

# Centre de Rencontres Internationales

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pour le Réarmement moral

# CAUX

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Caux, 24.07.00

Dear friends,

A third letter, at the close of the second session here, as we prepare for the Caux Conference for Business and Industry, and as we work through the first big changeover of the summer - 55 leaving and 77 arriving yesterday and today. It has been a great week, with an extraordinary degree of participation.

We started with an imaginative sketch introducing the new hired translation headsets in the style of an airline safety announcement - our essential communication equipment. And so it proved, with many languages spoken, as we conducted a genuine conversation on 'Aims and Values for the New Century'. Graffiti boards on either side of the stage also encouraged us to converse through felt-tip pens and slogans. One joker wrote 'The problem with the world is apathy', then 'Who cares?' and finally 'I do!' Korean mixed with Spanish and Russian alongside the more familiar English.

Pierre and Fulvia Spoerri introduced us to the challenges that were facing those who met in Caux in 1946 - and then looked at the challenges facing today's world. The young Ukrainian chairing the session noted that it is hard to translate the word 'challenge' in Russian, even though the country's full of them. The word 'problem' is too static. He suggested a definition: 'A problem that says "here I am, are you going to do something about me?"' He was drawn back to Caux, he said, because of the 'inner romance of the idea of the quiet time'. He had started preaching the ideas of Caux at home already last year, but had only started applying them during this visit. He vividly described the dilemmas of life at home, where there might be water for only three hours a day, but he didn't do the washing because there was also electricity, and he chose to download his e-mail first!

A four-decade spanning inter-generational team chaired the morning sessions in the style of a drawing room conversation. We heard from Maria Wolf from Germany, now organising the team of trainee translators, first came in 1996 and presented her fresh thoughts on life-changing. Bhav Patel from Britain first came a year later; he introduced us in a fresh way to the power of silence. Mike Brown, from Australia said, 'Ordinary people like us can be part of a process of reconciliation and change in the world. All can get involved in this conversation on aims and values, not just the priest or the Ph.D. - though they're included too.' The only conditions were 'no conformity, no correct views, no bluffing. Keep it real'. Ailsa Hamilton from Scotland called it 'porridge-stirring time', as she gave an introduction to Frank Buchman, but firmly in the context of 'learning to look forward, not back, and discovering new things'.

Our 'emergency communication equipment' had to be slipped on and off at speed (some chose to wear it all the time) as participants from Spain and Mexico took the roving microphone, between Germans and French. Thanks to some great musical

'animators', we learned several songs all together, and sang in harmony - itself a precious community-building experience. There have been haunting songs from Vietnam and Ukraine, and Moldovan dances along with the more now-traditional Scottish dancing. Joy Weeks, who has done a splendid job co-ordinating the community groups, training leaders, and helping put in place the new service system also distinguished herself as a dancer - we discovered that she's been taking lessons at home in international folk-dances. Another woman to whom we owe a lot is Cricket White from the USA, who has taken on the task of 'conference facilitator' or trouble-shooter extraordinaire.

Silvia Harnisch, a Swiss professional pianist came for the 7<sup>th</sup> time in 10 years to give us a classical concert, enriched by her own thoughtful introduction to the musicians and their pieces. Another evening saw us in the theatre again for *Return Trip*, the play by Hugh Steadman Williams and Alan Thornhill that treats the question of drug addiction and the other addictions of a family. It was a return trip for TOADS, the Totley Operatic and Dramatic Society, from near Sheffield in England, playing for the second time in two years in Caux.

There have been panel sessions on ethical values in health care, with three professionals who also had touches with in World Health Organisation and the international nursing organisations in Geneva. One of them shared deeply from her own experience as a recovering alcoholic. 'God is my love insurance, my life insurance,' she said. From the back of the hall, a young African said, 'I've been going through hell, thinking about what I'm going to do with my life. I want to make a difference in the world.' A day with listening as its theme included 'a listening picnic', with the community groups going out together, and spending time in silence with nature. Another panel presented American and Australian examples of 'what makes a multi-ethnic society work?' There's been a precious balance between thought-out presentation of experience and participation, with questions, comments and personal sharing from the floor.

The final meeting saw us sitting in a circle, with a basket placed on a little hill of rocks and flowers in the middle. We were invited to place in the basket coloured pieces of paper, with our conclusions and decisions for the on-going journey - a two-part harmony of the personal and the social, wider implications. A Brazilian trade unionist, Koreans, a group from the Philippines, such a rich tapestry of places, of situations and experiences. Many expressed gratitude for the community groups, where much more was shared. We owe much to the hard work and input of young East Europeans, Moldovans and Ukrainians to the fore. This is a strong, fresh current of life here.

The hills are alive with the sound of water - after all the rain, the springs and streams are not yet reduced to their mid-summer trickles. Summer has at last decided to pay us a call, before leaving her place to autumn. Yesterday I wore my shorts for the first time. The wild flowers are starting to fade, and the fruits are ripening. We enjoyed a grandstand view of the fireworks on the lake marking the close of the Montreux Jazz Festival, and many of the younger participants enjoyed visits down the hill. We were impressed by the young lady who arrived fresh from the festival at 6.30am for her breakfast service with our team!

Warm regards from a Caux where it's raining again, and we're wrapped in clouds,

Andrew Stallybrass