

International Conference Centre

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for Moral Re-Armament

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Dear friends,

The summer river flows on, entering another swifter stretch of rapids with the Caux Round Table opening dinner last night - senior business figures from America, Europe and Japan, 75 in all, including 15 wives - and many more arriving in the next few hours for the start of the 'Caux conference on business and industry'. With the Promenoir now taken up with the Caux Expo, the round - or rather oval - table is smartly installed in new quarters on the second floor, in the small dining room, and participants are eating next door in the Wagner room. Last night the housecount was 490, but within two days it will be 580, and we are again overflowing into hotel rooms in Glien and Montreux.

So much has happened, with the transition to the second three-week period hosted by the Americas. One of the 7.30 planning meetings opened with an exhausted European relay 'leg' running in with their batons, and passing them symbolically over to the new team. And it was with a faith-giving lift that we Europeans looked at the mass of new faces, new friends, Latin Americans, from the USA, Canadians, including native Americans, dreaming of being able to use this place for a world meeting of indigenous peoples.

The week started with an evaluation of the previous days' event/flower, and of our inclusion of people new to MRA and Caux. One of us felt that we were on the brink of a fresh 'quantum leap, for the future of Caux and MRA'. The spirit has been good, with a greater spirit of inclusion, yet perhaps God wants and needs to stretch us still further towards new gifts of fearless letting go, 'offering ownership' and not just including, with all that implies of 'come and help me in what I'm already doing'. We are trying to live up to the ideal that we dreamt of months back in the phrase 'a learning community'. In a learning community we can take risks, we can even allow each other to make big mistakes, as long as we are learning, together and as individuals - and I think we are.

A series of 'flashes', still shots of the rush of film: We hear of the Dalai Lama calling in his Swiss police bodyguards before he leaves, to thank them by presenting scarves. The ceremony is repeated at the very last minute so that they can capture this moment on a photo. A friend standing with an Icelandic Lutheran church minister is greeted loudly and warmly by an American Baptist minister. He asks the Icelander what the difference between the two might be. 'It's all a question of decibels,' the Icelander replies. The play by Czech writer Jara Moserova is given - and the Czech ambassadors to France and Switzerland turn up for the evening, and the lively debate after the play with a good part of the audience. A Croatian Catholic priest tells of finding the grave of his father, killed in the war, and re-burying the bones with his own hands, but with forgiveness in his heart. The open air stage in the park is inaugurated, with a brilliant tap dance routine by two young artists, including all their audience seated on the grass, and ending with a number where each has a metal tray attached to one sole. Then later, an American gospel group from the fringe of the Montreux Jazz Festival plays and sings, more accustomed to singing in prisons than in such a majestic setting. A showing of the *Crowning Experience* film is introduced by Anne Orteig (Buckles) who stars in it. A great-nephew of Mary Macleod Bethune, the great Afro-American educator whose story it tells, is in the audience.

There is a seminar on suffering, with an impressive panel of women health-care professionals - all but my mother who is marking her 84th birthday by speaking as a patient. After panels in previous days with few women or none, I am struck by the way that these women, academics and researchers, link head and heart, speak with great feeling of the way that suffering 'gets behind the carer's own mask', with respect for their patients, 'the musicians trying to play their damaged instruments'. The courage to care, the readiness to listen and to keep an open heart, are clearly core values for the 21st century towards which our minds have been bent.

An important Russian group has left after ten days here. 'The experience we've had here is very important,' their spokesman says just before leaving. 'MRA will grow to become one of the most important means of communication between Russia and the West, if we find ourselves isolated in Russia again, if Russia isolates herself. We need the experience we've gained here in Caux to avoid new conflict and bloodshed.' There is another magical evening of music with Russian artists, as the golden light of evening streams into the hall, the former salon of the Caux-Palace, where Russian artists performed before the 1917 revolution: the best from Russia, with love. What an amazing change we have been privileged to live through, and how lucky we are to meet this Russia here. The large mezzo-soprano tells how she felt that her singing and her life were finished, but her pianist, Victor, had had a dream, where he carried her through a swamp, like a labour of Hercules. It was he who had carried her over his shoulder to Caux, she said, to laughter. 'Here I felt that my spirit was being re-born to new life,' she said.

Some more 'flashes'. I meet an old American friend in the front hall, with her dog. She is blind, and is waiting for someone to take her to her room. She opens a new world for me, as I take her by the hand, and lead her round her new room, and share her joy at the 'view' from the balcony. The Americans sing in the dining room as we enjoy 'an Americas banquet'. Mary-Sue, my blind friend, sings about a golden thread, of rainbow design, while another woman dances-mimes with a dazzling scarf. The guide dog sleeps peacefully, with just an occasional snore, or is it a comment? Lively communities meet on the themes for these 'baton-passing' opening days of identity, difference, belonging. *To Sing a Story*, a production with slides and music, live and on tape, retraces some of the artistic effort of the MRA force in the 50s and 60s, against the background of the history that this amazingly talented team tried to shape. A seminar on Burma, with an advisor to the Prime Minister in exile brings to life and close to our hearts a forgotten country. Lisbeth Lasserre offers an evening on her grandmother's life-long love-affair with art, and the building of one of the important Swiss collections of post-impressionist paintings. A Sunday church service brings hymns sung in French, English and German (at the same time - I'm sure God understands). The first group of four British student volunteers, recruited through advertisements in their universities, who have been running the service teams with such spirit and talent, hands over to a second group, and expresses their gratitude for this first encounter with Caux and MRA, for 'the experience of a lifetime'; 'we'll be back,' they say. There are 18 'Caux Scholars', from Bosnia, Canada, the Turkish and Greek parts of Cyprus, Egypt, India and Sri Lanka, as well as the USA, meeting mornings in the Maria for their course in conflict resolution, with a stress on the individual. Glorious sunny weather, but fresh, cool even for us up in the mountains. And a week from today, I'll be heading to the Alps with my brother, for four days climbing, so I'm planning to do my next letter on Sunday.

We are grateful for all those who have come to complete the different pieces of the anarchic puzzle that is Caux, but we also think of the sacrifice of those who have changed their plans to cancel, or leave early or come later, to help us to cope with this welcome but massive flux of people.

Cheerful greetings from a full, busy yet relaxed Caux,
Andrew Stallybrass