

LIVING THE CHRISTMAS CONFERENCE/ *GELEBTE WEIHNACHTSTAGUNG* UPDATE

February 2006

Dear Friends,

We are just a few weeks into the New Year, and for some time now I have been wondering how to present the Anthroposophical news in a hopeful and positive way. Since our official sources inform selectively, not mentioning problems or passing them over very lightly, some readers are convinced that we have *made up* the bad news, since they hear it nowhere else, or that we simply rejoice in the negative; a "shoot the messenger" attitude may even develop.

The Christmas issue of **GELEBTE WEIHNACHTSTAGUNG/LIVING THE CHRISTMAS CONFERENCE**, is full of reports on practices, attitudes, actions, that must be swept aside if the Anthroposophical Society is to fulfill its purpose. The red thread running all through them is a profound lack of respect for the hopes, wishes, and needs of individual members and local groups, the basic rights given them by Rudolf Steiner's Principles, and even those rights guaranteed them by the society law of the land.

The first article revisits the traumatic December 28 and 29, 2002, Dornach members' meeting, at which the Executive Council railroaded in the creation of a new, supposedly truer society (now twice proved without legal basis in court) over pre-selected members, only minimally informed in advance, whose ability to speak and question was severely curtailed. A subsequent article details the ongoing struggle of Berlin branch members to defend their rightful autonomy against the German Executive Council, which involved itself in local affairs in a downright dictatorial manner (German speakers may inform themselves at www.anthroposophia-de.de). Some of the outrage generated there was felt at a January 14 meeting of German Anthroposophists in Kassel, where constitutional changes to the German society were to be discussed. The 46 members present were able to insist on a free, unhurried, open discussion -- a rare occurrence at Anthroposophical meetings in recent years -- at which, for once, the German Executive Council had to listen to the wishes of members. They had the same wishes that members had prior to the constitution crisis, at the recent Berlin crisis, and on other occasions in recent years: Re-establish the connection between local groups and branches and the executive councils so that the increasingly centralized society structure will again allow room for the autonomy and meaningful input of the local groups; let their representatives again truly represent them and let the councils of the individual countries and the world society again be responsive to them, as Rudolf Steiner wished them to be (cf. his discussion of the role of the general secretary in a lecture on 1/18/1923, when the Dutch society was founded). The editor of the German newsletter, at the same time a German Executive Council member, was singled out for engaging in censorship -- refusing to print views opposing the Council's, even refusing members the right to defend themselves against misrepresentations printed in his pages, a situation heard of in the U S society, also.

Paul Mackay's suppression of member motions, detailed in another GW/LCC newsletter article, illustrates the same tendency to limit member participation and freedom of expres-

sion. Despite the Dornach Council's efforts, the members' right to present free motions still exists on paper, in the Principles created by Rudolf Steiner. But in reality, Paul Mackay often simply writes to the authors of motions that the motion cannot be heard, giving no reason, or giving a reason that doesn't apply (the article includes actual letters illustrating this). Then, at the meeting, members read in the program that no motions will be heard because none were sent in on time! Recent motions that were not heard asked for a discussion and vote on points such as these: 1) Could the court judgment on the constitution matter be read at the meeting, slowly and clearly (the **GW** was the first to make the entire court judgments available, and the only group to offer it in English). 2) Could the meeting please hear, discuss, and vote on, more of the motions sent in by members? (the reason motions are so important is precisely that they have to be discussed and voted on, so they are much more binding than mere discussion). 3) Since many members were very much opposed to the Vorstand's appealing to a higher court, should they have to shoulder part of the considerable expense?

Herbert Witzemann, long-time member of the Executive Council, is honored on his 100th birthday by an account of his role in the struggle between the Society and the *Nachlassverein* over Rudolf Steiner's literary estate, and explains why he was the only Council members to oppose the 1968 decision allowing the publications of the *Nachlassverein* (Rudolf Steiner Verlag) to be sold in the Goetheanum, as an unacceptable compromise. The article makes a convincing case that Rudolf Steiner intended his works to be cared for and published by the School of Spiritual Science -- that they needed that esoteric protection, and that the School was hollowed out spiritually when this important responsibility was taken away from it. Here, too, the red thread surfaces: Events might have turned out quite differently if member discussion and understanding of this issue had not been suppressed by the Executive Council -- if the Society had been allowed to be an *Erkenntnisgesellschaft* --, a society in which members study, discuss, and live with, crucial issues until they have truly come to an understanding of them.

In the outside world we see the same tendency to exert power from above at the expense of the individual and small groups, and to bypass the step of *Erkenntnis* -- in multinational corporations and governments, as well as other bodies. The only way to guard against this tendency **is to be informed** and take action where necessary. What we don't know or ignore has tremendous power over us.

As always, the **GELEBTE WEIHNACHTSTAGUNG** newsletter also includes lengthy quotations from Rudolf Steiner's work: The memorable words he spoke when the Austrian Anthroposophical Society was founded in 1923 (included in *Rudolf Steiner und die Zivilisationsaufgaben der Anthroposophie -- ein Rückblick auf das Jahr 1923*), *The Pre-Michaelic and the Michaelic Path* and *Anthroposophical Leading Thoughts*, October 12, 1924, Numbers 103 - 105.

Speaking to the Austrian society members about how the Society could "come of age" (*mündig werden*), Rudolf Steiner says, "The word is, "Awaken"! **Be alert and attentive to what is going on around you** [emphasis mine]. Respond to life with your heart -- don't just hold theories about it..." And he gives an example of what such engagement and attentiveness could have done: It could have gotten the members to see to it that he had a copy of a recent *Wiener Rundschau* (*Viennese newspaper*) article about Anthroposophy **before** he gave an important lecture in Vienna, so that he could have incorporated the contents of the article into that lecture...

Such small actions, such attentiveness, then, are important anthroposophical goals! We have small but vital opportunities for spiritual growth all day long.

Best wishes,
Christiane Marks