

REARMEMENT MORAL · CAUX

Centre de Rencontres Internationales

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MOUNTAIN HOUSE
RUE DU PANORAMA
CH-1824 CAUX

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Dear friends,

Where to start? I feel rather shell-shocked, and I'm not the only one. We've been used to gentle starts to Caux summers, and this start has been anything but gentle, but what a joy it is to see Caux overflowing with people and life, to walk (or insinuate your way) into the dining room, and to see hosts of unknown faces! We're at full stretch, with our first over-600 peak just past, with the industrial session, and more than a week with over 650 in the house looming, with the youth-hosted session, and the cities session beyond. So two of the high points are already behind us, and two to come. We claim a second wind, and plot where we can put extra mattresses...

The weather has so far been glorious, which helps. Long may it last - it's a need rather than a luxury, when we have so many people. Children and adults overflow onto the lawn for meals. And Saturday night saw a jazz band playing out on the terrace under the trees, while we drank our coffee (am I making you jealous?). We've also had a foretaste of a new musical that an unseen army are labouring away to produce: 'The fantastical adventures of Mr G and Son', of which more later!

This year's industrial session brought several participants from Eastern and Central Europe, including a Hungarian just charged by his government with unravelling with Austria and Czechoslovakia an ecological disaster project of damming the Danube. Two Soviet businessmen arrived rather unexpectedly - it is still not wholly clear who in Moscow was circulating the invitation that they received. One of them spoke with conviction in a plenary session of the ecological struggle to be waged in the USSR (see the enclosed press stories). Polish and Russian translation cabins have been a regular feature of the week. An East German economist expressed his thanks 'at being accepted into this international community'. Half the East Germans are going to have to change their jobs in the next year, he said. 'The past system has collapsed like a pack of cards. There's a real value vacuum; people feel lost.' He had twice refused job offers in the West, one at four times, the other six times, his present salary!

Francis Blanchard, former Director-General of the International Labour Organisation, and now a special advisor to the United Nations' Secretary General, challenged us at the opening meeting. He warned of the creation of a two-speed society, deeply divided between a highly qualified, technically skilled elite, and an unemployed, nearly unemployable group. He called for an end to the blame and finger-pointing between North and South, and pleaded for the rich countries to pick up their share of the bill for the debt and ecological crises.

But another feature of this busy week has been the number of smaller meetings going on. Last Monday, a three-day East-West seminar was coming to an end, with a growing awareness among the sixty or so participants that although a life of freedom and truth are replacing a life of oppression and lies, some basic tasks remain. A Polish professor noted that the different peoples of Eastern and Central Europe had lived alongside each other, but without really knowing each other. Important dialogues took place between the Germans and the Poles, between the Poles and the Russians, between the Germans and the Russians. A Russian dissident woman, now living in the USA, warned that the power of a philosophy of hate is still very strong, and still controls the lives of many.

A long-time opponent of the Communist regime in Poland said that they were now just starting to learn how to live and work together with people who hold other opinions. A Scottish church paper editor commented, 'We must replace a pluralism of indifference with an active globalism of belief.' A young Solidarity Member of Parliament said, 'For me, this has been the opening to a new and open way.' A Russian spoke of the depth of hatred and cynicism in his country, which required the revival of moral and spiritual values. 'Here, there is a language that reaches everybody,' he said. A young Ukrainian commented, 'This has been the most marvellous week of my life. I go home a new man.' And so it goes on. We have just welcomed a Moscow theatre group, who will be here for ten days, and present two plays in Russian. They only got their exit visas hours before they were due to leave.

This morning sees the end of a creative forum on the theme, 'The truth shall set you free', which brought together 44 writers, producers, actors, singers, painters, poets, sculptors and academics who are committed to living out their faith and offering it to the world through their work. Since 1982, they have been holding informal gatherings in Britain, and for several, it was their first time in Caux. They are planning for a larger gathering of artists somewhere in Europe in 1991.

A group of younger business professionals met (for the sixth time) just before the industrial conference to examine the theme of 'Faith at work'. They have kept in touch by visits and letters, but valued the chance to exchange ideas and experiences face to face. They plan to prepare a forum discussion group for next year's industrial conference, drawing on their reflections.

Then there have also been many of the more 'internal' but vitally important meetings that help us to deepen and coordinate our world fellowship. A series of meetings, over four afternoons, looked at the East Mediterranean region, with a group of 25 including friends from Cyprus and Lebanon. Though there were perhaps no tangible conclusions, there was a real feeling of satisfaction that each was able to say what was deepest in them, and that there was unhurried time to listen, foremost to our friends from the region: a trust-building time, because the divisions of the region can be reflected in us. Just as a year ago, we could not have imagined what has happened in Eastern Europe, we may not now be able to conceive what could happen here. On one of the 'between-session-days' we had no morning session and had a 'meet in the sandwich' on Poland, and an unhurried chance to evaluate all the new openings to the East and the sessions just past.

Greetings from the happy hordes gathered here,

Andrew Stallybrass