

MOUNTAIN HOUSE • CAUX

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

Monday, 12th August 1985.

Dear friends,

We¹ re again having warmer days, but after a cold, wet spell that gave us a foretaste of autumn, and clothed the mountains, including our neighbour the Rochers de Naye, in a fresh powdering of snow. Indeed, there was that clarity and crispness in the air that hints that summer is leaving, and even the odd leaf in a hurry to turn to gold and fall. The wild raspberries are ripening and winking out from their secret corners, known only to the connoisseur - like me!

The house is full to bursting for the first time this summer. The house-count has been hovering just under 500, and all of our 550 beds are full each night, or promised for the morrow. When the house-keeping team heard of the needs, and that some might have to stay in hotels, they promised that they could have a room ready for new occupants 2 minutes after the departure of the previous tenants - which illustrates something of the spirit in the house. And so far no one's had to stay outside our houses. To me, it is an amusing paradox that the one session for which we didn't have a special invitation should be the fullest. Fortunately, Hardy, our computer keeping track of registrations, and listing arrivals, seems to be run in now - and he tells us of even fuller days to come with the Africans arriving. Laurel, his thinner partner, helps to produce these letters.

The dialogue of the continents started in fine style last Wednesday with a pre-supper reception for the distinguished guests, and then a magnificent dinner - table cloths on all the tables - before the opening session in a packed hall. 'We deal in another sphere here,' said Pierre Spoerri, 'the pre-conditions for solutions that are rooted in human nature itself. A dialogue pre-supposes a readiness to alter pre-conceived ideas. If no new idea can pass, no dialogue is possible, and we become prisoners of our positions.' One of the Lebanese present added, 'We need apostles of reconciliation and unity. Only he who has abandoned the fight has lost it. It is an illusion to think that it is up to our politicians to solve all our problems.'

The Swiss Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs - the top civil servant in the ministry - came to the opening session and spoke. The greatest problem facing Europe today was the build-up of arms in a divided continent, he said. 'But the arms do not create the problems, the problems create the arms.' He concluded, 'Every refugee who comes here is a failure, not for himself, but for his own country that has forced him to flee.'

I confess I've been dreading this moment of putting fingers to keyboard. So much of what goes on here is known only to God and his Angels - and perhaps the ghosts of decisions made. I can sense that, but how to put it into words? I appealed for help in one of our 3.20 daily planning sessions, and we heard a pageant of miracles (and I don't use the word lightly), but all were preceded or followed by stern warnings that this story at least was for our ears only, and only within these four walls! At least all appreciated the humour of my dilemma.

There have been politicians, members of parliament, diplomats and ambassadors, people from countries that are not free and others who had harrowing tales of escape to freedom. The sombre suffering of nations and peoples in great pain have been with us through the week. Friends from the Middle East and Indo-China, others from Eastern Europe and Afghanistan. Healing for these peoples and countries lies far beyond our grasp - so we started with an invocation to Buddha, Allah and Christ. And yesterday again, in the presence of a distinguished Sri Lankan delegation, including the Ambassador to the U.N. in Geneva, and of the Indian Ambassador to Bern, we prayed for the peace talks starting in Bhutan. The son of the Sri Lankan lady who prayed will be taking part in the talks, between the government and the guerrillas.

Asia has been a powerful presence here, in numbers, and in the level of the participants. 19 Asian countries have been represented. One Asian had the thought to write to the man with whom he used to share a ride to school some decades ago. The other man is now the President, and his country faces civil war. Another Asian is the sister-in-law of her country's Prime Minister, and she is searching for the important issues that she is meant to talk with him on.

'We can be Pol Pots too,' says a freedom fighter from Cambodia, who goes on to talk of how he brought unity in his family through an apology to his younger brothers for his dictatorial tendencies. A Laotian tells of his decision to flee his country - then he returns when he hears his mother is ill. A second escape follows, and finally his mother rejoins him in Australia. 'The war was starting again in our own family, in our own hearts. It follows us everywhere if we don't change.' Simple words that slip over weeks of walking, danger and suffering. 'Caux is a special place where we regained our liberty as human beings,' says another who was forced to leave his country, fleeing 15 minutes before the police came to arrest him.

A Sikh lady, at a private tea with the Indian ambassador, tells of the miracle the day before that had freed her from her bitterness against the Hindus for the events of the past year. 'Caux is an injection of hope,' says a young East European who has spent months in prison for his convictions. An Israeli apologises for the sufferings inflicted on Lebanon, and a Lebanese responds, 'I have never thought of the destiny of your country.' A leader comes incognito from another country that has undergone a bloody revolution. The last time he was here, he had read a message from his former head of state. 'It is a miracle that I'm alive today,' he says. 'What can we do for my country now?'

After the Asians, it was the turn of the Europeans. 'This whole talk of partnership is a big bluff,' said a Finnish businessman, 'when there's nothing we expect from our partners unless its raw

materials at the cheapest price possible. There's no hope for us unless we too are in need.' The Americans gave us an extraordinary evening session in the theatre - ending in gales of laughter and music with Johnnie Green. But we also heard of miracles in Latin America, behind the moves towards democracy in some countries.

The week has been filled to the full with a great variety of smaller meetings of varying degrees of secrecy. One of the more open sessions was on community relations, and brought together a French socialist M.P. and British with experience of bringing racial harmony. The morning after breakfast started with a first session on 'The heart of the matter' with themes like 'Absolute standards and freedom' and 'Blocks to effective living' - 7.30s in all but name and hour! Jamali, the former Prime Minister of Iraq, held many of us spell-bound as he told of his first touch with Frank Buchman at the founding of the U.N. Other, smaller, gatherings have examined certain aspects of our work - finances, centres, decision-making - profiting from this aspect of Caux as a precious coming-together of our world force.

Yesterday, some 120 of our friends from overseas piled into cars, buses and a train, after a hurried lunch - and a very disciplined meeting, with two ambassadors speaking in seven minutes. We were invited to visit 15 Swiss families, and see something of the country. Eliane and I took two car-loads to friends in Geneva: a Lebanese, an Israeli, a Filipino and five Japanese, including a senior senator. We payed an impromptu visit to a peasant farmer, with three cows, a dozen heifers and 15 hectares. He pointed out the room in their small, 200-year-old farmhouse where his grandfather had been born in 1823! Then we had a simple cheese and salad high tea with our hosts and their children, all crowded round the family table.

We look forward to a couple of days' breath before the next tide sweeps in!

Andrew Stallybrass