

Caux, Monday, 22 July 2002

Dear friends,

Another Monday; another mug of strong tea and another empty computer screen. Another full week of kaleidoscope impressions, and the struggle to tear the mind and heart out of the all too full present and cast it back. What was happening in the house one full week ago? One turn of the children's toy, and everything's changed. Certainly, there's been another change of faces and personnel. This year it seems that a Monday letter must always tell of half of one conference and the start of the next.

A sparkling British cast have given us two evenings with a concert-reading version of the 1950s classic MRA musical *Jotham Valley* to enthusiastic audiences. The one difficulty was to avoid singing along with the cast, and disturbing one's neighbours, for those of us who know and love the songs. Between the 'connecting communities' conference and the current 'Caux conference for business and industry' (CCBI) they also gave us an impromptu concert taking us from opera to the modern musical, and revealing more of the depth of talent in the cast, while giving their own moving evaluation of their time here.

A large group of us went down the hill for a surprise celebration of Jean Piguet's 75<sup>th</sup> birthday – a chance to express our gratitude to Caux's honorary chaplain, and the minister who has married many among us, and whose friendship has been part of his 'after-sales all-inclusive service' for his 'clients'. The numbers have so far been only just over the 300, so not a crowd. But each conference has had a distinctive feel, a specificity. The number of African Americans and African-Caribbean British and their white counterparts was one feature of 'connecting communities', and an 'honest conversation' starting between Americans and the rest of the world. Our perceptions are so different – and yet it is so important that we work at understanding each other better. Among those taking part were two representatives from the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights, sent by its outgoing chief, Mary Robinson. For me, a highlight has been the sharing of the Australian experience of the 'National Sorry Day' campaign, by John Bond, its national secretary, and Johny Huckle, an aboriginal singer, who has held the hall spellbound with his singing. Another highlight has been greater insight into the process of *Hope in the Cities* and the building of their team in Richmond: the 'how', with inspiration for all those who want to create a group of people sharing a common task. Alex Wise, a Richmonder who's found support and encouragement in this team, told of the inspiring project of building in this capital of the Southern secessionist states in the Civil War, a museum that will tell everyone's story – a first in American history. Himself a great-great grandson of the man who signed John Brown's death warrant, from a family that lost seven members fighting for the South, he has built trust that the African American, the Union and the Confederate histories can all be told in the same space. An inspiring example of healing, which makes one dream of possible future museums in other conflict situations, telling each party's story.

From Nottingham, in Britain, came a group of 23, on the initiative of Richard Hawthorne and his wife Meili. They represented business, the police, community and political leaders and officials. For many, the informal exchanges of grassroots experience, the friendships made, were every bit as important as the main meetings, excellent though they were. Groups coming from the same areas got to know each other for the first time, or in a new way, in the informal atmosphere and over the practical work.



*Initiatives of Change*

The media has not shown great interest in these stories – perhaps because they're too 'religious' for the secular media, and too political for the religious! But they are perfect examples of how an individual's changing awareness and values can lead on to real changes in society. Daniel Dommel, head of Transparency International in France, came to launch his new book (in French) on *Actors of change in Latin America, half a century of experience on the ground*, a history of the remarkable group of men and women who have carried the ideas of MRA/IC across that continent, another powerful example of IC's impact.

For those who want the weather report, we've had a cold, wet spell, with fine views of the inside of the clouds wrapped around our mountain perch. Perhaps no bad thing, someone suggested, since no one was tempted to sit out on the terrace through the meetings! But as we closed the second conference, the sun came out to warm those leaving. A group of children presented paper hearts, with a world and wide-spread arms, to some of the people who've been working so hard in the wings. 'Welcome to the heart of the world, welcome to the house of the world,' Johnny Huckle sang. And we've also been enjoying superb classical music – two concerts in the last week, from a Hungarian string quartet and a Roumanian-Swiss duo.

The Caux Scholars Program has started, with another outstanding group of 21 participants from 15 nationalities, several from areas of conflict. Each of them had to do a presentation on how terrorism has affected their community. Who defines 'terrorism'? Is it a pretext for the strong to dominate the weak? There's considerable divergence of views among the seven from the US, and surprising points of agreement between Israeli and Palestinian!

24 hours at home for me in Geneva, and there's a fresh cast 'on stage'. The hall has changed, and we're sitting around tables for the opening of the 'Caux conference for business and industry'. Important groups from India, Eastern Europe, the USA, and a great diversity of ages offer a fertile ground for more 'honest conversations'. Menso Fermin (Holland) and Steven Greisdorf (USA), who have taken over from the previous organizing team, welcome us. Steven gives an excellent introduction to Caux as a learning environment 'where we can all learn something about ourselves'. He tells how on his first visit, as someone of Jewish background, he found himself working in the kitchen with a German who had told him about his past in the Hitler Youth, and so made an important contribution to his own inner journey. Bernard Margueritte, the senior French journalist who has now taken over the presidency of the International Communications Forum, calls with passion for 'another globalization, a globalization of responsibility, of knowledge and respect for the other, for different cultures and traditions, and for human beings'. Dr. Kimon Valaskakis, a former Canadian ambassador to the OECD in Paris, and now founding president of the Club of Athens, speaks (see press release).

There are parallel workshops – so it's impossible to give you any idea of *all* that's going on – with three 'tracks' on Globalization on the personal, community/enterprise and global levels. Pierre Cadet, the Executive Director of the French association 'Observatoire de l'éthique' showed how today's consumers can and do influence the economy through their ethical choices. Individuals and individual choices *do* matter. Richard Hawthorne and Rob Corcoran offer a model for business-community partnerships. Polish architect, Joanna Giecewicz leads a discussion on globalization's impact on the environment.

The secretariat, the accommodation team and the teams for the coming conferences are all girding up their loins for increasing numbers, so greetings from a Caux that is fast heading for a very busy and full month of August.

Andrew Stallybrass