

REARMEMENT MORAL · CAUX

Centre de Rencontres Internationales

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MOUNTAIN HOUSE
RUE DU PANORAMA
CH-1824 CAUX

Monday 6th July, 1992

Dear friends,

Greetings from Caux, and from all the team here, as another summer season starts. The less said about the weather, the better. Suffice it to say that we would happily export it to our friends suffering from drought, if we could. And if it goes on like this, we'll be calling for volunteers in one of the morning 'forum' meetings, for a team to start building an ark for us. Still, the birds have not been totally discouraged from their dawn chorus, and no more shall I be from mine! At least we've been able to enjoy some dramatic cloud effects.

The house has been slowly filling, the family growing, over the last month. A few grinding gears, and the machine starts to move, to build up pace. And again we are particularly touched and encouraged by the support from New Zealand and Australia. If there were quotas - thank God there are not - they'd be well over theirs. By this weekend, as we started the conferences, we were around 300. On Friday evening, there was a word of welcome over supper in the dining room. In the afternoon, Archie and Ruth Mackenzie gave a background briefing on Yugoslavia, and spoke of their experiences there during his diplomatic career.

On Friday morning, very early, a group of 14 arrived from Croatia, from Zagreb. So we are helped to live with the tragedy and suffering of our own continent, just a few hours away. The unreality of a media item becomes painfully real through people. At the first meeting, one of them said how this time a year ago none of them knew anything about Caux or MRA, 'but something's started'. She had come last summer; then several of this present group came with her for the winter conference; others are new friends, here for the first time. She said, 'A bridge is being built. We pray for a moral and spiritual renewal. We are grateful for the support of prayers for our people, but also for our enemies.' When the film 'For the love of tomorrow' about the experience of Irène Laure is shown, as it was on the Saturday afternoon, the suffering of war, and the promise and possibility of reconciliation seem very close, and oh so needed.

At an 'orientation meeting' to introduce participants to the workings of the house and the programme of the week, a Czech woman, a teacher of Russian and music, speaking several other languages, announces the activities for the children. There is a lively mix of generations. Children are now seen and heard, and I for one am very happy with the change.

The Saturday evening saw an unusual, special event in the dining

room. Around the Danguy-Laure clan, we celebrated the 25th wedding anniversary of Charles and Juliette Danguy. A special meal; white table cloths on all the tables. The Croats sang a song for the Danguys who had visited them in Zagreb in the spring. They presented a now-rare richly embroidered shawl. The market lady who'd sold it said so much has been destroyed, these are now a rarity, it shouldn't go to foreigners, and they'd replied, 'No, it's going to friends.' In recent years we have more rarely celebrated personal landmarks with everyone, but at times like this, the cliché 'world family' takes on a texture of reality.

The enclosed press story will give you some idea of the opening meeting on the Saturday. What it doesn't capture is the humour and passion of Mr Alber, Member of the European Parliament - his cat's disgusted reaction to a soya sausage that he himself had disdained to eat. But then it was his fault; he'd failed to read closely the label; why should Brussels try to define what a sausage is? So often the media present us a caricature Europe of bureaucrats - from Mr Alber we got a good dose of common sense, good humour, and genuine conviction about a creation by and for people, aimed at peace, and not a self-interested economic arrangement. An afternoon seminar with him ranged over immigration policy and the need to take work to people rather than the other way round, and the Common Agricultural Policy, but with a strong accent on service and openness to the needs of others.

There has so far been a plethora of music, ranging from a string orchestra playing sombre Shostakovich in the bay window of the Great Hall, against a changing backdrop of mountains and clouds, and an unaccompanied singing group from Montreux in the theatre with a lively rendering of 'Old Macdonald had a cow'. The former, all students and young people, Dutch friends of Jeroen Gunning, dressed in black and white; the latter in colourful Vaudois national costumes, and including neighbours from the village delighted to bring their friends into this remarkable setting. The music is a good counter-balance to all the words, and gives the translators a break. And on this front there's change and progress: several student interpreters are giving their services, with verve and a freshness of language and accent.

The West tower is re-clad in new tiles, but the work's still being finished and the scaffolding being dismantled. The Japanese spirit of 'kaizen', constant small improvements, is also ever present. Thanks to Frédéric Chavanne there are now hot cupboards on wheels by the buffets for the plates, which are loaded directly at the wash-up. There are superb roses in profusion, and striking flower arrangements. The love and care speaks through the details.

As usual, we are stretched. Please pray for us and all those who come, that there is a stillness of the Holy Spirit in the midst of all the hard work, words and activities; that His watering will push up new life.

Warm greetings from a cool Caux,

Andrew Stallybrass