

Interview with Albert Breuer: the last-minute preparations (Brussels, 28 February 2007)

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[Étienne Deschamps] During the days preceding the ceremonial signing, when you were in Rome with the other officials and all the equipment, what remained to be done? Did the Treaties still need to be prepared?

[Albert Breuer] Yes, of course, that was the main idea. In Val Duchesse they had already begun to print a hundred or so pages. But those hundred pages were more of a disadvantage, because the committee was still talking and on page 25, we had to change a whole line again, or on page 68, a word needed changing, and we needed staff to do that. As we went along, the phone would keep on ringing and downstairs the head of Roneo would say: 'I don't know where I am any more!'

The reason is that each time he had to take a hundred stencils out from a pile like this. Then he had to hunt through them, number this or that, put a page in a machine and rewrite the word, firstly putting on the red, stabilising it with the red fluid like ladies' nail varnish, and then rewriting the word correctly. And he too was on his last legs, but it all worked. Until the day when disaster struck... And that is what I'd like to tell you about.

The disaster was very simple. In this superb Roneo room, they had put down covers, cardboard, a type of plastic and suchlike, all this in order to protect the flooring, which was several hundred years old. The Campidoglio is something quite sacred.

The cleaning ladies arrived in the morning, or in the evening, or at night. They picked up everything that was blackened, took it and threw it in the dustbins. Then *via!* It was gone.

[Étienne Deschamps] So these were all the pages that had been made ready for the signing day?

[Albert Breuer] Yes, yes... But it was still a huge pile of documents, not yet put together, not even stapled. Otherwise they might not have been shifted. But the stencils — that was the most important thing. They had taken them and put them into dustbins, into bags... who knows what? And the lot had been carried off to the Roman rubbish dump. We came in, and where were the stencils? 'Abbiamo buttato tutto.' 'E perché?' 'Ma... era sporco!'

I said: 'Sporco!? That does not interest me! You have just destroyed something that is priceless!' To cut a story short, we tried to head for the rubbish dumps of Rome, where there were hundreds of tons of refuse that had been poured on to them, one load after another, and merely to find the lorry that had the stuff from the Campidoglio was impossible... It was a disaster.

So the decision was taken to send for girls with a command of the various languages from Brussels and Luxembourg — Italians, Dutch in particular, Germans — in order to retype 180 pages of text. The girls arrived and we put them to work. But it did not go quickly. You need time to type a page like that. We gradually came to realise that it was going to be a near thing. Meanwhile, I had put in a request for help downstairs, for the Roneo, to have some trestles where we could put the printed pages so that we could put them in order on the table-tops. So starting with 1 to 10, 11 to 20, 21 to 31, it went along like that... And it was working. Until page 40 or 50, then the students, the students — I had made a request, not I, but the Secretariat had made a request to the University — the students were very cheerful, very happy, they were earning a bit of money. They were there and they were putting the pages together... without paying attention to the numbering. I said: 'Be careful, they have to be in order, packet after packet after packet...'

Well. The next day I arrived there first, at the Campidoglio, and they were outside the door: 'Ah, buongiorno dottore! Come va?' and so on. I said: 'Andiamo!' 'Ah no, sciopero!' I said: 'What do you mean, *sciopero*? Is that a type of orange juice or what?' 'No... Sciopero! We want more money.' It took another two hours before we had permission from the financial controller in the Place de Metz and they started work. Then, instead of doing 10, 20, 30, 40, they actually did 10, 20, 30, 40, and then, suddenly, 80, then 70, and so forth. It turned into something unbelievable. They had mixed it all up and had no idea what they had to do. I

was on at them all the time, ‘You must be careful, you have to follow this with that, and that, and that...’ It was no use.

[Étienne Deschamps] So this was a few days before the signing ceremony and the documents were still not ready?

[Albert Breuer] They were not ready. On the last day, when I too had gone on strike at almost nine o’clock at night, I said: ‘Stop now. Goodbye! Arrivederci!’ ‘Ah yes, but *dottore*...’ And at that point, no, I said: ‘That’s it. No more doctor; you have worked badly, here is your money and off you go.’

But what was to be done then? Mr Calmes, whose job was to guarantee...

[Étienne Deschamps] At that time, was Calmes in Luxembourg, in Brussels, or already in Rome?

[Albert Breuer] He was there too! He was there, ‘Father Kasel’ was there, Mr Guazzugli was there, all of them. What shall we do? Then they had a brainwave, now it is widely known: a Treaty, just about this size, a page of A4, but much more elegant. The Treaty contained page 1, with the Preamble and everything; the last page had the signatures, and between the two, was nothing. And it worked. It was really incredible and they were in the dark about it — those signing — they were in the dark! Because if we had told them: ‘Sign something like this’, they would have said no. We shall do the whole thing again. And it worked. Later on, of course, it was printed, it was made ready, the missing pages were put in, but the inside was blank.

[Étienne Deschamps] But it was Calmes who took the responsibility of having them sign a blank Treaty?

[Albert Breuer] Ah, that I do not know. No, no, no, I do not believe that he had the nerve to do that. It was something that he had discussed with the Italian authorities. Very few people were in the know. Even I did not know about it. Perhaps the Italian authorities said: ‘We shall have to do that or it will be a disaster.’ I had prepared the red ribbons with sealing wax. I had a seal that I had bought in Luxembourg, at Nimax — that will mean nothing to you, it is a Luxembourg supplier — because it had to be made in two days. Nimax told me: ‘I cannot make it out of metal, but I can do it in rubber.’ So I stamped it with the seal. The first one was the best, because the letters and everything stood out clearly. The third was rather flat, like this, and the fifth was as flat as that.

[Étienne Deschamps] Melted?

[Albert Breuer] Melted. The rubber had melted.

[Étienne Deschamps] And what was there on the seal? The wording?

[Albert Breuer] General Secretariat of... I can no longer remember. But he made it for me quite quickly, Mr Nimax — the foremost maker of office stamps in Luxembourg — but he said to me: ‘For a metal one, I need 5 or six days.’ Everything was in a rush.

Then these gentlemen signed, all looking very serious and quite certain that they were performing a fantastic feat, and there you are.

[Étienne Deschamps] And at the time, no one knew? Didn’t the press know either, or the photographers who were present?

[Albert Breuer] Oh no, oh no! If you read the article written by Mr Kasel, the press wanted absolutely that the document be displayed so as to photograph the pages. They held it up like this. Ha! ha! ha! ha! ...To save face.