

REARMEMENT MORAL · CAUX

Centre de Rencontres Internationales

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MOUNTAIN HOUSE
RUE DU PANORAMA
CH-1824 CAUX

Monday 27th July, 1992

Dear friends,

We're reaching towards the half-way mark of the summer here. The strange pink of dawn is lightening the air and touching the mountains across the lake, trickling down into the valley from the brightening sky. I sip a strong hot coffee from the new coin-operated machine in the 3rd floor corridor and search for inspiration. (There's also a cold drinks machine, and an inviting area with chairs and tables, a friendly, informal watering hole.)

Last Monday we were getting to the end of the cities session. I can only give a very personal evaluation; others may see it quite differently. The last hours were painful and unexpected. I came out of a two-hour meeting feeling as if I'd been sandbagged. And in a way, I had. Several black Americans, along with some of the non-white British, said what they really felt about the way society treats them. There had been presentations of the hope, the initiatives to bring change, but this was another level of reality, and one that we have not touched before in our conferences. The white executive assistant to a black mayor said that when she arrived in Caux, she had thought that she was in heaven. Then when the sparks started to fly, she thought, 'This is awful.' But on leaving, she concluded, 'This is real.' A black councillor said, 'We never broach the issues that people here have been courageous enough to address. I feel inspired.' He invited all those present to support an international MRA cities conference planned for next year in Richmond. 'I hope you can bring this spirit,' he said.

It is not comfortable. There is a strong challenge to all of us to have a radical enough diagnosis. Many have seen communism as the great threat. That giant has fallen over or was pushed, is smashed, and can be seen as a giant of clay. Behind him, we can see more clearly a far greater peril, a more threatening titan, and one already well-established in our midst: materialism. Our western, rich society is deeply sick, our cities are ill, and racism is one symptom of this cancer of materialism. We can find unity, but only if we are ready to face up to the depth of sin in our midst, in us and around us. So there is much to think about and digest, and that isn't easy to do, as the life of the conference flows on, and many depart, to make way for a new and younger population. The session ended with a lively puppet show presented by a children's workshop animated by Catherine Ruffin.

The platform in the Great Hall is now dominated by a giant billboard version of the youth-hosted session invitation - a hand breaking through a wall, the work of a young Romanian artist. There is also a large wall of boxes painted as bricks, labelled 'generation gap', 'gossip and backbiting' and so on. At the opening of the session on Friday evening, a helmeted, uniformed rock band gave a rendering of the Pink Floyd song 'All in all,

you're just another brick in the wall'. At the end, they sang 'Tear down those walls'.

There is an amazing variety of people and groups. The translation channels in use include Czech, Russian and Polish, Portuguese and Japanese, as well as the usual English, French and German. A series of interviews gave some of the history of the preparations for the session. A young Romanian, one of several among the organizing group, said, 'It was the first time that anyone asked what we from Eastern Europe thought, and they took our ideas seriously.' A young Argentinian 'from the South, South, South of South America spoke - they too had been meeting to prepare this session, communicating with friends in other countries despite the miles. The rules of the house were presented with a series of humorous sketches (two of our Romanian friends stopped in Montreux on their way here to smoke a last cigarette; they'd promised themselves to stop before arriving!).

Two characters dressed in Roman togas introduced the idea of the daily 'open forum' meetings. A young Brazilian, studying to be a music teacher, spoke of silence being as important as sound. 'Silence within us is one of the great powers for humanity,' he said, and he went on to explain that the day would start with a short time of 'inspirational input' followed by 45 minutes of silent individual reflection, helped by a short list of questions. So, as last year, in the quiet minutes before breakfast, every corner of the house and garden is occupied by solitary individuals, writing, reflecting alone.

A great deal of hard work and thought has gone in to the preparations for this session, and there is great freshness and originality in the presentation of eternal truths. A sketch, based on reality 'but considerably shortened, because otherwise you would have to sit here for a whole year', gave a student's experience of rivalry and jealousy healed by an apology. 'I wanted to leave home and never see my father again,' said one young woman. 'Then I saw that the conflict with him was harming me too much.' A letter of apology had brought a similar letter in return, and had helped to build an entirely new relationship. Relationships, between parents and children, with the other sex, the longing to be loved and understood have been talked about in the main sessions and in the community discussions.

A surprise evening forced the communities to rapidly prepare 3-minute sketches in a variety of styles on subjects drawn by lot: a garbage truck, in mythological style; the queue at the buffet, in the style of opera; a heavy metal rock approach to vegetables; the UN General Assembly in animal noises... It was not just a demonstration of great humour and imagination; it was also another opportunity for a cheerful mixing of the generations. There are many young people present, but it is not a youth session. At one point, there was some puzzlement at the announcement that there would be a café open every evening for all ages from 9 till 11, until it was understood that there was an implicit 'pm' that needed to be added to the phrase!

Still-sunny greetings from the cheerful horde here,

Andrew Stallybrass