

International Conference Centre

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for Moral Re-Armament

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Dear friends,

The Monday morning meditation begins before my little note-book computer's blank screen, as I look out onto a blank scene of cloud or mist hiding the majestic view that I know is there and even veiling part of the facade. But if you don't like the weather, wait for five minutes - we seem to be having every possible variety, including a full-blown snow-storm while I was climbing in the Alps with my brother, and further spectacular thunder storms since my return. Fortunately my philosophy is to be equipped for every eventuality, so in the mountains it was on with sweater, anorak, woollen hat, waterproof mittens - and still I was cold. But the latest majestic flower/event, the 'conversation on faith, moral values and our future', chases away these memories, though I'm left with sore feet and knees after all the metres of height gained and lost. After a splendid start in the crowded great hall, with fine speeches from James Hore-Ruthven and Rajmohan Gandhi, and a memorable talk by Philip Boobyer on 'The Caux Approach', we were able to continue with coffee and music out on the terrace after supper. And so the torrent of life rushes on; two press stories yesterday, and probably two more today. The house is again full to bursting, with the count at 574, and teams stretched to the full, the housekeepers and the accommodation team first of all.

The opening meetings have been of a very high standard, with three speakers, from a variety of countries, backgrounds, disciplined by a presidential gong to fifteen minutes, followed by questions and comments from the floor in an impressively inclusive 'conversation'. Over these days we will hear from Frank Field, the well-known British MP, a German woman judge, the initiator of an ecumenical centre in the red-light district of Amsterdam, the president of a French family federation, a social worker from Bombay, the founder of the God Squad motorcycle club from Australia... And this afternoon, the Jubilee Lecture from the Chief Rabbi of the Commonwealth. There has been a fine blend of philosophy and thought, and practical experience: depth and breadth, head, heart and humour.

I returned to a magical evening in the great hall which followed a dinner to honour those who have manned (or rather more often womanned) the Caux kitchens over these last fifty years. As the sixty or so veterans joined us in the table-filled hall, they received a standing ovation. Eleven of those who worked in the kitchen in 1946 were introduced. 'We were young then,' commented one, 'We learned to love each other's countries.' Archie Mackenzie spoke in honour of his wife and her four sisters who have spent thousands of hours cooking over these many years - and three are here now. To laughter he commented, 'Men need to learn to keep their cooking separate from their reflections on world affairs.' A chorus sang a new song by Rob Corcoran about Caux, 'the magic mountain', 'like a half-way house to

heaven'. Language problems were partly overcome by drawing pictures of what was needed. But this didn't always work. A drawing of a mushroom brought a puzzled lady with an umbrella! There were messages from some of those who couldn't come, a take-off of Gilbert and Sullivan, a mime-dance by Vijaylakshmi. And finally, an amazing finale from *The Sound of Music*, with words rearranged: 'The hills are alive with the scent of cooking'.

The Latin Americans have been a noted presence through these days, as part of the team from the Americas carrying the whole - there have been some 30 - with their music in song and the music of Spanish and Portuguese from the platform. Friends from ten countries around the Baltic have been meeting and continue to meet in the theatre foyer for the fourth in a series of seminars, searching for a common view of their painful shared history, respect for the neighbour, and the common tasks for the future, based on shared values. Romanian friends arrive by car, exhausted after their long drive, and swiftly plunge into the practical work. The influential *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* has carried a major half-page report of the International Media Forum, and the anniversary of the centre. A listener on a daily phone-in programme on the radio, where the following days report is proposed by the public, rang in to suggest Caux. The reporter was none too clear, but a neighbour in the village who was listening in rang in to the studio live to say that she would arrange it if the journalist came. So the following day, the Suisse Romande again heard about the Caux Expo and the history of the centre.

We have again been treated (I hear from my spies) to some superb music from a Kazakh violinist (and his English flautist wife also played in a meeting) who studied at the same music high-school in Tashkent as Victor Ryabchikov, the pianist. A friend of Caux heard Marat Bisengaliev playing at the Carnegie Hall in New York, met him afterwards, and invited him to give a concert in Caux - so he did. A telling example of the extraordinary initiatives that make Caux work. And there have been further rich contributions of African-American music and artists. Two meetings were led by the many young people in the house. Swiss National Day, 1st August, has come and gone, with the local band playing a new tune, just to prove that change is possible, even in Switzerland, and they came only at 6.40, instead of the usual 6am! At breakfast, a chorus from 34 countries yodelled for the Swiss and some of the unseen workers from below decks were introduced, thanked and given chocolate medals. Then at the meeting, led by two Americans with Swiss connections, the Swiss present proceeded to win chocolates in a strange quiz on the country, where they didn't have the right to give the answers, but where they were rewarded for the correct answers of the foreigners.

Last night saw a fine fresh production by Eva Hofmann-Lindroos of Hugh Steadman Williams' play *Skeletons*. I was asked afterwards by two friends just arrived if it was a comedy, and certainly there are some funny moments and many humorous lines, but the central image and symbol of the washing of the feet brings to mind some of the greatest works of Christian art. The programme notes quote a prayer that underlines the serious intent beyond the laughs: 'Merciful God I cannot forgive. But I pray You, You who in every instant create the whole world over again, help me to forgive... Now give me courage to take Your key in my hand and say, "I forgive," without a clear picture of what it will signify. I want to trust You.' The spirit of the house has been fed by the full, lively and deep 7.30 meetings, and by the prayers of many, present here, and far away.

Refreshed greetings from a stimulating Caux, where the mist is now lifting,

Andrew Stallybrass