

# Centre de Rencontres Internationales

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pour le Réarmement moral

# CAUX

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Avully, Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> August 1999

Dear friends,

The blank screen is the same, but the view, the desk is different. Yesterday, Sunday, saw us arrive at the last meeting of the last session, the end of the summer season, and I'm now back home, looking out onto a dark sky and darker trees. What a rich and stirring summer this has been. And what a deep last session.

On Tuesday afternoon, the 'Conversation on aims and values for the 21<sup>st</sup> century' opened, with a large and varied inter-generational team on the platform (fifteen people from ten countries), a large compass hanging behind, and a song in Italian about steering our course by the Pole Star, sung by everyone. An added poignancy this final week has been the presence and active participation in the session of my father, in Caux for the first time without my mother, after her death in the Spring. It has been a participatory time, with a sense that all could have a part in shaping it and making their contribution. We started, continued and closed in conversation style, looking at the values and aims that our countries and our own lives actually reflect, good and less lofty: money, power, individualism, but also compassion and solidarity, reliability... The opening session continued after supper with a sketch set in a quality shop, selling bio-degradable, throw-away values, and longer-lasting virtues and vices. There's a certain price to pay for the kind of world we want, and for the kind of person we would like to be: that was one of the themes running through the week. Then there was a wordless mime about the purpose of the community discussion groups and the work of the house from the ever-present and ever-creative Latin American friends of *Gente Que Avanza*.

The following days took us through a series of meetings on the tools for private and public decision-making. We were invited to take a short time of quiet all together and to write down the five greatest treasures in our lives, and then our five most important values. Then we were invited to reflect on whether there is a link between our treasures and our values. Do external factors rule me, or do my own internalised values decide my priorities? I cannot guarantee the accuracy of the statistic, but we were told that most men said that their families were very important to them, at the top of their list of priorities, but that in reality, they spend on average 2.5 minutes a day on their families! But at least we got the drift. There was the TEMPT test: what do I spend most of my Time on, my Energy, my Money, what do I Ponder on most, what do I most Talk about? In my community, we split into two groups by age, to be surprised by the unity of our views when we shared together. God and faith, family and loved ones, friends and friendship, calling and a sense of mission, nature and love of country, music, drama and cricket all found their place in our list of treasures. And then we made a long list of the qualities we most treasured in others and aspired to for ourselves.

Two times of pure magic took us into the world and language of music. One afternoon, Alan George, the viola player in the Fitzwilliam Quartet spoke of the call to 'fulfil what we are as people and as musicians', musicians have a quest, and the quest is on-going. A quartet is 'an extraordinary blend of people trying to create something together' which can only be compared with family life – but it's harder with 4 than with 2. He spoke of their personal touches with the composer Shostakovich. Then in the evening, in the bay window, facing out on a stormy sky, we enjoyed a world class concert, with dark clouds scudding by, and then breaks with a red sunset shining through. Nature seemed to be in tune with the music, working through to a resolution and the peace of night. After the interval, the quartet were joined by Moray Welsh, the principal cellist with the London Symphony Orchestra, to play Schubert's string quintet, for them the summit of chamber music. And after the concert, there was a chance to meet and discuss further with the artists. And music of all kinds played an important part in the week.

On Thursday, local figures, two church ministers and the Mayor of Montreux, joined us for a simple but deeply felt ceremony to install a plaque by the oak tree planted two years ago on the terrace in memory of the Jews sheltered in Caux during World War II – and in memory of all those

who had been turned away at the Swiss frontier. The President of the Vaud Cantonal government sent a message – he was prevented from coming in person by a press conference that he had to give on the tragically still current question of refugees. Representatives of the five continents lit candles in memory of all the refugees of today.

'Aims and values for the economy' was the title for yet another South African contribution - a spellbinding presentation from Nico and Loël Ferreira of their commitment to their town and region of Stutterheim, described by a journalist as 'the town that saved itself'. We were all fascinated to hear how people had moved from deep division between black and white, between black township and white town, to 'we', to 'we are one community', even before all the apartheid laws had changed. They had been able to create a spirit of 'We'll have to do it together, we're not going to wait for outsiders to solve our problems.' One key had been to decide: 'Your problems are my problems', they said. Their commitment led to the creation of jobs, to education programmes, that were beginning 'to change the life of the nation'. 100 other towns in South Africa had been in touch to see how they could learn from this experience.

Another seminar on 'Aims and values for public life' brought us details of the Kenya clean elections campaign, and its prolongation into the clean Kenya campaign, the Jubilee 2000 campaign for debt relief, experiences of applying values at work and in studies. In the main meetings and in the seminars, there have been many contributions from the floor, questions and comments, sharing and experiences. An American participant spoke of the seemingly impossible series of complicated and interlinked decisions that he faced. He went on, 'For the first time in my life, I'm not just relying on my own resources but on that bigger power.'

The small group still with us of *Gente Que Avanza* gave us a workshop based on the training courses they give back home – that was the morning that the Abbot of Saint Maurice, the oldest monastery north of the Alps chose to visit us. The Latin Americans demonstrated in a sketch the attitudes of selfishness, indifference, negativity and self-satisfaction, before giving us sheets of paper and inviting us to write a letter, expressing forgiveness, gratitude or love, to someone close to us. It was moving to see the number of people writing away on their sheets, and then to hear that one person, rather than write had gone straight to the 'phone to ring home. A Nigerian high court judge told us all later how she had written her letter to her children, present in the conference, and how she had then shared it with them.

An African chorus' singing brought the sun out for the first time in several days, and we ended the week with the more hardy taking tea and meals outside on the terrace – but autumn is coming, and the leaves are turning. As so often, much, perhaps most, has been going on the privacy and intimacy of the smaller community groups. A young Ukrainian drew a picture of the rucksack full of experience that they were taking away with them, and an retired Swiss lady had also drawn a rucksack for the joys that she was carrying away. The sense of community, the sharing, meant that she no longer looked on the world as antagonistic and cruel. An important group from Thailand shared with the help of a video and yoga exercises some of their experiences of development – and several in the conference benefited from their skills at acupuncture and face massages. It's the first time that I've seen people walking around Caux with needles in their heads, looking like extra-terrestrials with antenna!

A memorable evening of readings, music and film gave us something of the life and work of Peter Howard, ending with an extract from the video of *Mr Brown comes down the hill*. The following day, at popular request, the full video was shown. A final variety evening gave us mime and a scene from George Bernard Shaw (there was a fascinating seminar earlier on his life and work), music and songs from Latvia, Russia, Nigeria, Australia, Germany and Italy, a sketch on learning to stand up straight, and helping each other to stand, and poems from Scotland and France. The final meeting saw Mountain House in fog, but as one of the organisers commented, in fog you really need your compass! 'Countries have become faces for me here,' said a Latin American. 'I've been learning a greater sense of self and integrity,' said a Pole. There was a moving host of people coming up to leave behind some problem, to mark their change, on slip of paper put into the shredder. Then on another slip, those who wanted to could say the value that they were taking away with them, that they wanted to work at integrating into their lives, for the new century advancing towards us.

So farewell until the next season. We'll keep you posted about dates and plans for next summer. Warm and grateful greetings,

Andrew Stallybrass