

REARMEMENT MORAL · CAUX

Centre de Rencontres Internationales

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MOUNTAIN HOUSE
RUE DU PANOPAMA
CH - 1824 CAUX

Monday, 25th July, 1994

Dear friends,

An almost-round moon hangs in the clear and brightening sky over the Grammont, across the end of the lake from Caux, as I head for my computer, and the peaceful sound of cow-bells comes up from the meadow below the terrace. Yesterday thunder rolled round the hills and valleys, and later there came a little refreshing rain, driving us in from our supper on the terrace, looking over at the pre-dinner reception for the Caux Round Table, and a bevy of smartly dressed men and women. But the weather continues largely fine and hot as the summer gallops away with us. We're so used to having the industrial forums and Round Table in August: the system gets a little out of kilter! So another session has come and gone. With far less contrast than I for one expected. In many ways the inter-generational dialogue has gone on. The young business executives of the Junior Round Table may dress in a slightly more formal style, but there have continued to be many other younger people, many families with small children. The large group of Russians now seems quite natural.

It is quite impossible for me - or anyone - to give an adequate report on six separate forums meeting in different places, on different themes, at the same time after tea. I can only give my impressionistic impressions. The communities have continued in the mornings, mixing all the people in the house, discussing the wider questions of 'What is work? How do we experience it? Is it a right? What do I get out of it?'. One constant theme has been the exchange of experiences from different parts of the world of part-answers to unemployment. As the invitation states: 'No one can do everything but everyone can do something.' Examples were given, of small business creation by the unemployed from Birmingham, Great Britain, of work-sharing among metal working firms in the Bulle region in Switzerland. Hassan Mezghiche, an Algerian living in Lausanne, Switzerland, told how he had created an association to help the unemployed like himself. A second theme has been the idea that our definitions of 'work' and a 'job' need to be broadened to include all activities that are useful to society.

Jim Beggs, from Melbourne, Australia, spoke with his wife with great humour and depth of their life together - and the difficulties of two very different people travelling across Europe. Beggs recalled his last three years as National President of the Waterside Workers' Federation - the dockers - during which time they had held over 300 meetings aimed at 'bringing in a new culture' which introduced multi-skill training, and had reduced the number of unions in the docks from 27 to 2 (by next year, one). Employment in the industry had dropped by two thirds, but with no involuntary redundancies, 'with not one hour of work lost' and productivity gains averaging 100%, said Beggs, who has been awarded the 'Order of Australia' in recognition of his work in industry. Because of the waterfront reform process, which had reduced costs dramatically, exports have increased, and jobs elsewhere have been protected, especially in agriculture, he said. 'The trade union movement should be an instrument of change, not a means of resisting change,' he concluded.

The theme of unemployment even found its way into yesterday's communion service up in the Protestant chapel, as Bror Jonzon preached on Jesus' story of the labourers hired at different times of the day, but who receive the same wage. And we ended with a rousing rendering of the hymn 'For all the saints who from their labours rest...' And I thought with love and gratitude of the industry and legacy of all those who have gone before.

The session 'The economy and the individual' started with explanations in the Great Hall, but swiftly moved on to Scottish dancing in the entrance hall - this seems to be becoming a new Caux tradition. There's been a lot of music, and of a magically high standard. Some of you may remember the Heineken beer advertisement, which I turn into 'Music refreshes the parts of you that words do not reach'. An evening in the theatre with Sylvie Soderlund accompanied by Victor Rjabchikov - a young Russian pianist who came for the first time last year - gave me a lung-full of purity, unselfishness, honesty and loads of love, transparent like the air, and as life-giving. Last night saw the Caux première of a 'Sequence of Gospel scenes for string quartet and narrator' by Felix Lisiecki. At the end, to further applause, Claire Lisiecki, the first violinist, brought her father up to face the audience, and then the lively 'Hallelujah' was given as an encore. I suspect I'll hear it hummed in the corridors today.

A new play 'Letter to Wollongong', by Jaroslavá Moserová, former Czech ambassador to Australia and New Zealand was presented - a powerful meditation on giving in and giving up, situated in time after the Soviet invasion of August 1968. It is a moving memorial to Jan Palach, the student who burned himself to death in protest. But the play takes us to a deeper, universal battle that is situated in every human heart, and it ends with the plea and challenge: 'Whatever you do, never, never, never sell your own soul.' The pressures on us may be harder to see than those of the secret police man with his threats and bribes, but are they much easier to resist?

There is a stir of excitement about the Caux Round Table this year - there has already been a major article in the 'Financial Times' about their 'Principles for Business', what seems to be one of the very first pluricultural efforts by senior business figures from Japan, the USA and Europe to establish universal ethical principles for themselves. The day after the 'Financial Times' article, there were 49 telephone calls asking for more information and copies of the principles, mainly from businesses. More articles are in the pipeline - a journalist from one of the main French-language dailies in Switzerland is coming today. This initiative seems to come at just the right time, when media, business and the public, shaken in many countries, including Switzerland, by scandal after scandal, are in search of guideposts.

My apologies to our younger friends in Australia for having forgotten to mention in my last letter the enthusiastic launching here of 'Global Express', their well-received magazine offering ideas and fun to a younger audience of all ages. Smarter, older people have been buying copies - to pass on to younger members of the family or to read themselves, we don't know. We have not yet conducted the first market survey, but stay tuned!

Sunny regards,

Andrew Stallybrass