



Initiatives of Change

Caux, Monday 8<sup>th</sup> July 2002

Dear friends of Caux – Initiatives of Change,

Ancient and modern; tradition and change; the past, the present and the future. One hundred years ago yesterday, to the day, the inaugural banquet of the Caux-Palace Hotel was held. And yesterday, well over 600 people from the region poured through the house all through a glorious sunny afternoon for an open day. Many of them stayed on for a round-table on 'Learning from the past for the sake of the future'.

What a start to the summer this has been! The conference only started on Friday – and it seems an age ago already, so much has happened. We've started on our hubcaps, as we say in French, like the start of a Grand Prix race. The history of the place and the people have been very much with us. As the opening meeting of the first conference and of the summer season was taking place, several of us were down in the village church of Lonay, accompanying H  l  ne Mottu to her final resting place, and surrounding Philippe Mottu and his family with our affection. As we arrived back in Caux, we heard Krish Raval giving his masterly opening address on 'Service, Leadership and Responsibility', the theme of this first week, and we heard him ending with a long quote from Clara Jaeger's book about her husband Bill. He has also left us, yet young people that Bill Jaeger and his generation touched, like Krish himself, are here carrying forward the same passionate struggle for a better world.

The official day on Saturday saw ambassadors and diplomats from Geneva and Bern joining local dignitaries and authorities and the many young conference participants in the theatre. There were official greetings by the Mayor of Montreux, the President of the Vaud Cantonal Parliament, and the President of the Federal upper house – the three layers of authority in Switzerland, the Commune, the Canton and the Confederation. We saw the premi  re of a new video film put together by Jean-Denis Borel to mark the 100<sup>th</sup> birthday. We were staggered to see H  l  ne Mottu and her husband Philippe on screen, moved to see other old friends departed, and some of ourselves a good deal younger, in a gallop through these one hundred years in 20 minutes!

Each of the official speeches carried a real message, a sense of understanding and support. Anton Cottier, the President of the upper house in Berne, told of a recent encounter in Nigeria, where a traditional leader – the Emir of Kano – had told him that they were trying to apply the spirit of dialogue taught and practiced in Caux, and find inspiration in the Swiss model of federalism. He hailed 'the spirit of Caux, which opposes hatred and violence in the world, generating a spirit of dialogue and cooperation.' Francis Rossier spoke of the pride that the Cantonal authorities felt in the conference centre, and expressed his pleasure in coming to this place 'where you can listen to the song of silence, and hear your heart speak'. The Mayor of Montreux, now also a Federal MP, spoke of 'this citadel of silence in the service of humanity', and hoped that many of his fellow citizens would take advantage of the open day to get to know this '  lan to improve the world' – and indeed they did.

For those who like the weather reports, Friday saw the weather go from warm and clear to cold and wet, Saturday was overcast and mixed – but yesterday was sunny, perfect for the large crowds who had responded to the invitation that had gone to every home in the area, the large advertisements in the two regional newspapers, and the programme on the local radio. Echoing the title of the hit-film, *La Presse Riviera Chablais*, the Montreux regional paper, carried a front-page headline over five columns: 'The fabulous destiny of the Caux-Palace'. 'The Belle-  poque palace sheltered refugees before opening up to the ethical questions of the world,' it went on. The inside article over the whole of page 3 headlines, 'Built one hundred years ago, the prestigious hotel is a home for the world,' and 'The Caux-Palace doesn't look it's age'.

For yesterday's open day, Dave L  thi, a young local historian of architecture took in hand an increasingly expert and enthusiastic team of guides; Eric Jaeger, the manager of Caux, himself an architect by training, planned the tours with great care, and produced a fine sign system. Then we were just overwhelmed by the flood of people pouring into the Expo and the front hall. I sense that there is a real sea change in our relations with the area. Then last night, as a certain calm descended again on the house and the sky turned to a dark peach-red over the Jura, lively dancing got under way out on the terrace, an echo of



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the care-free images of the Caux-Palace from Jean-Denis' video. Moldovan dances, old Scottish favourites, and a Russian dance taught by Joy Weeks from Winchester... clearly there is not yet any lack of energy!

Pierre and Fulvia Spoerri write their impressions: 'Not being involved in the preparations for this weekend, we allowed ourselves to be surprised. We were struck by the natural transition that has taken place between the generations and the effortless teamwork between the young East Europeans in the leadership of the present conference and those preparing the weekend and the summer; the quality of the men and women from Swiss public life who came; the natural acceptance of the new name by all we met; the perfect programme, impossible without the care for a thousand details by a whole bunch of unknown saints.'

Cornelio Sommaruga, the president of Caux – Initiatives of Change, welcomed his many guests, speaking in three languages. Religions must not be used to divide peoples and encourage violence, he pleaded. The Saturday afternoon saw the first of the six 'Caux Lectures', by Ruud Lubbers, the United Nations High Commissioner for refugees. He warned us that the idea of a fortress Europe, closed off from the rest of the world, was a dangerous illusion, would have no more success than had the prohibition of alcohol in the USA. Yet there were signs that if the rich would be generous enough, vast numbers of refugees would return home, as fast as they could. Putting aside his prepared notes, he spoke from the heart on this difficult issue that is increasingly polarizing politics in Europe – while many third world countries welcome far larger refugee populations.

Egon Mayer, a professor of sociology in New York, and director of a centre for Jewish studies, has just left after three full days here, including a deeply felt participation in yesterday's round table. He was born in the Villa Maria, in December 1944. 'No, my parents were not here on some poorly planned skiing vacation,' he joked, going on to detail the amazing tale of how some 1'600 Jews found shelter in Caux. He spoke of 'that small bridge from the darkness of the Holocaust on one side to the light of freedom on the other,' between Switzerland and Germany. He concluded, 'For my family and me, and by now thousands of Jews the world over whose parents and grandparents found safe haven in this place, Caux was and will always remain that magical place amidst Alpine peaks where salvation was found. May the work of this centre for Initiatives of Change continue to hold out hope to others in distress today that we found here in the foreboding years of 1944-1945.'

With him at the round table spoke professor Bronislav Geremek, a former foreign minister of Poland, one of the key figures of the Solidarity movement in the final years of resistance to communism, and himself a survivor of the Warsaw ghetto and the concentration camps. Looking to the new century, he insisted on the importance of education: 'We need a training against hate,' he said, 'an education of the young generations in the world to counter exclusion and hatred.' Any injustice anywhere touches us all, he stressed. He concluded, 'We must respond to the challenges of the new century with a universal humanist philosophy, with morality as its reference and its content. Each of us, inheritors of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century must decide how we must live.'

Alongside the moderator, Lison Meric, a well-known radio journalist, and Cornelio Sommaruga, Michel Kipoké, a Congolese lawyer now working in France spoke. As for many Africans, he had felt that hope was a luxury, but 'in Caux I've found reasons to hope,' he said. He gave the example of the work undertaken by himself and others in the African Great Lakes region, for peace and reconciliation, including meetings in Caux.

Now we're into the conference 'Service, Leadership and Responsibility – working for a world that works', with a 'young politicians forum' running in parallel. It aims, in the words of Konstantyn Plosky from the Ukraine, and one of the organizers, 'to strengthen our conviction that politics should be based on honesty, openness and responsibility; we want to learn together what political leadership based on service means'. So more on that next Monday!

Sunny greetings from this amazing place, as we start the 56<sup>th</sup> series of summer conferences,

Andrew Stallybrass