

REARMEMENT MORAL · CAUX

Centre de Rencontres Internationales

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MOUNTAIN HOUSE
RUE DU PANORAMA
CH - 1824 CAUX

Monday, 7th August, 1995

Dear friends,

A minor panic - the alarm clock failed to go off, so I'm starting a little flustered and late. The long hot spell of fine weather, with meals out on the terrace, was finally broken last night by a thunder storm that took its time to decide to arrive. There was more rain during the night, and this morning, the clouds are still hanging around, and the temperature is pleasantly cool. At least for a few days, the sprinkler on the lawn will not be needed. The mountain meadows are now being close shaved in their turn, to short stubble that will hold the winter snows, and reduce the dangers of avalanches - a legal obligation in this regimented, cared-for landscape. The patches of wild raspberries that I keep under surveillance are still far from ripe and ready; the fruit is still hard little green buttons.

Again, the fall of days means that the 'Caux conference for Business and Industry' held its last meeting after my last letter. Last Monday itself was marked by a memorable Caux Anniversary Lecture by the American thinker and writer Michael Novak on 'Capitalism to free the poor from poverty' (see the press release). His provocative title and thinking led to many thoughtful and passionate discussions over the following days. As someone who situates himself to the left of centre in the political spectrum, I was surprised to find myself agreeing with most of what he said! One cheer for capitalism, rather than two or three was all he asked for, in his plea for the 'civilisation of caritas'.

The two other memories that stick with me are of the British employer who said at the closing session that he left with renewed vigour, but still carrying the pain of the many unemployed. 'My best thank you,' he said, 'is to do something, and I'll be back next year to tell you what I've done.' The second vignette - also British - is of another business man sharing his decision to learn French. The vegetable team in Caux was the place to start, he said.

Then came the 1st August, Swiss National Day, with its traditional trek up the hill to the fire, and two teenagers from the village reading the old but revolutionary phrases of the 'pact' of 1291 marking the founding of the Swiss Confederation, with its early reference to conflict resolution. It was with a certain emotion that I read the English translation for the first time as a Swiss citizen (I now have the two nationalities).

The conference sent a cable to Cardinal König for his 90th birthday, and we think with gratitude of many older friends and all they have given to the life of Caux and of this fellowship. The Spoerri's have had to leave in a hurry for Bonn, where Fulvia's mother is close to the end of her life, and I think of all those who have gone before. I vividly recall translating the evening here in Caux with Dr. Paul Tournier, near the end of his long life, when he described, complete with inimitable laughs, his meeting with the Oxford Group. It was through the change he saw in an 'impossible patient' - Fulvia's mother, Connie von Hahn. So we owe to her in part the precious life-work of the Genevese doctor.

Then the Caux Cities Consultation on 'Restoring the human spirit in our cities' opened. Philippe Lasserre gave our 3pm team meeting a memorable meditation based on a reading from the book of Revelation in the Bible - the Bible opens in a garden, and closes in a city, the heavenly City of God, he noted. So on Friday evening, as the setting sun poured its golden light past the bright yellow blinds into the bay window of the Great Hall, we launched out into this penultimate session. What an amazing mix of people and experience it brings: the head of a Muslim cultural centre from Copenhagen; a young Gambian-born black Norwegian, bringing his experience of 'Non-Fighting Generation', an association with some 2,000 members, trying to turn around the lives of young people like himself; a Muslim doctor and a Hindu woman working together in the slums of Bombay to build bridges between Muslim and Hindu after bloody riots; the favela leader from Brazil, who is also the founder of a taxi-drivers co-operative, and who works with the street children; the former Marine general from the US who is working to rebuild the social fabric of his city....

We have also had some most memorable evenings in the theatre. Saturday night saw the première of a new production of Hugh Steadman Williams' play 'Skeletons', directed by Eva Hofmann-Lindroos. A see-saw between laughter and tears, comedy and profound truth about... skeletons; the stage being dominated by a fine cupboard into which anything left lying around is tidied away, and in which we see a skeleton hanging - the father of the family is an osteopath, and uses it with his patients. Then last night, just what the doctor would have ordered: a classical guitar concert by a young Swedish artist, Robert Fortunato Åkerberg. So peaceful, restful, so wordless after a day full of many words.

Much quiet work is going on in the wings, a good deal of it related to next year and the 50th anniversary of Caux as an MRA centre. Camilla Nelson-Wilhelmsen and Anja Orphelin-Snellman have left for home after weeks of hard work on the exhibition that is in preparation for the Panorama Room and part of the Promenoir. John Williams and Mike Brown are hard at work on the pictorial. And we meet weekly to advance in planning for the programme of the summer. Before the summer closes, we will send you an up-date.

Urbane salutations from the thick of the cities session,

 Andrew Stallybrass