

The Threefolding Movement of 1917-1922 and Its Present Significance¹

By Christoph Strawe

(translated by Edward Udell)

Rudolf Steiner was occupied with social questions all his life. His work in the social field reached its highpoint in the years 1917-1922, when he sought to intervene on a grand scale in contemporary events.

R. Steiner's move in 1897 to Berlin led him into the capital city's literary circles on the one hand, and on the other hand brought him, as a teacher at the School for Workers' Education (1899-1904), into contact with the workers' movement. The Theosophical Society, of which he became general secretary in 1902, was added as a field of esoteric work.²

“Basic Sociological Law” and “Fundamental Social Law”

The underlying question that Steiner posed in 1893 in his main philosophical work, *The Philosophy of Freedom* [also published in English as *The Philosophy of Spiritual Activity*], a question about the individual situation of the human being, is presented by Steiner in 1898 explicitly as a question also about the structure of society: in two essays in the *Magazine for Literature*, “Freedom and Society” and “The Social Question,” the emancipation of the individual from the supervision of societies is identified as the inherent tendency of social development and recognized as “basic sociological law.” The logical consequence of that law was the establishment of states for the protection and support of the needs and forces of the individual. In the magazine *Lucifer*, founded in 1903 (later merged with the magazine *Gnosis*), Steiner in 1905/06 published three essays under the title “Theosophy and the Social Question,” in which he addressed the overcoming of exploitation, and discussed -- in terms of an altruism that is not merely subjectively moralistic, but works right into the organization of economic institutions (“the Fundamental Social Law”) -- the necessary social organization of the division of labor. The planned series of essays was discontinued on account of the theosophical readership's insufficient interest in pages on this theme. After that, Steiner's references to the subject are to be found more as hints, which he probably would have elaborated if audiences at the relevant lectures had followed up with questions. That however was evidently not the case.

Rudolf Steiner During the World War

In 1913 the break with the Theosophical Society was finally made, and the Anthroposophical Society was constituted as an independent association. In this year had begun in Dornach, Switzerland the construction of the first Goetheanum as a place for the cultivation of

¹ This article is based largely on the list of further reading given at the end. It was first published in the newsletter *Dreigliederung des sozialen Organismus* [*Threefolding the Social Organism*], Issue 3/1998. For internet publication the author reviewed and slightly edited it [cf. <http://www.sozialimpulse.de/fileadmin/sozialimpulse/pdf/Dreigliederungsbewegung.pdf>]. The English version was first published at <http://www.socialthreefold.org/2016/08/threefolding-movement-of-1917-1922-part.html>

² For the life and work of Rudolf Steiner, please refer to the classic work by historian Christoph Lindenberg: *Rudolf Steiner – Eine Biografie*. 2 Volumes, Stuttgart 1997. [Available in English as *Rudolf Steiner: A Biography* (Great Barrington, MA: SteinerBooks, 2012).]

anthroposophy. As the world war broke out, a group of anthroposophists of different nationalities worked in Dornach on this building.

During the years of the world war, R. Steiner gave lectures in Dornach and in other places about the spiritual backgrounds of the war and about questions of the time; the direction of the necessary social renewal was in those settings at most alluded to, as in a lecture of 31 December 1914 (Collected Works 158), where the requirements for freedom, equality, and brotherhood were treated in threefold differentiation. The lecture work that year includes a massive dispute with nationalism and chauvinism, to which on the other hand is opposed a positive and cosmopolitan “folk psychology” as basis for understanding among peoples. In this connection, and with respect to German great power madness and its deformities, and the anti-German resentments in the Entente nations, R. Steiner made the attempt again and again to emphasize anew the Central European cultural impulse as it had lived at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries in Weimar and Berlin, in Jena and Vienna. It was an impulse that had been pushed completely into the background through developments since 1871: “The German Reich was placed in the world situation,” Steiner held in 1919, “without an intrinsic goal to justify its existence. This goal should not have been such that it only concerned military power, could not be directed in general to military development in the outer sense. It could be directed only to the *inner* development of culture.”³

In these years Steiner was also eager to contribute to an objective account of events in Germany connected with the war’s outbreak – events he had learned of firsthand. This question concerned him primarily because of its significance for a future peace agreement. The subject was so important to him that in 1916 he pursued for this purpose the project of a German news service in Zürich, in neutral Switzerland. Even then the concept of a comprehensive social renewal formed the background of the project.

Landmark Year 1917

1917 is a landmark year in world history. Starting from this year there took shape that bipolar world situation characterized by the superpower role of the USA and the Soviet Union and supplanted only in 1989. In 1917 the USA entered the world war; 1917 is the year of the Russian October Revolution – in whose coming to pass the German General Staff was not uninvolved. The ideas of socialism, and American President Wilson’s democracy slogans (“make the world safe for democracy” -- speech of 2 April 1917 to Congress) both achieved a considerable propaganda effect, while the Central Powers weakened themselves through a deficit of spiritual goals and a limited focus on annexation claims.

The Ball Gets Rolling

In this situation a student of R. Steiner, Count Otto Lerchenfeld (1868-1938), who like all sensible persons distrusts⁴ the talk of “peace through victory,” comes to Steiner at the end of

³ Introduction to Helmuth von Moltke’s “Thoughts and Memories”/1919, in: *Essays on Threefolding of the Social Organism and the Contemporary Situation*, Collected Works 24 [“GA 24”], Dornach 1961, p. 382.

⁴ In the middle of 1917 he records that it was no longer bearable to watch the order, counter-order, disorder. Everyone sought in his little department for the All. “For thoughts – no time! Of ideas – no trace! With the war, they

May 1917 with the question of how to save Central Europe from the catastrophe threatening it. Then in three weeks of protracted face-to-face discussions, which begin in June, Steiner unfolds to him the concept of a Central European peace program. Particular details of these conversations were not preserved. It is safe to say, however, that they did not turn on theoretical deliberations, but on the attempt to win a hearing from the leading statesmen of Central Europe and to dispose them toward a sensible peace initiative. On 13 July, the day of the resignation of Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg in connection with escalating controversy in Germany over the question of peace and annexations, Count Ludwig Polzer-Hoditz (1869-1945), also a student of R. Steiner, learns of Lerchenfeld's initiative. Polzer-Hoditz' brother is cabinet chief for the Austrian Kaiser Karl (who was pressing for a speedy peace agreement) and has some prospect of becoming foreign minister, while Lerchenfeld's uncle is the Bavarian royal diplomat in Berlin. Both thus have indirect access to power. The attempt is made, though essentially without result, to establish personal contact with a number of individuals, including the former German ambassador in London, Prince Lichnowski; the journalist Maximilian Harden; Walter Rathenau; the former ambassador to Washington Count Berstoff; and the director of the Hamburg-America-Line Albert Ballin.

The Memoranda

R. Steiner composes two memoranda, which are intended for Berlin and Vienna. The fundamental idea is a peace initiative proceeding from Central Europe on the basis of social reorganization: the new order, which would link up with Central Europe's best traditions, would be the best confidence-building measure and thus the precondition for a peace that would guarantee the viability of Central Europe. Rudolf Steiner, incidentally, had not at the time broadcast his authorship, in order not to endanger the effect. In the memoranda, aside from the treatment of the war-guilt question, he turns against the utopianism of slogans about human happiness. In particular, he warns against the "right of nations to self-determination," which in Wilson's "14 Points" on 8 January 1918 moved quite one-sidedly into the foreground. When each people without consideration of the autonomy of others tries to establish its own state, then such "liberation of nations" can create only new injustice. That must hold true above all in a space like Southeast Europe, where various ethnicities intermix and must peacefully coexist as a multicultural manifold in a confined space. According to R. Steiner, if one first liberates the individual human being, then with the individual the nations will be liberated also. The organization of relationships, to quote Steiner, "will only take place in a healthy fashion, if the national is born from freedom, not freedom from the national. If one strives for the former [the primacy of individual freedom] instead of the latter [the primacy of nationalism], then one stands on the basis of world historical development. If one desires the latter, then one works against this development and lays the basis for new conflicts." (Memorandum of July 1917). What is represented here is the idea of an entirely free cultural and spiritual life: "The state leaves it to the private organizations of the peoples to establish their courts, their schools, their churches, and leaves it to the individual to determine his school, his church, his judges. Naturally not, say, from case to case [with regard to judges], but for a certain time. (...) All juridical, pedagogical, and

count on victory as if reckoning with numbers. To gain courage, they look to the military. They dream only: Victory – Victory – Victory!" (From *Rudolf Steiner During the World War*, published by R. Boos, Dornach, 1933, p. 57 ff.)

spiritual affairs are given over to personal freedom. In this domain the state has only the right to police, not to initiate.” (Collected Works 24, p. 352 f.)

Also, the economic life would unfold free from state interference, “opportunistically,” that is to say pragmatically with respect to circumstances. Steiner called for culture and economy each to have its own “parliament.” For their common concerns, including finances, a senate chosen out of these three bodies is to be responsible. – The state is responsible for the preservation of security and order (to that extent he is “conservative”). The democratically elected people’s representatives occupy themselves exclusively with purely political, police, and military matters. All centralist strivings are rejected in favor of the federalism considered essential to the Central European.

Conversation Initiatives

Polzer-Hoditz gave the text on 23 July [1917] to his brother Arthur, and also took the opportunity to present the concept to the Prime Minister Ernst von Seidler. The brother, weakened in his position through intrigues, sees at the time no possibility of intervening and only presents the memorandum in November along with his resignation. Despite the Kaiser’s positive and interested perusal of the content, a political initiative does not result. In Berlin, R. Steiner himself presents the matter at the end of July or in August to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Richard von Kühlmann (1873-1948), who later brings the concept in his luggage to the Brest-Litovsk peace negotiations. The brutally dictated peace treaty of 3 March 1918 is the exact opposite of that concept. The hope that Brest-Litovsk could become a promotional platform for a peace based on a new social order, and thus perhaps in the last hours could give a different direction to events, was not fulfilled.

R. Steiner holds numerous further conversations, among others one in January 1918 with the later German Chancellor Prince Max von Baden, for whom Steiner specially authored a forward to his 1910 Oslo lecture series on psychology of nationalities. But this contact also does not lead to any tangible result. In Berlin, the greatest “result” is still that the texts, which indeed for a longer time must have been in circulation among the senior military leadership, are passed on further among them via one of R. Steiner’s students, the Württemberg factory owner Emil Molt, to whom the military has assigned a liaison officer.

Collapse – In the Changed Conditions of the Time

On 3 November 1918, sailors in Kiel refuse to render obedience, and the revolution breaks out. The world war, whose material battles and senseless sacrifice through static trench warfare brought horrors previously unknown, is over. On 9 November, Scheidemann and Liebknecht make parallel proclamations that the state is now a Republic. The collapse of the German and Austro-Hungarian monarchies causes a whole world to collapse for many human beings. The hard armistice conditions are experienced by many as a “national disgrace.” Among workers, who are divided politically among the majority Social Democrats, the Independent Social Democrats, and the communist Spartacus League, the hope lives for a socialistic society without exploitation, oppression, and war.

Stuttgart Initiatives

At this time Rudolf Steiner resides in Switzerland, where he gives lectures emphasizing the theme of the changed conditions of the times. Marxism, ideas about workers' councils, the proletariat, surplus value, and so on are new leitmotifs, but also inner aspects of the social question, such as the relation of social and antisocial impulses in human beings.

Emil Molt is in Switzerland at the time of the revolution. In Dornach on 9 November he hears a lecture by R. Steiner. He writes about it in the autobiographical text *Sketch of My Biography*. "Never before had I taken in Rudolf Steiner's explanations with greater attentiveness than on this evening. As if he had heard my inner question: 'what can I do in this situation?', he said during the course of his lecture approximately the following: 'And if now someone should ask me what he should do, I could only advise him to be open and to listen to what the circumstances require from him.' That was for me the only right answer." (p.161).

Emil Molt (1876-1936), leader of the successful Waldorf-Astoria cigarette factory in Stuttgart, now becomes active. He offers his cooperation to the Württemberg Economic Ministry and is able to set up a desk of his own there. However, the attempt to found an industry fiduciary corporation for the stimulation of the peace economy fails. In the middle of November Molt speaks with his foreman Speidel about educational possibilities for the workers' children. The thought of founding a school begins to germinate in him. Other Stuttgart anthroposophists, such as Hans Kühn (1889-1977), and Carl Unger (1878-1929), who is an epistemologist and the owner of a machine factory, also want to get involved with social questions.

Dornach January Conversations

They decide to seek out Rudolf Steiner to pose questions for clarification and to discuss practical steps. On 25 and 27 January 1919, Molt, Kühn, and Roman Boos, at that time editor of the *Waldorf Astoria News*, have long conversations with Steiner during which he elucidates his ideas down to particular details of organizational questions – for example with regard to tax systems. The shorthand report by Roman Boos, insofar as it was decipherable, later appeared printed in manuscript form under the title *Social Scientific Texts*. Steiner proposes an announcement, an appeal, to be supported by a larger group of human beings. In the situation of the upheaval he considers it necessary to turn to the broad public with the threefolding idea. The idea of founding free schools also emerges. Consideration is given to how a politically effective organization can be created. Signatures are to be gathered, lectures to be organized, a book to be composed. Steiner writes not only the "Appeal," but begins in the following weeks to pen *The Basic Issues of the Social Question in the Life Necessities of the Present and Future*,⁵ whose content he presents initially in lectures in Switzerland. The book appears on 28 April.

⁵ On the internet the [German] text can be found here:
<https://archive.org/stream/rudolf-steiner-ga-023#page/n1/mode/2up>.

In the appendix the "Appeal" can also be read.

[One can find an English translation here:

http://wn.rsarchive.org/Books/GA023/English/SCR2001/GA023_index.html . The book is available in several English translations with various titles, the most recent of which is *Toward Social Renewal*.]

The Appeal “To the German People and the Civilized World”

On 2 February, R. Steiner gives to Molt, Kühn, and Boos the finished text of the appeal “To the German People and the Civilized World.” A German committee is formed of the first signatories, including Molt, Unger, and Wilhelm von Blume, the author of the draft of the Württemberg state constitution. To the Austrian committee belong Walter Johannes Stein, Polzer-Hoditz, and the State Councilor Stefan von Licht. The gathering of signatures begins – under various difficulties, for the activists from the very beginning feel to some extent overstrained. (Boos expresses himself to this effect with regard to a conversation with the sociologist Max Weber about the Appeal.) In Germany the document bears in the end 320 signatures, among them those of the sculptor Wilhelm Lehmbruck, the authors Hermann Hesse and Jakob Wassermann, the theologian Friedrich Rittelmeyer, and the philosopher Paul Natorp.

The Appeal starts from the facts of the catastrophe, and states that these must lead to introspection; the catastrophe occurred because Germany sought a position of power grounded in external forces, but omitted real social renewal, which would have secured a constructive role in the world. Social renewal now demanded conscious structuring, where social instincts would previously have been effective. The social organism now had to develop three independent members, each with its own “legislation and administration”: that of the economic life, that of cultural/spiritual production, and that of the rights-state, which would work together in a living way. This new order also had to arrange for three independent delegations to negotiate peace conditions with foreign nations.

Going beyond the memoranda, the Appeal, like the book *Toward Social Renewal*, employs a comparison between the social organism and the human natural organism. This comparison is not to be understood in any sense as an analogy, but as a means of sharpening the eye for viable social structures that serve the creative human being. R. Steiner bases his approach on his *Riddles of the Soul*, published in 1917. In that work he expressed for the first time a perspective that had been ripening within him for decades: his view of the threefoldness of human physical organization as foundation and instrument of human soul life.

The Campaign Begins

From February to April 1919 the campaign is prepared. Steiner during this time has conversations with, among others, Kurt Eisner, the socialist who would later be assassinated. On 5 March the Appeal appears in daily newspapers and in fliers; on 21 March the committee of signatories with Molt, Unger, and von Blume hold an event for the public in the Stuttgart city garden. Blume states on this occasion that he is no anthroposophist and that till then he had never seen R. Steiner (who still lived in Switzerland). Blume declares that all of his experience however counsels solidarity with the threefolding idea.

Escalation of Crisis in the External Situation – Foundation of the Union for Threefolding

Germany at this time is increasingly shaken by revolutionary movements. On 1 April the so-called Ruhr Strike breaks out; in mid-April 300,000 miners join in a walkout. On 7 April the Munich Council Republic is proclaimed; on 16 April a red army is founded. In Württemberg the

movement is less radical, but there too, from 31 March to 6 April a general strike takes place, and the government temporarily fortifies itself in the railway station tower.

On 20 April 1919 Steiner arrives in Stuttgart. At a meeting with activists, when he is asked whether one should rather address oneself to the proletariat or the middle class, he answers that if one really gets the middle class interested, the proletariat will participate. Ultimately, however, that does not hinder him from working as a speaker particularly among the working class.

On 22 April, in the city garden room, a lecture for the signatories of the Appeal takes place, and a “Union for the Threefolding of the Social Organism” is founded, to whose work committee belong von Blume, Kühn, Emil Leinhas, Molt, Unger, Max Benzinger, and Theodor Binder.

23 April: Waldorf-Astoria Lecture – Beginning of the Popular Movement

On 23 April, before the workers of the Waldorf-Astoria factory, Rudolf Steiner gives an inspiring lecture⁶, in which among other things he calls for a free education for all and the overcoming of class privileges in education questions. In connection with this lecture the decision is made to found the “Waldorf school” as a unitary lower- and secondary school. Emil Molt invites R. Steiner to take over the establishment and leadership of this school, which to begin with is intended for the workers’ children. The now developing movement encompasses broad layers of the population, as can be seen from the daily press of that time. The movement indeed is concentrated in the Southwest German region, but spreads beyond to other areas. A list from September 1919 shows 74 local groups in the threefolding union. R. Steiner speaks in great worker assemblies in Stuttgart’s large companies, thus at Daimler, in Cannstatt, Feuerbach, Untertürkheim, Ludwigsburg, and Waiblingen; later in Reutlingen, Tübingen, Ulm Heidenheim, Maulbronn, Mannheim, and Schweningen. His brilliant rhetoric sweeps the listeners along. Collaborators like Hans Kühn help to carry the impulse to the workers, with whom Kühn finds a great response particularly among the followers of the Independent Social Democratic Party.

Works Councils Movement

The question of the establishment of works councils played a large role among the working class at the time. The “threefolding” actively took part in the attempt to create such works councils. However, whereas the majority social democrats saw works councils as organs of equalization between “capital” and “work,” whose hostile opposition to each other was thus taken for granted, and others saw the councils as revolutionary organs of the “the struggle against the bourgeoisie,” the threefolding saw in the councils organs of company and inter-company self-management and common work, in which workers and management – on the basis of equal rights, with preservation of domains of competence and responsibility – were to work together. It was with this view that Rudolf Steiner entered into meetings with the Stuttgart worker committees (which first took place on 8 May). On 16 May the worker Siegfried Dorfner (USPD) expresses to an assembly the thought that on the basis of threefolding an understanding between proletariat and bourgeoisie was possible, and declares, “As free and equal let us be brothers!” A flyer is self-consciously formulated: “Elect works councils in the sense of threefolding, and make history.”

⁶ See excerpt in the appendix.

Cultural Council

At the same time, partly to avoid any one-sided development, the attempt was made to interpret and anchor the councils idea as concept of self-administration in cultural life also. On 31 May 1919, a call for the founding of a cultural council was published. The call was signed by numerous artists and intellectuals, including writer Thomas Mann. “Free spiritual workers” were to join together and themselves take in hand the organization of cultural relations. The free comprehensive school without state oversight was called for, as was the abolition of the state authorization system, thus also of state tests at the universities. Compared with the activities among the workers, however, the strivings for an autonomous cultural life were less successful: often engagement was exhausted after signing the call. At discussions about the matter, doubters would rise to speak; thus at a 15 June discussion, university professors in Tübingen feared that if no culture minister spoke his word of power any longer, the already great rivalries among colleagues would intensify immeasurably.

Growing Opposition

In general the political climate changes during the course of the first half of 1919 increasingly to the disadvantage of the progressively-minded forces. Already in April the Freikorps had begun to crush the Munich council republic. The reactionary forces, which had kept their heads down and waited for better political weather, sensed the chance to restore the old order. From this side, but also from the side of the majority Social Democratic Party and union functionaries, the threefolding movement was demonized as radical. Functionaries feared to lose their position and their influence with the workers. Revolutionaries by contrast suspected and struggled against threefolding because they took it to be an attempt to manufacture an illusory peace among the classes. Thus the Union for Threefolding increasingly had to resist attacks. Moreover, many coworkers in the movement were overstrained. Some relied less on their own power; they entertained illusory expectations toward the political parties and wanted merely to “carry over” threefolding to them. The proposals of R. Steiner were partly misunderstood as a recipe-like program. Large numbers of anthroposophists did not support the campaign, but observed rather skeptically and from a distance. All these factors led to a decrease in activity among many who were previously engaged. Thus as early as 14 June an assembly of worker committees took place before a nearly empty room. Nor could the weekly newspaper *Threefolding of the Social Organism*, whose first number appeared in July – the chief editor was Ernst Uehli -- reverse this trend.

Strivings for the education of the works councils are indeed still continued – thus on 29 July a special 50,000-copy issue of the threefolding newspaper appears on this theme – but without resounding success.

Generally by September at the latest it is clear that the hoped-for breakthrough will not take place. Conditions have consolidated, the Weimar constitution is in force, and many questions that previously seemed to allow for new formative possibilities are no longer open.

Thus it was natural to concentrate more on particular “model establishments,” which one could hope would work as examples pointing to a longer-term transformation of conditions. One could

start on a path of smaller step-by-step changes. (At a study evening on 3 March 1920, Steiner speaks clearly of a “course change.”)

Moltke Pamphlet

A hard blow against the movement was the prevention [in June, 1919] of the appearance of a pamphlet containing the memoirs of General von Moltke, who was linked with Steiner. This publication of background material with respect to the question of war guilt was intended as an attempt to positively influence the Versailles negotiations. Prior to distribution, a relative of Moltke received a freshly printed copy from Emil Molt, which resulted in the Moltke family compelling the pulping of the 50,000 copies of the pamphlet – on account of alleged inaccuracies.

The Founding of the Waldorf School

On 7 September 1919 in the Stuttgart city garden room took place the festive opening of the first Waldorf school. A liberal school law of 1836 had provided relatively favorable conditions for the negotiations that had begun in May [1919] with the Ministry of Culture, so that the necessary compromises remained reasonable. The school operations took place in the Uhlandshöhe restaurant building, which Molt had purchased privately for 450,000 marks. Soon the school, originally intended for the children of Waldorf-Astoria workers, opened to additional children, and grew to nearly 420 students. In August, Rudolf Steiner had given a kind of “crash course”⁷ to prepare the circle of teachers for its tasks. At the August 20th welcome to the participants in this course, he had said that the founding of the Waldorf school must be a cultural deed that would reform and revolutionize the school system. The basis of the school’s social structure is the principle of self-management by those who are active in the school – and to the extent this principle is adhered to, the school remains, beyond its immediate pedagogical role, an outpost of social renewal.

The Coming Day Corp.

In October a meeting of economically active anthroposophists took place in Dornach. R. Steiner called for economic enterprises to support the work of the Goetheanum (“Leading Thoughts for an Enterprise That Is to Be Founded”). In this sense “The Coming Day Stock Company for the Support of Economic and Spiritual Values” was founded on 13 March 1920. In Switzerland arose the parallel Futurum Corp. The share capital in spring 1920 amounted to 10 million marks, in June to 25 million, finally to 136 million (a number which however is to be qualified on account of inflation). The Coming Day was a union of economic enterprises with enterprises of cultural life. Through this union it was intended that these enterprises should support each other; it was hoped that eventually the research institutions that had received support would in turn come up with marketable innovative products.

⁷ 21 August to 5 September.

“In total the following businesses belonged to the Coming Day at the end of 1922:

Central, Stuttgart, Champignystrasse 17

The Coming Day AG, Publishing, Stuttgart

The Coming Day AG, Mail Order Bookstore Department

The Coming Day AG, Printing Plant Department

The Coming Day AG, Offset Printing Department

The Coming Day AG, formerly Carl Unger Machine Factory, Hedelfingen

The Coming Day AG, Chemical Plant, Schwäbisch Gmünd

The Coming Day AG, Slate Quarry Sondelfingen

The Coming Day AG, José del Monte Department, Cardboard Factory, Stuttgart, with branches in Zuffenhausen and Weil im Dorf

Guest house, Rütbling, Stuttgart

The Coming Day AG, Branch Office Hamburg

Guldesmill Dischingen, Estate, Flour Mill and Saw Mill

Estate Ölhaus, O/A Crailsheim

Estates Unterhueb and Lachen, O/A Leutkirch

Estates Dorenwald and Lanzenberg at Isny im Allgäu

The Coming Day Clinical-Therapeutic Institute

The Coming Day Clinical-Therapeutic Institute, Fabrication, Schwäbisch-Gmünd

The Coming Day AG, Scientific Research Institute, Stuttgart.

The Coming Day AG, Scientific Research Institute, Biological Department, Stuttgart.”⁸

There were also some investments.

The Coming Day AG soon came into difficulties, in which leadership problems and the difficult economic circumstances both played a role. When Emil Leinhas on September 22, 1921 takes over leadership, the situation is already rather muddled. In March 1922, a limitation of the program has to be undertaken. The Waldorf Astoria stock is sold off (and purchased by Reemtsma through a puppet). Molt is financially compensated, but never quite gets over this blow. In the end the enterprise must be liquidated. Through great sacrifice most of the Coming Day’s cultural establishments, such as the school and the Clinical-Therapeutic Institute, are preserved. Despite this failure, one must keep in mind not only that the Coming Day was a first attempt in practical terms to advance in the direction of associative cooperation in economic life, but also, that without it, anthroposophically-oriented pharmacy, for example, would not be thinkable.

The Upper Silesian Action

In November 1920 the anthroposophist Moritz Bartsch of Breslau asks Steiner what his stance is toward the idea of undertaking a large threefolding initiative in Upper Silesia. The Versailles Treaty had established that a referendum was to be held over the nationality of the region. Whatever the result would be, it had to lead to the oppression of a minority and thus work in a malign fashion. (The vote on 20 March 1921 led to the division of Upper Silesia. Although 60% voted to remain with Germany, the greater part was added to Poland.) In this conflict point, toward which the eyes of the world are directed, Rudolf Steiner sees a chance, through a campaign, to work toward a social form that would permit two cultures to develop freely next to each other. An appeal appears, a course for speakers is held, and a campaign begun. However, this attempt to prevent the nonsensical vote collides with massive opposition especially from

⁸ Hans Kühn: *Dreigliederungs-Zeit. Rudolf Steiners Kampf für die Gesellschaftsordnung der Zukunft*, published by the social science section of the Goetheanum, Dornach 1978, p. 111.

circles on the Right, who see the campaign as treason against the fatherland. In the *Völkischer Beobachter* [a Nazi Party newspaper], there appeared at that time an article from the pen of Adolf Hitler, in which threefolding is designated as “thoroughly Jewish,” and defamed as a machination for the destruction of the normal state of mind of the people. On 15 May 1922, at a lecture event, Rudolf Steiner just barely escapes an assassination attempt by circles of the radical Right.

The End

At a large Pentecost Congress of 1922 in Vienna, the so-called West-East Congress, Rudolf Steiner again supports the threefolding idea before the broad public, but must have recognized that the movement had initially failed. He treats the theme for the last time in a lecture in Oxford on 29 August 1922, a few weeks after giving a special course, from 24 July to 6 August 1922, on questions related to the renewal of economic science. In the course, conclusions were drawn with regard to the development of world economy. Leaving the threefolding theme, he now concentrates his work energies entirely on the renewal of individual cultural areas (art, pedagogy, religion, medicine, agriculture). After the first Goetheanum is destroyed by arson on New Year’s Eve 1922/23, R. Steiner at the 1923 Christmas conference gives the Anthroposophical Society, through its new constitution, a social form that shows the way forward toward a modern society living entirely out of the free interplay of initiative and social resonance.

Further Development up to the Present

In the ensuing years the development of the whole society took a fateful direction: in 1933 the complete counter-image of a free social constitution was able to establish itself: cultural life was forced entirely under the political dominion of a totalitarian, inhuman government that trampled democracy under foot. On the other hand, from 1917, among other portents, a similar monolithic system established itself in the form of Stalinism.

After R. Steiner’s death (30 March 1925), internal disputes initially hindered a strong further development of anthroposophical social impulses. Then came the National Socialist barbarism, and bound up with that, the suppression of anthroposophy in Central Europe. After World War II, the East-West conflict in many ways blocked the search for new social forms. Within the anthroposophical movement after the war, the rebuilding of institutions stood in the foreground more than activism in the wider world. Only the movement of 1968 brought renewed interest in “threefolding.” The European upheaval of 1989, and the new, open historical configuration, revived such impulses again. However, the forces that could have brought about a real renewal proved too weak. Unlike dialectical-historical materialism or the market economy system, threefolding does not concern itself with mechanisms and automatisms, but is based completely on the insightful free action of the human being. Whether the possibilities offered by historical situations are grasped depends only on the knowledge, capacities, feelings, and will impulses of human beings.

In any case, after 1989, it is to be noted that threefolding movements experience a certain invigoration, if only of a modest kind: the formation of the “Netzwerk Dreigliederung”

[Threefolding Network] initiative, the development of ongoing further training in the social field, and strengthened cooperative endeavors in the sense of an associative economy.

Present Significance

If the threefolding movement of the years 1917-1922 failed in the end, the practical attempt was more substantial – as “unrealized history” – than a mere program and literary observations. Enormously much can still be learned from the experiences of the movement of that time: from the balance between utopianism and technocratic pragmatism; from the attempt to speak with the broad masses and also to deal without reservations with the “establishment”; from the sense for historical constellations and from the feeling for the essential in each particular time; from the variety of forms of work and the ability to vary them according to the situation; from the attempt at effective public relations; from the non-partisan character of the organizational approach of the Union for Threefolding; from the endeavors to link the deepest human questions (anthroposophy) with immediate practical tasks; but especially from the steadily maintained course toward progress in creating realities in all three great fields of social life (realities such as works councils, The Coming Day, cultural council, Waldorf school).

The work approach of the “Threefolding of the Social Organism” is an attempt to answer the question raised for the majority of individuals by the crisis of social upheaval. To that extent this work approach is relevant for a whole historical era. However, that does not mean that “threefolding” is to be grasped as a collection of ready-made answers. Much more is it to be understood as the description of conditions in which social relations become penetrable by consciousness and humanly shapeable. It is a living model out of which directions for work and practical forms – appropriate always to the concrete demands of each situation and time – can be developed.

With regard to approaching such a social renewal, the following statement, which R. Steiner at that time wrote in *Toward Social Renewal*, remains relevant: “No one will take what is explained here for a mere utopia... For precisely those arrangements are indicated which can grow everywhere in life quite immediately out of the present conditions. One will only have to arrive at the decision to gradually renounce state management of spiritual life and the economy, and not to resist when what should happen actually happens, namely that private educational institutions arise and that economic life stands on its own foundations. One need not abolish the state schools and state economic institutions from one day to the next; but from perhaps small beginnings one will see grow the possibility that a gradual dismantling of state schools and state economic institutions takes place. But necessary above all would be that those persons who can permeate themselves with the conviction of the rightness” of the threefolding idea “care for its dissemination. If such ideas find understanding, trust is thus created for a possible healthy transformation that does not evince the defects of present conditions.” Trust arises when it can be shown, “how new institutions can be connected with what exists... To doubt because one cannot believe that even in the chaos of the present a sufficient number of human beings will understand such ideas if the necessary energy is applied to their dissemination, means to doubt in the receptivity of human nature for impulses of health and practicality. The question as to whether

one must doubt should not be posed, but only this one: what should one do in order to make as strong as possible the understanding of ideas that awaken trust.”⁹

Appendix: From the Speech of R. Steiner to the Workers of the Waldorf-Astoria Factory on 23 April 1919

“Human beings today participate in material domains, in the outer economic domains, in two classes: in the class of the bourgeoisie, with which the nobility is merged, and in the class of the proletariat. Because the proletarian has become class conscious, today he knows what he has to demand. He is a proletarian. He did not have a choice. He was thrown into the proletariat through the economic process. [...]

“The matter stands thus: cultural life in modern times has emerged at the same time as the development of technology, along with the development of soul-desolating capitalism. A modern cultural/spiritual life has also emerged,

but it is only class-based. [...] And we stand today before the necessity to further cultivate not the knowledge taken over by the bourgeoisie, but rather to decide for a free knowledge that can only develop when prejudice is overcome [...] We must learn to see that the cultural/spiritual life must be emancipated, that it must be freely based upon itself, so that it is no longer a servant of the state- and economic order, but a servant of that which universal human consciousness can bring forth in spiritual life; so that the cultural/spiritual life is not present for a class, but for all human beings at once.

“Very honored attendees, you work today in the factory from the morning on, as long as your work lasts. You go out of the factory and at most pass by educational institutions, which are built for certain human beings. In these educational institutions the people are produced who till now have been the ruling classes, who have led the government and so on. I ask you: Hand on your heart, have you an inkling of what is pursued inside those institutions? Do you know what takes place there within? You know nothing. That shows with immediate clarity the division of the classes. That is the chasm. What is striven for in the appeal is that everything pursued on a cultural/spiritual basis concerns everyone, and that the cultural worker is responsible to all humanity. You cannot achieve that if you do not liberate the spiritual life and base it upon itself.”

After the lecture some workers came to Herbert Hahn, who had taught courses for them. They said approximately, “The courses that we receive are right, and we are thankful for them. But we are already a little old. Could not our children from the first years on be taught in the fashion with which we have become acquainted?” And thus was the question about a new school brought to Rudolf Steiner.

Appendix from: Christoph Lindenberg: Learning Without Fear – Self-Conscious Action. Praxis of a Misunderstood School Model. Reinbek 1975, p. 170.

⁹ *Die Kernpunkte der sozialen Frage in den Lebensnotwendigkeiten der Gegenwart und Zukunft*. Complete Works, Vol. 23, Dornach 1976, p. 119 ff.

Further Reading

Christoph Lindenberg: "Der geschichtliche Ort der Dreigliederungsinitiativen Rudolf Steiners. Eine historische Untersuchung der Jahre 1916-1921" in "Die Drei", Nr. 9, September 1985, S. 641 ff.

Albert Schmelzer: *Die Dreigliederungsbewegung des Jahres 1919. Rudolf Steiners Einsatz für den Selbstverwaltungsimpuls*. Stuttgart 1991.

Hans Kühn: *Dreigliederungs-Zeit. Rudolf Steiners Kampf für die Gesellschaftsordnung der Zukunft*. Dornach 1978. Textrevision 1.10.01.