

MRA CONSULTATIVE GROUP
Chantilly Meeting - April 1989

Twenty-nine of us from the world force of Moral Re-Armament met for five days at a Jesuit retreat/conference center, set in a glorious park near Chantilly outside Paris. This meeting was part of a continuing search for greater unity, cohesion and wholeness in our work, and was part of the preparation perhaps for more difficult and daring initiatives and ordering of priorities.

Confirmation of the unusual quality and value of our response as a world family to specific concerns came early in our time together when heartfelt thanks were expressed for the way in which the world force had reacted to the death of the Japanese Emperor, and had played such a constructive part in the public debate.

Discussions will continue through the summer in Caux, and we plan international consultations every six months, the next being in Japan in October.

THE COMMUNIST WORLD

The principal subject of the agenda for the Chantilly meetings was our responsibility towards the communist world. We examined the possibilities opening up there - and what has been so far done. Our conclusions fall naturally into three groupings.

The Message

- Our common meeting ground with all people is our need for change. We need change in the West; and we need to be able to demonstrate to the East our determination and commitment to change the militant materialism of our countries.
- We - our living experience of change, forgiveness, faith - are our message. Marxism is based on blame - hence the importance of starting with ourselves.
- We should emphasize the moral and spiritual values essential for democratic development. The non-sectarian nature of MRA is a great asset - in the judgment of one cardinal in Rome. A Chinese Ambassador expressed interest in a movement working for moral and spiritual change, but noted that he couldn't collaborate with a movement with a religious affiliation.

- One of the essentials of MRA, part of its specificity, is to have no excess baggage, no preset positions, and not to pre-judge people, issues or countries.
- The concept that 'conscience is the space in every man where God is working' seems to make sense to many in the communist world.
- Speak to but stay above the nationalities issue, so as not to be divisive. The challenge is to channel the pride of a nation or a people in a constructive way.
- Use examples of reconciliation and change in the family and between races, groups and nationalities.
- Offer a global concept and a vision of a world that works.

Some Perspectives

- We are still in the exploratory phase, at the very beginning of a long journey; we must be free from both fear and eagerness. Timing is all-important.
- Confidentiality is of course vital in this area, especially with regard to individuals we meet on the cutting edge of change in their countries.
- Much more coordination and teamwork is needed - and this was a precious by-product of these days together, along with renewed and deepened friendship and trust. Some 50 - 60 MRA people have been in the communist countries over the last few years. This will doubtless increase and we must commit ourselves to the time and travel necessary to coordinate such activities so as to avoid confusion, duplication and wrong demands on key individuals.
- While taking full advantage of the new openness in the communist world, we need realism about the diverse motivations for the changes taking place.
- We need an appreciation of the ordinariness of life for many people in the East, humility about ourselves, and finally, a love for those countries. Then love **will** establish our priorities, but it will take time and leisure for such love to grow.
- We must beware of the wrong kind of fascination with the communist world, that could spring in part from our own feelings of frustration and inadequacy about our work in Western countries.

Specific Initiatives and Strategies

- Take full advantage of unexpected and non-threatening points of approach, such as through India and Finland.
- Remember that a few individuals deeply changed and committed will mean far more for the future than a great many "contacts."
- In the autumn, Grosvenor Books will be present at the Moscow Book Fair. Well before then, next month already, we should have the Irene Laure film in Russian and Chinese. A Polish version is in preparation. Any of us, anywhere in the world, may have a chance to use these films, with exiles and with officials. Friends in London are preparing to send a good many subscriptions to For a Change to the USSR, and are also planning an annual or bi-annual digest from FAC in Russian. The Solzhenitsyn film is also available in all these languages.
- There is the possibility of taking an English play to the USSR - but more exploratory work needs to be done, to understand what might best reach a Russian audience with limited English. We may need a specially written play. Something humorous and on family life was one suggestion.
- Our Swedish friends also are exploring the possibility of some kind of seminar in Poland, following their visit there earlier this year. This would be on the initiative of one of the Catholic bishops they met.
- Further ahead, we may need to search out the ways in which people from the communist countries can contribute towards the changing of other countries and situations. 'On God's billiard table, balls sent East may rebound and come back towards us,' said one.
- We must try to reach and change some of those at the heart of the present power structures. Some of these come regularly to the ILO and other international forums and academic institutions.
- The Caux dialogues on the preservation of creation may be one way of reaching some people in these countries.
- Language barriers and cultural differences are of great importance, hence the need for more books and films in the languages of these countries, but hence also the need for more non-verbal expressions of what is a life and an experience rather than an idea. Caux can be an important provider of experience beyond words.

Other Subjects Discussed

MRA's World Task: We need a greater understanding of, respect for, and cooperation with the many other organizations and movements of the spirit. A large part of our task is to play an 'enabling role,' helping others to fulfil their God-given destiny. We should try to discern more of what the Spirit of God is seeking to bring about in the world, and then see how to help realize that.

The Universality of our Message: We are not meant as a group to give an exclusively Christian message, but we should emphasize the fundamental points of convergence. One evangelical friend noted five such points of convergence with MRA: 1. Human nature, sin, is the problem; 2. Social change is only possible if individuals change; 3. Individual change is only possible with God's help; 4. We can only hope to know God and to live according to his moral standards through an on-going relationship; 5. God speaks and gives direction to those who listen.

Important New Opportunities: We supported the convictions of our Indian friends to respond positively to invitations from senior people in Bhutan and Burma to give training to some of their people. We spoke of Namibia, and the urgent need there for dialogue between the internal leaders and the leaders of the returning exiles. We decided to make it possible for a goodsized group to come from Lebanon to Caux this summer.

World Bulletin: To develop this monthly bulletin as an aid to these consultations and as a means to widening the number of those who feel responsible for our global undertakings. It should give hope, describe needs, raise questions, but should not reveal names and details of sensitive initiatives. There will be further discussion at Caux.

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