

# REARMEMENT MORAL · CAUX

## Centre de Rencontres Internationales

TÉL. 021/9634821  
TÉLÉFAX 021/9635260  
TÉLÉGRAMME CAUXVAUD

MOUNTAIN HOUSE  
RUE DU PANORAMA  
CH-1824 CAUX

13th August, 1990

Dear friends,

Another jam-packed, cram-filled, rich, amazing, crazy week has swept past us, and another session has come and gone. As one speaker who tried to summarize the seven workshop discussion groups said, it is a bit like trying to give people a picture of a mighty river when all you've got is a teaspoon and a cup! The best I can do will look like a trickle, but a sweeping flood it has been. There's been all too little time to note much of nature, other than through meals outside - even tea has been cut down to three quarters of an hour. But I notice that season is turning as dawn comes later and later as I write.

The week started with a surprise arrival at supper time last Monday of two bus-loads of Poles, 72 in all, from around the Jaroslaw centre. As my wife, one of the duty pair on the accommodation team, said, 'With five we'd have been annoyed, with that many you can only take it as a joke. We were their answer to prayer!' Further dormitories were created, they were given a meeting to tell them about this place they'd dropped in on on their pilgrimage to Fatima in Portugal, they saw the Irène Laure video in Polish, were up for an early Polish mass the following morning, and breakfast served by their compatriots in the house (who were most upset at their fellow Poles arrival), and were off again. To my disappointment, we've still not quite hit the figure of 700 for one night this summer. We've come close, but we won't go over that number now. 'This is marvellous', exclaimed the paid Portugese pot washer to a Portugese-speaking friend in the conference. He likes to see the house full, and he hasn't seen it so full for years - and he's never without pots and pans to clean!

Through Monday and Tuesday, the house was going through a mighty turnaround of arrivals and departures, which just about balanced out: a jigsaw puzzle that we managed to fit together by the skin of our teeth. Then we were into 'Change in the cities - getting to the root of the crises in our communities'. Six red-clad, swaying black Gospel singers, backed by drums, piano, flute and marimba filled the great hall with sound: 'God has given us the city/ He has given us the land/ God has given us the city/ He has given us every man'. At the full concert on Thursday night of The Victory Praise Singers, from Richmond, Virginia, USA, the mouths of the plaster gargoyles round the walls of the theatre fell open, as the rhythm and fervour brought the audience to its feet, clapping and dancing.

So there's been more than the usual amount of life and liveliness, not least with the participation of two other important black groups, from Atlanta, Georgia, USA, and Bridge Park, Brent, UK, as well as a group from the favelas of Rio and an experience-rich group from Pasadena with John and Denise Wood. Caux has been an extraordinarily busy market square, with stalls of local experience to be sampled, exchanged, looked over, discussed. Lyon, Lodz in Poland, Rio, Atlanta, Baltimore, Minneapolis/St Paul, Richmond, London, Merseyside, Newcastle...

I remember using the phrase 'redeemed experience' in an earlier letter, and it comes to mind again. The problems of the cities of the world, where over half of humanity now lives, the violence, crime, drugs, child abuse, lack of hope and purpose - yet through God's amazing alchemy transformed into gold, into hope, as individuals find a sense of calling and destiny. Change in people is the common factor, though MRA was not always the bringer of that change. But Caux provides that duty-free market place, where groups who would not normally meet can draw hope and inspiration from each others' experiences.

'The crisis in our country forces us to search for deeper human values,' says a newly elected Nicaraguan Member of Parliament. A young man who first came to Caux last year as a Solidarity militant with prison and persecution behind him is back again, this time as freely elected mayor of his city of 800,000. 'We're soldiers in a war, a battle in our cities,' says a young black man. An attractive young woman lawyer speaks, and we all carefully follow the translation from the Polish.

'Slower for the translators', the leader of the meeting cautions another speaker; 'That's the Southern Baptist in me', the speaker continues. (It has been a testing time for the translators, what with accents and hosts of local details, organizations and initials). We listen to the story of a street kid, an addict, a dealer, now a proud and happy father, and a worker for community: there are 13 million favelados in Brazil, gathered in 500 slums, and they are aiming to reach the leaders of all of them. 'I'm proud of what I'm doing for our community: we're exchanging the pistols for pencils and books.' A chance to ask questions, a hand goes up: 'I come from a small city with a few problems of its own - New York. Could you tell me if...'

The insecurity and fear of the cities is echoed in some of the fears of those from Eastern and Central Europe: some locking and bolting their doors out of habit. A surprised Russian said after a few days, 'What was behind it all was what was in front!' And a Czech who on his last visit to Caux had hidden his car with its give-away number plates, in case any curious compatriot should report him, this year took great pleasure in parking outside the front door. 'I am a survivor of the killing fields', said a Cambodian now living in the USA. 'Ten years ago, I was starving, and planting rice. We walked in the dark; we had no hope, but I wanted to die in a free country.' He was now one of the 72 ethnic groups in Minnesota, he said.

The week also saw the first showing of a new documentary film, 'Rajmohan Gandhi - Encounters with Truth'. Coming as it does at a time of reassessment in the great debates on development and democracy, the film gives some powerful truths, as well as vivid and hope-giving images of today's India. 'Simple, unpretentious and profound', was the comment of one of the guest speakers. Karen Lee Hodgson presented her one-woman evening on the life of Saint Clare of Assisi - an interesting complement to Michel Orphelin's Saint Francis. 'The fantastical adventures of Mr G and son', the new play by Juliet Boobbyer, with lively modern music by Leif Nahnfeldt, took us on a journey to Africa and Asia (conversations with Mahatma Gandhi and Marx's ghost in Highgate cemetery), and on an inner journey, arriving at a new beginning.

A moving element in the final meetings of the cities session yesterday was the meeting of religious differences. In the morning, a young French Catholic father, deeply involved in the problems of inner cities and immigrant communities, spoke of identity. We all have multiple identities, he said, and he spoke of his: as a man, a European, a Frenchman, a Christian, with certain political views. We all choose the priority we give to different strands in our identity - but it is not fixed and unchanging. He spoke of what he had himself learned from the contact with other faiths.

In the afternoon, an American Baptist, Ray Bakke, spoke of the public faith of MRA, 'taking faith beyond the boundaries of personal and parochial life into the market place of the modern world'. He called it an ecumenical movement, in the widest sense; 'Please don't lose that', he said. He was followed by a leader of the Muslim community in Newcastle and the North-East of England who thanked the organizers for the care they had taken to make available a place for Muslim prayer and to provide correct food. Before quoting the Koran, he said, 'Because of the world we live in, we are constantly getting the dust and the rust over our hearts. We always need some polishing.' A Christian expressed gratitude for Vijay's dance in the morning meeting to the text of one of the psalms. 'I confess to Muslim friends and my Hindu friends and to everyone else who is not a Christian, that I need to understand the immensity of God's love for every one of us', he said. I am interested to know what three Chinese diplomat friends up for the day made of it all!

We have also had the visit of the President of the Vaud Cantonal Parliament. After listening attentively to a short meeting on 'The family and the city - inner resources to meet the crisis', and a main morning session on 'Coalitions for change', he asked if he could say a word. 'We feel close to you,' he said. 'You honour this canton. I am a farmer, and this afternoon, I'll be helping my son bring in the harvest - and it's a good one. But this morning has been a good harvest too. Vive le Réarmement moral!'

Until next week,

Andrew Stallybrass

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### MORAL RE-ARMAMENT PRESS OFFICE

Caux, 8th August 1990

Mr Grzegorz Palka, Mayor of Lodz, Poland's second largest industrial city, today appealed for Western capital investment to help tackle Poland's burgeoning unemployment, city decay and rising crime rate. He emphasised the need to "learn from the experiences of Western cities with their strong local governments", in tackling such issues. He was speaking at Moral Re-Armament's international "Consultation on change in the cities" at Caux in Switzerland.

"The people who elected us are very impatient. They want better conditions," said Mr Palka. Yet rising prices, and the removal of government subsidies, had led to a 30 per cent decline in living standards since January. He forecast that unemployment in Lodz would rise from seven per cent to 15 per cent by year's end. There was the threat of further closures in textiles and other manufacturing industries, while there was no longer a guaranteed export market to the Soviet Union.

However, the 25,000 unemployed people in Lodz today represented a skilled, employable workforce - many from the textile industry. The city administration, he said, has signed a "declaration of intent" with an American firm to build a new \$100 million factory park of industrial units. However, there were complications concerning the city's ability to buy the necessary land. The city administration itself had created 1,200 municipal jobs since January. But, with rising unemployment, a lowering income tax revenue was hampering further expansion.

Mr Palka envisioned that the churches would play a wider role in providing a safety net for the poor. One idea was to create smaller parishes of not more than 10,000 to 15,000 people that would act like a social movement.

He described Moral Re-Armament's conference as "a unique climate in which to talk about these problems". The week-long conference has drawn 600 community leaders and representatives of city governments from such cities as Atlanta and Chicago in the USA, London, Birmingham and Newcastle-upon-Tyne in the UK, as well as from France and Rio de Janeiro.