

Centre de Rencontres Internationales

Siège social:
Case postale 4419
CH - 6002 Lucerne
Tél. 041 310 12 61
Fax 041 311 22 14

pour le Réarmement moral

CAUX

Mountain House
rue du Panorama
CH - 1824 Caux
Tél. 021 962 91 11
Fax 021 962 93 55

Caux, Monday, 21st July, 1997

As my train silently sped from Zurich to Lausanne, on 6th July, gliding through the lush Swiss countryside, heavy rain beat against the carriage window. It's been a very wet summer, causing floods in countries like Poland, where one tenth of the land area is said to be under water. However, as the little mountain train rumbled up the hill to Caux, the clouds had cleared and the sun broke through, opening up that spectacular vista that overcomes you, when you arrive at Mountain House. Eliane Stallybrass, met me at the door and said, "Thank God you brought the sun, it's been raining for a whole month." I promised to keep it that way! I have not fully succeeded!

How do I report on the CCBI? Should I give lots of details and quotes from among 150 participants from 32 countries, in seven Forums, discussing communications, business ethics, responsibilities of young professionals, new market economies, successful enterprises, case studies in cooperation and initiatives for unemployed, who took part in 28 Forum sessions, six main sessions, six seminars, one public lecture, one panel discussion and numerous other smaller meetings and workshops? To do this will perhaps bore you. So I will focus instead on the 'spirit of Caux' during the CCBI.

Well, the CCBI did get off to a good start with inspiring contributions from Jacky Brandt from Bulle, Switzerland, and Daniel Dommel, former Chief of Finance Inspection in France who is now President of the French section of Transparency International. Mr Brandt, whose family business was marking its centenary, told us how he consulted his staff who contributed key ideas to keep the business successful. This consultative process he had learnt at Caux. The Swiss Press published a number of feature articles on Jacky Brandt's approach and he is certainly making an impact on other companies as well. Mr Dommel talked about the culture of corruption in business. He spoke of the need to have "islands of integrity" to tackle corruption, like 'pockets of clean economic zones,' where all companies abolish corrupt practices. He reckons this should be legislated and could become a trend in business world wide.

Last Wednesday our Swiss friends at Caux took all 350 of us on a journey of remembrance, down the painful road of time, recalling the plight of 1600 Jewish refugees who stayed at Caux during WW II. Pierre Spoerri read heart rending extracts of letters written recently by some of those who stayed in Caux as children, recalling the joy, relief and hope they experienced. Of equal significance was the symbolic gesture of repentance that was offered in memory of many thousands who were turned away from Swiss borders to certain death. Out on the promenade, under a brilliant blue sky, overlooking the shimmering lake, an Oak tree was planted in their memory. Rabbi Marc Gopin, Professor for Conflict Resolution at George Mason University, Washington DC and Dr Heinrich Rusterholz, President of the Alliance of the Protestant Churches of Switzerland dropped the first shovel of soil. All of us followed them, standing in a line for our turn.

Later we gathered around the bay window upstairs, a single lit candle before us and the backdrop of the ever changing evening sky, as Dr Rusterholz and Rabbi Marc spoke. To capture what they said in a few words will perhaps devalue the power of that deeply moving evening, when many in the audience wiped their eye. Rabbi Marc took us into the depths of his thinking and emotions, helping us to deeply understand the trauma, and invited us all to help bring healing to the collective memories of the Jewish people. He spoke about the paradox of having to face any past wrongs, where we tend to both repent and defend our position. He commended the Swiss people for doing the soul-searching that is going on in themselves at this time. As Rabbi Marc spoke, the sun set over the mountains and three aircraft in the far distant sky left a trail of white cloud behind them. When the aircraft had disappeared, three criss-crossing white lines had formed into a star. The Star of David, I wondered.

There is so much that makes up the spirit of Caux. It permeated our Pointe Fix meetings and Heart of the Matter sessions and mealtime discussions. Mr and Mrs Darius Forbes from Pune, India added to this 'heart energy' with the story of their business and its contribution to the upliftment of the poor in Pune.

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Digna Hintzen-Philips from Holland spoke of the power of listening as "crisis-proof" into the 21st century" for anyone wanting to live a full and adventurous life. Jean Fayet, President of Siemens Automotive in France talked about the need for business in Europe to move from its comfort zone to a culture of greater risk-taking to meet the challenges facing western economies. People from East and Central Europe opened the doors of their lives to us and talked about the challenges they face in a new market economy. Each one gave an example or incident of 'a light being lit' in their countries, through positive action taken by them. They asked Caux for ongoing support in developing values-centred leadership to replace the uncontrolled 'valueless practices' spreading in their countries.

The first of the series of Caux Lectures was given by Bill Jordan, General Secretary of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions representing 125 million members in 137 countries. Mr Jordan, and his wife Jean who are from Birmingham spent four days with us at Caux. In his wide ranging address on 'The Morality of Globalisation' Bill Jordan took us through the doorway of global finance and economics where he said, 'the impersonal forces of globalisation' could, with the push of a button, trigger major economic upheavals. He said, the world's 40,000 multinational companies, concentrated the wealth of the world in the hands of a few, effectively making them more powerful than governments. In a world where Trade Unions have experienced a major paradigm shift, and redefinition of their role, Bill Jordan's speech held out an example of the new role that Trade Unions are now playing is fighting for ethics and accountability in the management of the global economy. If Unions did not take on this challenge he said, a small group of unaccountable people could, by electronically move billions of dollars across the world, trigger off devastating changes, resulting in major social problems. He cited the crisis in Mexico some years ago as an example of this.

By Saturday the seven Forums which took place concurrently in different parts of the house were ready to present the results of their discussions. Keep a look out for a special report on this which will be published later this year, and can be ordered through your local/regional MRA offices. The key elements worth mentioning are: the initiative of the International Communication Forum to offer full support and solidarity to their counterparts in Eastern Europe to develop a strong and independent media base, the creation of a World Centre for Business Ethics - an outcome of the Business ethics Forum and the promotion of the concept of "Partnering" - a collaborative approach to business and industry being successfully used in Britain which has brought 30% savings in multimillion dollar projects.

The presence of a strong group of Indians, from Delhi, Pune and Bombay gave us the opportunity to hear of the next phase of management training being considered in India, in addition to running the existing and very successful Industrial seminars being held at the Asia Plateau. This new program is to focus on reaching the top MBA graduates and new generation entrepreneurs and business leaders now moving into top positions in a deregulated and high growth-rate Indian economy.

On Sunday the final session of the CCBI was hosted by Peter Fields, a professional trainer and facilitator in the 'partnering' program. He skilfully weaved in the entire proceedings of the week with short two-minute contributions from a group of people from the conference, the two minute discipline was ensured by the ringing of a gong! Speakers shared of the impact and ambience of Caux on their lives, new decisions, new relationships, new trust and hope and new purpose for life.

And finally and most importantly, there was time everyday for the dynamics of silence. There seems to be an increasing search in the hearts of people for that 'space within' that connects each one with themselves, with others and with the universe of which we are a part. Silence became as much a part of our week, as all the talking.

Sunday afternoon - the thud and thump of bags at the entrance, people going home. At the same time an equal number coming in for the next session, "A Life of Faith." After three days of mist and rain, the sun came out again. In the distance four Indians walked up the hill. Another week at Caux had begun.

Mohan Bhagwandas

MONDAY CAUX LETTER: Each Caux letter is written by a different writer/writers this year and the impressions and reflections expressed are therefore of that individual or group. This letter was done by Mohan Bhagwandas from Australia, who was one of the coordinators of the Caux Conference for Business and Industry (CCBI).