

International Conference Centre

Tel. +41 21 962 9111
Fax +41 21 962 9355
email:
caux@prolink.ch

for Moral Re-Armament

Web page: <http://www.caux.ch/>

Mountain House
Rue du Panorama
CH - 1824 Caux
Switzerland

Caux, 19th August, 1996

Dear friends,

A week from today, I'll be home in Geneva - but writing a last Caux letter of the summer. The conference will have ended, and the brave crew staying on will be in the thick of the change-over to the hotel school. We are grateful that some are coming specially for this last stretch. Last night, before going to bed, I looked out across the lake to the solid dark blue mass of the mountains, to the clearer dusty blue and peach of the sky behind, the flashing red and green lights of the little ports. A distant church bell was ringing, and a crescent moon climbing into the night air, and the piercing beauty of this place seized me afresh. What a privilege it is to be here, and with so many good friends who just happen to be colleagues as well! Yet, this cannot be taken for granted, it takes work, on ourselves and on our relationships. I've had a salutary reminder that I need to be more sensitive, and live into the feelings and reactions that I can create in others, without any intention of doing so, just because of the way I am: on the whole, I get on all right with myself, but I can't assume that others always find it so easy!

I had to check with my diary that my mass of notes does indeed cover one week only, and not two. What a concentration of riches there has been. Four press releases in the first two days of the week. The highlight of the 'Agenda for Reconciliation' - and indeed the summer - was the level of statesmanship from the top level Japanese present. From different political parties, they want to bring together a round table of politicians from different countries to explore this theme of reconciliation. They expressed full apologies for the dark chapters of their country's past, and gratitude for Caux's contribution to the life of their country since the Second World War, but above all a vision of Japan as a reconciler and peace-maker, in the presence of three Japanese television crews whose reports were broadcast nationally back in Japan. It set many of us dreaming of the day when leaders from our countries will so clearly address the shadow chapters of our pasts: for example, the Anglo-Irish relationship. Masahide Shibusawa's contribution in this area was felt by many of us to be an historic moment. As Yukihiisa Fujita said before leaving, we're a little like the blind men trying to evaluate the elephant, each of us only touches one part, and it will take time to build up a more coherent picture of what it is that has happened, been given, and where we are heading. It's worth remembering that this session has also been partly financed by the Japanese government foundation - another première - and their way of acknowledging Caux's contribution to Japan.

The 'agenda' also saw a session furthering the inter-faith dialogue. A Jewish intellectual from Geneva remarked that he found himself in Caux for the second time within a week. Caux was beautiful, 'but so different from the world we see downstairs', but we must try to 'make the real world closer to the world that you dream here'. This is another important thread that has been greatly strengthened this summer, where it will take more time and thought to plot the course ahead, but we can already express great gratitude for all that has been given. There was a further day on the theme of 'Hope in the Cities', another of the important threads that leads on, and a Jubilee lecture from a major African-American figure, Marian Wright Edelman. Within minutes of the end of her speech, she was being interviewed by 'phone from New York for the Voice of America's world-wide service. There was a host of seminars - many running in parallel -

Bougainville, El Salvador, the Horn of Africa, Ireland, Lebanon, South Africa, Zimbabwe, the wounds of history, the social and economic conditions for reconciliation... There will be a full and separate report on the 'agenda' event - I don't envy the editor, Brian Lightowler!

David Mills took us on a spell-binding journey of faith through his life and his music. Simple and profound. Another evening brought Muriel Smith and her life and talents back to us through music and monologue, thanks to the artist Marie Goodman-Hunter and the research and writing of Ailsa Hamilton. There was a variety evening of endless variety, which included a Japanese former prime minister singing from Mozart's 'The Marriage of Figaro'! The young European standing beside me at the back of the hall commented, 'This is the magic of Caux'.

A highlight for me was an unplanned and unexpected meal with a senior Russian judge whom I'd heard speak from the platform. Over supper, he told us about his grandfather, an Orthodox priest shot in 1938 at the height of Stalin's purges. He himself had become a dissident in defence of the rights of the victims of the Communist system. Some months back, he at last felt ready to face his grandfather's file. Within a week of arrest, the signature at the bottom of the interrogation transcripts had changed, and his grandfather was confessing to every crime suggested by his torturers. He was 'a spy for Germany, Finland and Poland'. He gave the names and addresses of his accomplices. And a month later, without a trial, he was shot. The judge was shaken to his roots to think of those betrayed, and by a priest. Then, from the file, he saw that in the fifties, his grandmother had asked for her husband to be rehabilitated. An enquiry had been opened, and he saw that the investigators had found that all the names that his grandfather had revealed were either false or of people already executed.

Another moment of magic was a candlelit evening in the great hall, largely emptied of chairs, in circles with our different community groups. We included a senior couple from the Magreb who were sitting on a sofa behind us, and within minutes, there was profound sharing. The man asked us to be silent and pray for the souls of the missionaries murdered in Algeria, and then to pray for the souls of their killers. He wanted to meet with the Algerian couple here, and other MRA friends to think for that country and what could be done.

We've found time (where and how I know not) to look towards next summer in Caux, and indeed the summers beyond. We're in a tension between practical realities of dates and printing, and also the logical desire to follow on from many of the important leads given this summer, and the desire to stand back, take time for the dust to settle, to evaluate fully before we charge into the next thing... Any ideas welcome. There will be a planning and evaluation time in Haguenau, in France, 31st October - 3rd November. Then the final Jubilee event in Caux will be a New Year family conference (26th December - 1st January, 1997), taken on by a Dutch team. The invitation is already available. In April (19th-27th) there will be an important consultation in Australia on the issue of 'participation' in MRA.

Yesterday was a one-day gathering on agriculture, with the Director of the Swiss farmers' federation, amongst other panellists. 'It's not just a question of the future of farmers,' he said, 'but it's the future of humanity.' Pat Evans regretted the British government's attitude towards its European partners and its sins of omission in the 'mad cow disease' crisis. He brought laughs when he said, 'We don't want to follow mad cows with mad Englishmen.' Later today, we launch into the 'Creators of Peace' event.

Warmer, sunnier greetings from the last lap of Caux,
Andrew Stallybrass