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pour le Réarmement moral

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Caux, 10.07.00

Dear friends,

Hello and welcome to this, the first Monday letter of the Caux Conference season. I would love to tell you that the sun is shining as I am writing this, but we are at the moment completely surrounded by clouds, so I'm afraid that the sunshine will have to wait for another occasion.

Although on paper we have only just begun, it has taken a small but dedicated team just over two weeks to guide Mountain House through its annual transformation from a hotel school into a conference centre. They all deserve our thanks, especially a fine team of Ukrainians who drove all the way to Switzerland for the preparation and who have now returned home.

This letter, which has traditionally come to you from Andrew Stallybrass, will now be written by a team of writers, which is still being assembled as I write this. However, don't worry, all you Stallybrass fans out there - this does not mean that Andrew will no longer be writing to you! He will most certainly be writing a letter in the very near future.

The letter isn't the only thing that is moving with the times. For those familiar with Mountain House, a certain number of physical changes have occurred, the most noticeable being in the kitchen. Following a report by the British based consultants TRICON, the old serving area has been completely transformed, which allows for less queuing and a greater choice of food, while at the same time being less stressful for the service teams.

A group of Moldovan students will be assuming much of the responsibility for the service shifts this year, as some of them did last year as well. They had problems getting their visas back home, but arrived yesterday afternoon after a truly epic journey of about 2000km in a small minibus, which they made in 48 hours. The amount of effort they have put in just to get here puts those of us from Western Europe to shame.

As well as the kitchen some shiny new furniture has appeared on the terrace. Unfortunately due to the rather damp weather conditions, they have so far only been admired by some rather cheeky cows who, no doubt sniffing at the winds of change, decided to wander up and have a look for themselves. The sight of a newly convened community group, trying to shift a group of bemused heifers in as dignified a way as possible, is something I shall never forget.

On a more serious note, however, the changes in the Caux environment, which some may be feeling a little hard to swallow at first, are a reminder to us all of the challenge of personal change which Caux and Moral Rearmament continues to advocate. We are reminded that change is often very difficult to accept, and all the more difficult to make in our own lives.

One other change that visitors will surely notice is the absence of the tall pine tree which stood on the lawn overlooking the dining room. I'm afraid to say that it fell victim to the ferocious storms which swept through Europe in December. The tree fell towards the dining room, smashing one of the large windows. Thankfully no one was hurt, and the tree has long since been removed.

The address at the opening of this year's Caux Conferences was given by Cornelio Sommaruga, the new president of the Swiss Foundation of Moral Rearmament, who was until recently the president of the International Committee of the Red Cross. He called for 'a globalisation of responsibilities', which was needed to supplement the concept of economic globalisation which has become so prevalent in the world today. He also expressed his gratitude to Marcel Grandy and Daniel Mottu, the previous presidents of the Swiss Foundation, and to all the 'Caux-fans' who supported and assisted in the running of the summer conferences, taking the opportunity to thank many of them personally. Mr Sommaruga also gave a press conference on Thursday in Geneva, and as a result, good articles in two Swiss newspapers have appeared so far.

The conference season kicked off on Saturday with the 'Foundations for Freedom in East and West' session. In the opening meeting Igor Smerdov, a Russian post graduate student who has been a co-worker in Britain for the last year, described the feeling of disillusionment in the new democracies of Eastern Europe. He explained *Foundations for Freedom's* goal 'to help establish Eastern European democracies at a grass roots level,' in order to truly fill the 'moral vacuum' left by the downfall of Soviet government. The conference is being attended by young people from both East and West, from countries such as Ukraine, Moldova, Kirgizstan and Russia.

Over the past week we have been kept entertained by the piano playing of Monique Chaurand from France, and by a local brass band up the hill at *Hauts-de-Caux* on one of last week's nicer evenings. Yesterday we were treated to a wonderful piano concert by Mme Sylvia Harnisch, who played pieces by Beethoven, Chopin, Liszt and Bach.

Although the conference season has only just started here in Caux, one already can feel a new atmosphere around Mountain House. It is obvious that Caux has undergone some very thorough physical changes. However, it is the presence of so many young people (especially those from Eastern Europe) who are taking on the organising of the various sessions and the everyday running of Mountain House in general which has produced a certain freshness in the Caux spirit. It makes me personally very excited about the coming weeks here in Caux.

Yours sincerely,

John Everington