

REARMEMENT MORAL · CAUX

Centre de Rencontres Internationales

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MOUNTAIN HOUSE
RUE DU PANORAMA
CH-1824 CAUX

Monday, 20th July 1992

Dear friends,

From last Wednesday until tomorrow the house lives with the problems of our big cities. We all read about these problems, and see them on our TV screens. We see and hear less about the army of people at work, tirelessly labouring for healing, taking a host of initiatives that really are changing the lives of many for the better. 'For a Change' will carry a cover story with much of this mosaic of hope. The Swiss media have also reflected some of this session. '24 Heures', the largest circulation daily in French-speaking Switzerland carried a half page article with two photos on page 3 under the headline 'Healing the sick cities'. The local Montreux regional paper has carried several articles, the latest with the headline, 'Sick cities - the human factor'. The French-language Swiss radio put out an interview with two of the participants of the last session, and a further feature on the exhibition of the paintings of Croatian children.

The numbers have shot up - we've been over 400 but under 450. But it doesn't look as if we'll be totally overwhelmed for any session, unless perhaps the up-coming education one. It should help us to care better for those who do come, and lower the stress levels! And the weather has at last changed for the better, so meals and tea can be taken outside, and the children can run around and let off steam. As these letters and the news of Caux wings its way out from Oore, we feel the prayers and support of many friends around the world, and several groups here are also carrying in prayer the effort and activity. With many black Americans, and black and brown British, those of us who are white need an added sensitivity to the hurts of others, and our own, often unconscious, attitudes, to listen to the pain, without arguing points. In any case, we can never say 'I understand, I know how you feel', to any other person. We can only say, 'I am alongside you, I hear you. I want to go some of the way with you.'

Just before the session began, there was a remarkable afternoon with Prof. David Allbrook from Australia, where he drew out his audience on their experiences of cancer and illness and death. Palliative care was a relatively new science, but a very old idea: 'the need to treat people as people'. An African woman warned against 'the stiff upper lip that can become a wall'; others spoke of the need for tears and bereavement before there could be healing. There was an amazing reality and depth. Also just before this session, the Croatian Minister left, saying, 'I have seen in the eyes of people here that we are friends for life.' A Russian intellectual and publisher said, with tears in his eyes, 'You have another friend in Moscow.' This week has also seen the inauguration of a steam engine on the line up through Caux to the Rochers de Naye, to mark the centenary of the line's construction. So lunch was pushed back, and the whole conference joined the village at a garlanded station to welcome the puffer with a band and cheers and waves. So you'll now see a

water tower as you arrive at the Caux station, and hear a new and distinctive sound from time to time.

There are press stories which may give you some of the highlights of the 'Change in the cities' consultation. The days have been incredibly full. Participants have seized on the open forums at 9.30 to give some come-back. A white woman from the 'deep South' of the US, working with the police, apologised to the blacks present for the way they had been kept down. 'We can turn things round, if we realise our mistakes and try to put them right,' she said, going on to give examples of her police department's voluntary work with young people. Another white pleaded for Europeans to open their hearts to the pain and shame of Americans. 'We need help,' he said. Discussions and group meetings have gone on late into the night.

The sessions have been enlivened - perhaps leavened too - with gospel music. There have been many case studies of situations turned around by local initiatives from Portland, Oregon, to the favelas of Rio and to community relations in France and Britain: residents threatening to demonstrate with placards outside the comfortable homes of the owners of poorer area property used by drug dealers and users; writing to the owners of cars seen cruising looking for drugs or sex for sale, saying that they're not welcome in the neighbourhood; coalitions built between residents and local authorities to deal with policing, gangs, job creation. As Rob Corcoran said at the end of a brilliant presentation by the delegation from Richmond, led by the Mayor, 'It is important to build truth and remove conflict between the people of goodwill who want to make a difference.' 'If you're not mixing, you're not healing,' challenged the black chairman of Bridgebuilders, a local initiative in Croydon, London. One afternoon there were outings, to Gruyère and the Château de Chillon, but also to Lausanne, Yverdon, and an 'alternative culture' centre in Geneva.

Yesterday afternoon there was 'a birthday celebration' for Konrad von Orelli who died last month, but whose birthday it would have been. He and his then-fiancé were among the first Swiss to commit themselves to the great adventure of turning the Caux Palace Hotel into a Moral Re-Armament conference centre for the world. With many who had known and loved him from school days onwards, and others who had never met him, we remembered a life of faith and a powerful pen, producer of prayerful poetry.

Some have been hard at work over these days with a Scottish couple who came at their own expense in reply to a call for help in training 'community leaders' in the skills of drawing out the best from a group discussion, helping all to express themselves. This work should bear rich fruit in the future. They were impressed by much of what they saw and experienced, but think that we could do better in helping new people to understand the essentials of MRA, and particularly in introducing them to quiet times. It was a healthy reminder of the need to constantly search how to make attractive and clear the specific contributions of Caux and MRA.

We ended the week again with a lovely concert - to twist the Heineken beer advertising slogan: 'Music refreshes the parts of you that words do not reach.' Sylvie Söderlund-Haller sang from rich musical and poetic tradition of Scandinavia, and I will end with the words of one of her songs: 'On a quiet summer morning in Caux, all that you see was created by a loving father. A father for every people and nation, who wants to lead his children by the hand.'

Warmer, sunny greetings from Caux,

Andrew Stallybrass