go round.’ But in 1946, it was far from clear that the Europeans were going to be able to break the destructive cycle of their civil wars, to re-find the ‘spirit of cooperativeness’ and to deal with the hatreds that the massive violence of the war years had produced.

The Swiss had been spared – and not spared. They had been deeply marked by the suffering of their continent. Many had lost close friends. Since the 1930s, a growing group of them had been working for the moral and spiritual re-armament of their country and its neighbours. One young woman went to a Nazi rally in Germany to better understand the rising power of fascism. She stayed with a Jewish family there. Through the war, she worked in the Swiss army (in itself something of a struggle for a woman), and at its end, she learnt that the family she had known and loved had vanished in the death camps. Another Swiss, a teenager then, recalled lying in bed pleading with Mr Hitler to stop the terrible things he was doing. She was saving all her pocket money and birthday and Christmas gifts for some great task as yet unrevealed. A third young woman recalled the electro-shock of seeing a photograph in the newspapers of rows of children’s bodies laid out – they had been killed in the bombing – and feeling that she would be ready to do anything to make such horrors impossible. Philippe Mottu had served in the army, in *Armée et Foyer*, a morale-building unit, and then as a diplomat, he had

¹ Philippe MOTTU, from a Caux Jubilee Lecture, ‘Caux is the place’, 30th June 1996.

² Figures from ‘The Economist’, 6th May 1995, p.19.

³ ‘A History of Warfare’, by John KEEGAN, Pimlico, London, 1994, p.385.

been bombed by the Russians in Helsinki, and by the Allies in Berlin. He had had touches with the German resistance to Hitler. One of his friends had been brutally killed for his part in the failed attempt on Hitler's life. Their lives were all now to be linked to the old lady's new adventure.

In February 1946, Mottu was writing to Buchman, asking him about his plans. Then in April, he was writing again, suggesting 'a possible world conference in Switzerland in August and September'. Mottu wrote, 'Last Tuesday I went there (to Caux) with Hélène'...¹ In a lecture on the 50th anniversary of the MRA centre, in 1996, Mottu recalled their visit: 'Walking along the lengthy front of the Caux-Palace, which seemed to me endless, I wondered what we would find. Everything was empty, without a living soul. Finally I came across the caretaker of the property, Robert Auberson. He told us of the mishaps of Caux during the war and informed us that the hotel now belonged to the Swiss Popular Bank in Montreux. Without waiting a moment, I went to see the manager of the Bank. I discovered that the hotel was for sale and that he was negotiating with a French company who wanted to buy it. There was naturally a fundamental difference between renting a hotel for a two-month assembly or buying a hotel to turn it into what I called in my letter "a Swiss Mackinac", (after the American MRA conference centre).'²

In his letter to Buchman, Mottu went on, 'It is an ideal place... The manpower situation in the hotel industry in Switzerland is such that they cannot think of having a commercial exploitation of the hotel.' Mottu noted that the present board 'is very positive towards MRA'. The French company is interested in buying the building to strip it of all its fittings – much needed in France. In Mottu's words, 'The hotel would have become an empty shell, a ruin.' The board of the bankrupt hotel company is offering to sell the hotel to Mottu and his friends. 'The price that they ask is relatively cheap: they paid 6 million (Swiss francs) to build the hotel and are ready to sell it for about 1 million.'³

The records of the Commune des Planches, the local municipality, note in March that the company is more interested in re-starting the hotel than in demolishing it, while a month later they are being informed that the 'Oxford Movement' was in negotiations to turn the Palace into their congress headquarters, while a Swiss-German group is interested in buying the hotel, but would demolish part of it.⁴

At Easter that year, a first European gathering of MRA was held in Interlaken. Buchman had decided to bring a team to Europe, was thinking of a major conference, in Britain, or perhaps in Switzerland – Mottu had talked with Buchman of his idea of Caux while he was in America. From Interlaken, Mottu wrote to Buchman, 'Your coming back to Europe with a team is a light in the darkness and a great hope for each one of us.' He went on in the military terminology of the period: 'At Interlaken during the last two weeks, we built the bridgehead for the continental attack. More than 180 people coming from 12 different European countries plus 400 Swiss were trained for the war of ideas and began to see the need for an ideology which can provide the foundations for true democracy. Through deep national repentance we found the way to the renaissance of Europe and we saw hate

¹ *Private correspondence from Philippe Mottu to Buchman, dated 11th April 1946.*

² *Philippe MOTTU, from a Caux Jubilee Lecture, 'Caux is the place', 30th June 1996.*

³ *Private correspondence from Philippe Mottu to Buchman, dated 11th April 1946.*

⁴ *Minutes of the Commune des Planches, p.267, 11th March 1946 & p.272, 11th April. Montreux Archives.*

disappear in the fire of the Holy Spirit. A European team was born.' It is interesting today to note this stress on the European thinking of the Swiss, since a majority of the Swiss voted in 1994 against Switzerland's becoming part of the European Economic Area, a step towards the European Union, and feelings towards the Europe of Brussels, and the big German neighbour divide town and country, French-speaker and German-speaker. Mottu adds, 'In my last letter I gave you some facts about Caux-sur-Montreux. The situation has developed very fast and a final decision has to be taken before midnight May 3rd.'¹

From London, Buchman rang Mottu in Interlaken, and gave every encouragement to go ahead. At around this time, three young Swiss couples, close friends, freed themselves from their professional obligations to take on this new venture: the Mottus, Philippe and H el ene, the Peyers, and the Hahnlosers. Mottu had been thinking of a diplomatic career, Robert Hahnloser's career as an engineer in Z urich was well launched, and Eric Peyer gave up a job as head of personnel for an important Z urich firm. But the pioneers came from a wide range of backgrounds. Jacques Henry, a bitter young farm worker from a background of alcoholism and illegitimacy found freedom from his past through a friend, Ren e Thoney. Thoney also came from a poor family and had found security as a postman. They also both gave up their jobs to help create this home for the world.

The day after the end of the Interlaken conference a group went to visit Caux – Philippe and H el ene Mottu, the Peyers, Eric and Emmi, Lucie Perrenoud, Maurice Nosley, the Frenchman decorated for his resistance work whom we met in the train at the start of the chapter, Robert Hahnloser and his wife Dorli, and a young Dutchman, Bert Wolvekamp. Wolvekamp's wife had started off with them on the car journey, but the winding roads made her car-sick, and they had to leave her at a station to make her own way. 'It was a cold spring day,' recalled Perrenoud. 'Monsieur Auberson, the caretaker opened the main door for us with a vast bundle of keys, and then started an amazing visit to this maze of rooms, stairs and corridors.' In an office near the entrance, there was a typewriter with a half-finished letter in it, abandoned. The parquet floor of the dining room had been ruined by being cleaned with buckets of water; the lift wells were full of rubbish. The kitchen was black, where the army's wood-fired campaign stoves designed for outdoors use had stood. But there was also an obvious potential. Hahnloser, the engineer, explained to them all: 'This ballroom would make a marvellous theatre – just what we need to spread a new thinking.' Perrenoud remembered, 'From one of the balconies, I saw a ray of sun break through the clouds and touch the lake. What a vision it was of grandeur, hope and peace.' Mottu talked about a newly-invented coffee machine that could produce coffee for a thousand people in an hour. The imaginations leapt to work overtime, but it all seemed so vast, there was so much to do, they were so few.

Once in the unheated and dirty building, it was hard to find the way out. Nosley got lost, and shut himself in a room where the door-handle then broke. This gave rise to the legend that someone was only released from a room with a broken lock after a telephone call from the next village down the hill reporting that there seemed to be a person on a balcony waving a sheet! Another version has a local farmer coming in to say that's he's seen someone signalling that they're trapped in a room, and then losing himself in the vast house.

The women were all very aware of the incredible amount of work that would be needed to make the old shell anything like habitable. The men perhaps were more visionary, less practical, saw the great possibilities.

¹ *id.* dated 28th April 1946.

They all retired to the Buffet de la Gare for a hot chocolate to thaw out, and to try to decide together what was right. In a time of quiet reflection, it seemed clear to them all that this was indeed the place, that they were meant to launch out in faith to make this place a home for the world. 'Streams of living water will flow,' thought Dorli Hahnloser, a theme picked up some years later by the Finnish artist Lennart Segestraale in the great fresco in the dining room.

What strikes the present day observer is the youth of these 'founders' – most of them were in their 30s – and the staggering speed at which events and their shapers moved. On 4th May, Philippe Mottu, and Robert Hahnloser sign a letter of intent to the bank: they were ready to buy. The bank manager, and others in Montreux, were keen to see the old hotel live again, and a first down payment is made on 8th May, before final terms had been agreed. Hélène Mottu, Philippe's wife gave the advance deposit – 100,000 Francs – that she had received as an advance on her father's inheritance. On 13th May, Mottu writes Buchman a full report of the international conference in Interlaken. 'We Swiss feel and act as Europeans,' he writes, 'and our deep conviction is that our country must give everything to make Europe great again.' At times, the sense of responsibility seems a burden, but 'the songs, the verse, the laughter of Interlaken showed that the Swiss have also got a new sense of humour and a quality of lightness that was badly needed'. Mottu adds that 6 people have already promised 450,000 francs between them. The local council minutes of 20th May report a meeting between Philippe Mottu and M. Brandt of the bank at which the sale has been confirmed. Mottu has expressed the hope that the new centre will pay reduced rates, but the local big-wigs decide there's no question of dropping the night-night tax (taxe de séjour).¹

On 21st May, Mottu is writing again to Buchman. 'Last Wednesday we had a three hours' conference with the direction of the bank,' he writes. 'The conversation was very cordial and we were able to get new conditions and a final price of 1,050,000 Swiss francs, payable by 31st December. We have to pay a first instalment of 450,000 francs by the end of June. Next weekend at Interlaken we are going to give officially the news to our Swiss friends and to include them in all the decisions about the financing and the work to be done to put the hotel at your disposal in July. Already we have received some very generous gifts and we pray that we will get all the money on time. It is a great life-changing proposition going through the material securities of the Swiss team. Next Wednesday Robert (Hahnloser) and I are going to sign the contract.' 'The Syndic of Montreux Albert Mayer, the Chairman of the Board of the Caux Property Company, Lucien Chessex, whose father had founded the Caux-Palace, the publisher of the *Journal de Montreux* and the managing director of the Rochers de Naye railway had urged the Bank to give preference to our plan,' Mottu recalled.²

The Communal archives for the 10th June reveal a final confusion about the new owners of the hotel, and a further discussion of the ever-prickly question of taxes and money. They are informed that the Caux Property Company will continue to exist, while handing over the hotel either to the 'Fondation Mountain's Club' (a confusion with 'Mountain House'?) or to the 'Mouvement d'Oxford' which will make it the permanent centre

¹ *Minutes of the Commune des Planches*, p.279, 20th May 1946. *Montreux Archives*.

² *Philippe MOTTU, from a Caux Jubilee Lecture, 'Caux is the place', 30th June 1996.*

for their meetings. And a M. Müller-Veillard is mandated to look into the question of whether the clients of the hotel shouldn't still have to pay the bed-night tax.¹

The final negotiation of the contract took place in Bern on Saturday, 25th May 1946 with the General Manager of the Swiss Popular Bank (BPS), Monsieur Hadorn. Mottu continued, 'Robert Hahnloser and I had negotiated to get a more favourable price, saying that our aim was to help to rebuild Europe and that the Bank could take part in this. I told Monsieur Hadorn that we were ready to accept the price which he, in the depth of his heart, thought we should pay. After a silence which seemed to me an eternity, he named his final price: 1,050,000 francs to be paid on 31st December with an initial instalment of 450,000 francs at the end of June. For the record, one must add that the construction and equipment of the Caux-Palace had cost more than 6 million francs in gold at the beginning of the century.'

Later the same day Mottu met with a wider group of Swiss friends in Interlaken to bring them up to date with the situation. 'The response of our comrades was unforgettable. About one hundred Swiss made costly sacrifices to find the sum necessary for the purchase of Caux and at the end of June we were in a position to pay the first instalment to the Bank,' Mottu recalled, 'One family gave up their plan to build a chalet, another sold a property. There was a firework display of generosity, representing costly sacrifice. Perhaps the most touching were the smaller, humbler gifts that came in with a word of encouragement.'² A young woman who had lost her fiancé in the war gave her trousseau. Elisabeth du Pasquier, the young woman who had gone to a Nazi party rally, and had lost her Jewish friends in the war, recalled a long time of quiet, after reading together an Old Testament text about sacrifice. She remembers a friend offering a ring she was wearing; a father giving the money saved for a family ski chalet – Caux will give more to young people than one small chalet – and a wealthy business man deciding to sell a painting by the Swiss artist Hodler.³ 'If Swiss start to give their capital,' Perrenoud said to herself, 'this is really serious.' There is as yet no legal body behind the venture – the Swiss Foundation for Moral Re-Armament will not officially exist until the end of November.

New-comers and sceptics continue to puzzle over the financing of this impressive centre. The French Catholic philosopher Gabriel Marcel, at the opening of the book *Fresh Hope for the World*, where he details his encounter with Moral Re-Armament, writes an open letter to three critical friends: 'The worst mistake one could make – and I say this all the more strongly because I nearly fell into it myself – would be to imagine that the movement is financially dependent on a handful of millionaires living in the United States, Scandinavia, or elsewhere. The facts seem to be that the money – and the sums needed are certainly large – comes almost entirely from people of modest means who, after meeting this movement, feel led to give not of their surplus but often what they can ill afford. In other words we find here an organism which depends for its existence entirely on faith.'⁴

¹ *Minutes of the Commune des Planches*, p.283, 10th June 1946. Montreux Archives.

² 'Pile et Face', an unpublished manuscript by Philippe MOTTU, p.117, Ch.18, p.6.

³ Notes from an interview with the author, 7th January 1996.

⁴ 'Fresh Hope for the World', foreword by Gabriel MARCEL, Longmans, London, 1960, p.11.

Some years ago now, a friend in Britain received a phone call from a lady who said that she wanted to leave half her estate to the Oxford Group-Moral Re-Armament when she died, and she wanted to make the arrangements. My friend went to visit her, and discovered that she and her husband had visited Caux in 1952. His experiences as a prisoner of war of the Japanese had deeply shaken him and left him depressed and unable to cope with life. They stayed for three days. After he got home, he decided to start a business collecting and selling antique maps; it became very successful, and his wife said he became a happy man. She believed that it was as a result of their visit to Caux. When she died, she left £100,000 to MRA, and some of this money was sent to Caux in gratitude for what this couple had found there.¹

For many years, when you went to fetch your mail at the internal post office during the conferences, you would meet Trudi Trüssel, a walking history book of the centre – walking with a stick after a hip operation, but still with a twinkle in her eye and a zest for life. In 1946 she was working as a maid in the Mottu home, after an extremely difficult childhood marked by cruelty and long illness, with little schooling due to the spells in hospitals and clinics. She was saving every centime to pay for a long dreamed-of training as a nurse. In a short memoir, she describes a meeting over lunch in the Mottu home in Bern at this time. She was washing up in the kitchen when one of the gentlemen came in and announced that they wanted her to join them – they were on the point of deciding to buy Mountain House. ‘I replied that they shouldn’t expect anything from me; at last it was a chance for the rich to do something. Deep down, I blamed the rich for the unhappiness of so many people. I couldn’t accept that some could have everything without lifting a little finger while others slaved away. This injustice filled me with bitterness.’²

Shaken, the man left the room, only to return a few minutes later. Trüssel in turn was shaken to hear him say: ‘You are right. It is time for us wealthy people to do something, but we can’t do it without you. We can never build a new world without your class of people.’ She joined the three couples in the sitting room; in Socialist circles she’d heard talk of building a new world, but no-one had ever said to her: ‘We need you.’ She knew that the three couples were well off. Why should they want to give so much money to buy an old hotel? From Lausanne where she had stayed some time with the Mottus she had looked up and seen the setting sun flash in the windows of the old hotel, and she’d even gone up to Caux on a day off and seen close up the dirt and decay.

They were quiet all together for a moment, seeking God’s leading. ‘God and I didn’t get on together,’ Trüssel wrote in her booklet. ‘I never said He didn’t exist, but I’d been so hurt by life that deep in my heart I felt that God only loved the rich and the good.’ In the time of quiet, she clearly thought that she should give 200 Francs – two month’s salary. But she slipped out to tidy up the kitchen, pursued by the thought, and wondering whether God could be for people like her too. She struggled with herself for three days. She knew that if she said ‘yes’ to this thought, everything was going to change, but she gave the money, saying that it was towards the invitations for the first conference. To her surprise, she discovered that her gift just exactly covered the amount needed. In another time of quiet listening, she had the further thought that a profession chosen only for oneself,

¹ *Personal conversation with James Hore-Ruthven.*

² *‘Envers et contre tout’ a private edition by Trudi TRUSSEL, pp.33-36.*

for selfish reasons, loses its value, and she decided to change her plans. 'God became my master. I took responsibility for the kitchen in Caux – a job I loved.' It wasn't easy to overcome a certain bitterness against those who had had an easier life, 'but my gratitude at having found God won out,' she concluded.

There are five separate books of accounts in the Caux archives covering this period, though much of the giving seems to have been unrecorded, or was recorded in a missing book – the total giving, excluding contributions of conference participants towards their stay in Caux only comes to CHF862,000 for 1946. The largest gift is for CHF38,000 and there are indeed a host of modest gifts. Some 230 Swiss made contributions in this first year. In 1947, the Hahnloser family seem to have given CHF600,000, making them the largest givers towards this great venture. Just before his untimely death in 1950 Robert Hahnloser said, 'Caux is one of the best examples of how the economics of Moral Re-Armament work.' He saw in Caux the hope of building a better world for his children to grow up in, and he saw that he could give three things : 'I could give a large proportion of my capital to make Caux possible; I could give all my time; and I could take up this fight with all my family.' He quoted Buchman's words: 'If everybody cares enough, and everybody shares enough, everybody will have enough,' and stressed, 'The main point is that it means *everybody*.'¹ Mottu recalled, 'He was 42 years old. It was a very great trial for his wife Dorli and his four young sons. For me, it was a heartbreak after five years of intense work together. We complemented each other and took all our decision together. Those five years had seen the first stage of the Caux centre completed. Moral Re-Armament possessed an instrument which has proved itself priceless over the last fifty years.'²

Before the small group arriving on the 17.45 train from Montreux can take possession of their new chalet in the mountains, the Swiss army take over the building again for a fortnight, to disinfect it – there are signs round the house saying 'danger – stay clear'. One of that first group to take over the disinfected wreck, Robert Nussbaum, keeps a diary of these amazing weeks³. The diary recalls one of their number 'expressing our gratitude to God, our will to give ourselves wholly'. The date is 2nd June. The scale of the task dawns on them, as they make a second, fuller visit of the house: 360 rooms! But it is 'destined to become a welcoming home to a great European and world family'. More helpers arrive, 9 in all, including 3 children. On the Monday 3rd June, they meet at 7.30 for a time of quiet and sharing. The diary then starts to include the first of many little pen and ink sketches of the workers and their work. Nussbaum captures their motivation: 'We're not going to produce a demonstration of a house that works perfectly – that's perhaps our greatest temptation. But by God's grace, we are going to proclaim to the world what the life of nations can become when Christ comes first at every instant in the heart of each person... He is our aim, our motivation, it is He that binds us.' After breakfast, teams are formed for 'la putze', the cleaning. 'When questions come up, the answer is given in silence.'

Soon after the start of their occupation, the first gifts start to arrive – polish, cleaning materials, a car, a whole cheese, table cloths, cutlery, 5 francs from a very poor family. There is even a mysterious case of soap that one lady finds, and gives – she can't for the life of her remember ordering it, or where it had come from.

¹ 'Caux Information Service', no. 9, 1949, p. 5.

² Philippe MOTTU, from a Caux Jubilee Lecture, 'Caux is the place', 30th June 1996.

³ The diary, in French, is in the Caux archives. The English translation is by the author.

Lucie Perrenoud recalls starting cleaning room 403, on the 4th floor, and then working on down the corridor. Water and electricity are restored in the house. It takes 4-5 people a full day to clean each room, but as a room is cleaned, it is occupied by some of the helpers, moving in from the hotels and pensions in the village. Perrenoud sleeps for a month on a mattress on the floor, in room 414, today restored to one of the finest rooms in the house. Nussbaum notes that it is on the night of 6th June that for the first time some of them sleep in the house, under 'our roof'.

They make a first cup of coffee in room 420, and sing a song to celebrate. On Friday 7th June the writer admits that the last four days have been so full of hard work and weariness that he hasn't had the energy to pick up his pen. Passers-by are stopping to ask when the Palace Hotel is going to re-open. They are told that it's open already, but it's no longer a palace, and it has a new name – Mountain House (to match the Island House conference centre that Moral Re-Armament has started to use on Mackinac Island in the Great Lakes, Michigan USA). The passers-by are puzzled by the use of 'we' from people in work clothes, with buckets and mops. They'd like to ask more questions; who is the boss? And 'we' kindly put them out of their misery, and try to explain that this is a place where no-one commands but where all obey. And they reply that this sounds very nice, but which means that they are understanding less and less!

Many of the suppliers offer reductions, as their way of supporting this great venture. One offers samples of chamois leathers for cleaning, and says they'll give as many as are needed of the one that meets the requirements. There are already many more helpers than at the start, but with Whitsun coming, many more will be arriving to help. By the 8th, they are around 150 people, old friends and new. A few Dutch arrive, one of them an architect, freed from a labour camp in Germany. There's a Swiss mason and his family, a recently graduated lawyer and a village postmaster who has just resigned his job; young and old. A man with an industrial cleaning business gives up his job and arrives with all his machines. He says later, 'I came to clean up the house, but cleaning our hearts first is the best way to do this. It was by caring first for people's needs and by sticking together that we did more work than I would have expected from an experienced lot of workers.' As people arrive, their first question is 'where can I work?' And they're already in overalls or with aprons. The other hotels in the village are full with helpers, and 48 are eating at the 'Repos' where they normally can take only 30.

On the 11th June, Philippe and Hélène Mottu arrive with Elisabeth de Mestral, to a welcome gathering in the great hall. The latter is going to be one of the generals of the catering operations, but one of her friends recalls, 'When she first saw the kitchen, she burst into tears because it looked like a coal mine.' It took eight coats of paint to quell the stains on the walls, Ken Belden recalls. He adds, 'Without Philippe (Mottu) Caux might never have been. He was the engine in the car, temperamental but brilliant.'¹

The work goes on at a feverish pace: knocking down walls, installing stoves, resurfacing the floors, cleaning the windows, mending and cleaning mattresses, blankets, sheets, coming and going. An ocean of chaos – with islands of peace and calm. Nussbaum reflects on the past, imagining the bitter experiences of those who worked in 'this monument to a time of injustice and suffering, where the rich, the owners, kept for themselves all the beauties of the countryside, the sun and flowers, the comfort and the pleasures, and the countless staff where

¹ *Letter from Ken BELDEN to the author, 14th May 1994.*

housed in the dark, with damp walls, working all the day in dim light'. Then one evening the merry band welcome for a visit a former director of the Palace. He is staggered, Nussbaum notes. 'He had a staff of 120, and endless complaints; we have no staff, and we're joyful.' A Dutch woman on holiday in the village knocks at the door and asks if she can come and join in the work. 'You are attempting the impossible,' says Monsieur Schenk, the President of the Oberland Hotel Keepers' Association, and another visitor. 'It's a great idea – but it's impossible.'

A locksmith/blacksmith employer from Bulle, touched by the Oxford Group, has the conviction that he should help with the repairs of all the metal fittings in Mountain House. Since he can't leave the family business, he asks his 79-year-old father to go up to Caux to repair the locks – a much-needed task, remember. At the same time, he hopes that this may help to rebuild their relationship – the old father is bitter at having to hand over control of the business to his son. The father accepts, and offers his services to the team in the final stages of preparations for the first conferences.

Three weeks before the planned opening, he arrives to check all the locks and the keys to the hundreds of doors. The old employer realises the gigantic work that this represents, and worries that he won't be able to finish the work in time. But he immediately starts with the help of a young apprentice, and over the next five weeks, they check and repair over 800 locks. There is also a full reconciliation between father and son. The apprentice amazes his boss with what he shares with all his fellow workers before he leaves. He hasn't just done a job, he's found a new path in life. The son himself returns again and again over the coming years – and his great grandson, who now is one of those running the family firm, has come to Caux to help during 'work weeks' to keep the centre in working order. The firm celebrated its centenary with a series of public and widely publicised round tables on ethics in business and public life.

Mottu writes to Buchman, 'When I came back here, we were able to pay on 1st July the first 450,00 francs to the bank. All this money was given by Swiss people on the team, and it is really thrilling to see the change that is taking place in so many of our good friends.'¹ As a newsletter from this time put it: 'All understood that this was an opportunity to sacrifice for the sake of peace what they hadn't had to lose in the war; that each one could thus participate in the rebuilding of Europe.'² On Tuesday, 2nd July, M. Brandt, the Director of the Banque Populaire Suisse transfers to Moral Re-Armament all the shares he holds in the bankrupt company, and a new board is named: Robert Hahnloser, Eric Peyer, Pierre Joseph, Eric Thiébaud, C. Hochstrasser, Philippe Mottu and Lucie Perrenoud.

The work goes ahead, punctuated with celebrations. Birthdays or anniversaries are excuses for songs and sketches, dancing and flowers. 'Every opportunity was taken to celebrate,' Wieselgren, a Swede, recalls.³ Another of their Scandinavian group, artist Kerstin Rääf was joined by her step-father who lived nearby, Albert Jeanneret, brother of the architect Le Corbusier, and himself an artist and a musician. He came up and joined 'the Caux family', and produced 'le ballet des balais', 'the dance of the brooms' at a tea break in the old

¹ Letter dated 9th July 1946.

² Newsletter (French original), dated 1st August 1946.

³ Letter from Gunnar WIESELGREN, 10.10.95.

ballroom. 'Friendships were created that have lasted all our lives,' Wieselgren writes. Bit by bit, the long corridors are emptying of the furniture that was piled there, blocking them. The kitchen that was so dark and forbidding is now all in white and the morning rays of sun are no longer put out by the smoke-encrusted walls.

A first article appears in the local newspaper in Montreux, telling the region about the welcome new direction that the old lady is taking. 'Something new at the Caux-Palace' is the headline over the report of a meeting of the Caux Property Company, in the Terminus Hotel in Montreux, noting that the previous financial year closes with a profit of 665 Francs 31 centimes.

On the 9th, 150 people eat their first meal cooked in the Mountain House kitchen: mushrooms on toast. The cooks come in at the end of the meal and are applauded. Then all stand and sing the first verse of the hymn, 'Grand Dieu nous te bénissons' ('Holy God, Thy name we bless'). Then a prayer is said. It is almost like a communion service, Nussbaum and Perrenoud both think. The same day Mottu tells Buchman in another letter, 'Elisabeth (de Mestral) is very busy with a real European team, composed of one English girl, two Danes, one Swede, one Dutch and three Swiss. The other day when they prepared the menus, they were unable to find out what a carrot and a mushroom was. After fifteen minutes of explanations they found the best way was to draw the vegetables! The kitchen has been completely re-made by our people, and I hope that by the time you arrive we shall be able to serve you a real Swiss meal.'

On the same day, the *Journal de Montreux* carries a longer article based on the journalist's visit to Caux, where the old hotel 'is like a busy beehive, where all work selflessly and hard, a smile of their lips'. 'Looking out on one of the most grandiose views in the world, those who are struggling for a better world, above party interests, can work and renew themselves in a conducive atmosphere,' the enthusiastic journalist reports, concluding with the wish that as at Mountain House, 'the whole world may become a liveable home where all can live together in harmony'.

There is no clear-cut line between cleaning and preparing the house, and the 'opening' of the conferences; they blend into each other.

Andrew Stallybrass