

21st July, 1986

Dear friends,

So we come to the end of our first week - is it really only a week? - and the end too of the Franco-German-hosted period. The house is still full, and young people are arriving in considerable numbers for the youth forum that starts on Wednesday: there will be some 200 here by then. We're at a change-over time, with a few precious hours to absorb and digest the riches of this first section of the summer.

I enclose copies of the three press stories that went out this week, which give you some poor idea of what was said. Yesterday's meeting was one of the greats, deeply moving. The theme 'The price of freedom' brought to the platform a French woman, and a German woman who spoke together of victory over suffering, and with victory in their hearts and voices. The references to the martyrs of the 20th July plot against Hitler's life led to a moment when Philippe Mottu, himself deeply moved, revealed a largely unknown page and debt from Caux's history. Then to close what was already a superbly memorable meeting - Cardinal König!

The opening story has appeared widely in the Swiss press. One Lausanne paper headlined, 'The great crowds of the great days.' And we've also had several long visits and interviews from journalists. So far 'not one negative note'. But these younger journalists, who know nothing about MRA, good or bad, find it very hard to understand, and thus keep us on our toes with many probing questions. We look forward to seeing their feature articles when they come out.

The week has been rich in the fruits of the last months' Franco-German teamwork, and several threads for the future are already coming clear. The group from Cameroon were touched by the way they were included and cared for, and have invited a Franco-German team to come and support them 'on the ground'. Discussions with Mr Bersani (see enclosed story) and the Lebanese have led to plans for a Mediterranean session next summer in Caux. There are hopes of putting on the new German play about an Alsatian church minister, Oberlin, in Strasbourg. A month's showings of the Irène Laure film are planned in Karlsruhe, with the full support of a French team...

Caux, as ever, is an amazing mixture. I feel that I am sitting with a multi-coloured pile of jigsaw pieces, trying to put them all into one picture for you; maybe the pieces are not all from one puzzle? The evening programmes have been most varied - and of the very highest level. The Haddens, Frances and Richard, wove a magic spell around young and old one evening in the great hall with a two-piano concert 'From Bach to rock and back again', via jazz. They spoke movingly of their marriage in that very hall, and the blessing that they had received from Frank Buchman, and they told of their experiences in China and their friendship with Chiang Kai-shek and Chou En-lai. Children, teenagers, old friends who had not seen them in years rose to applaud them at the end.

Then there was the reading of the Kriegs' new German play, undertaken by a large and largely German team; Michel Orphelin's evening with St. Francis of Assisi in mime and song; a classical concert by a brilliant young professional musician; Jean-Jacques Odier's champagne bubble comedy play 'The girl in pink'; a 'cabaret' variety evening of sketches and songs.

A highlight of the week has of course been the premiere of the Nordic revue - it still doesn't have a definite title yet. 'The greatest art is the art of serving,' it proclaims. The young Scandinavians have shaped their show for their own generation, and naturally it is in Norwegian and Swedish, so on Wednesday night, the volume of the hundreds of 'ecouteurs' in the packed theatre was competing hard with the volume of music coming from the rock band on stage. The quality of their production was most impressive, and it is highly professional and entertaining.

The following day Mr Bersani spoke, in the context of a meeting where young Europeans expressed themselves. It was a mark of the sensitivity of the man, a shining inspiration in a politician, that he picked up a line from one of the Nordic revue songs, and developed it in his speech.

The young people in the show answered questions from the floor for half an hour, and expressed their motives and convictions. 'I want to give something to my selfish and cynical generation,' said one of the musicians. He went on, 'These things are so much part of me too. You have to be responsible for what you've said from the stage. This show is a starting point for the way I want to think for the next 60 years! The trend in Europe is only to think of earning more money. Our generation need something else - something like this.' Another of the cast added, 'We're not old, and we don't have all the answers. But we want to give our friends hope and faith in the future. We want to break the evil circle of cynicism, where everything centres on ourselves.' Asked about cliques and relationships within the group, another said, 'Conflicts are there to be solved. That's what the show is about.'

Our local paper carried a colour photograph and a prominent mention of a Nordic art exhibition in the promenoir, under the title, 'From darkness to light'. It will be open to the public until the 10th August. The Nordic North has done us proud.

The meetings, public and private, have been legion: Greek Cypriots and Turks, meeting first in private, then sharing with all the new understanding and forgiveness that they had found; Lebanese expressing themselves on the foundations of their faith - their journey here alone being an epic of faith and obedience; a very senior figure from the French aero-space industry talking about co-operative European projects; a major South African cultural figure who dropped in unexpectedly for tea. Over the last weekend, we had in the house some 40 Italian lawyers, judges and their wives, to discuss the legal, moral and political cures to terrorism. There have also been several East and Central Europeans, who have perhaps helped us to start picking up the mighty challenge that Cardinal König left with us. We'll send you his full text later, which is worthy of close study.

Warm greetings from us here,

Andrew Stallybrass