

March 2007

Dear Editor,

I notice that your most recent News for Members (2006 no.4) begins and ends with an article treating of the fundamental inspiring power of the Christmas Conference as a basis for everything in Steiner's esoteric legacy. The Scherer article rightly points out that this basis has become obscured, virtually "ausgeblendet", by the hectic world-wide activities of the anthroposophical movement (whether members or not). And this seems confirmed by all that lies between the two articles - where much interesting and in itself heartening activity is reported on with hardly a mention of that esoteric foundation. And that is in itself understandable because here it must seem like ancient history in an alien land; American pragmatism wants to get on with things. Or, are more Americans cosmopolites than I thought?

In any case, it is exactly the statutes and constitution resulting from that conference, arranged by the contemporaries of Steiner close to him, that somehow, despite battling among various Vorstand members over the years, sustained the existence of the esoteric foundation through the 20th century. Yet, a new set of Vorstand members early in the 2000's suddenly turned course hard right and introduced a hitherto undetected *parallel* spiritual society - not at first apparently accepted even by all members of the Vorstand - and fashioned a new constitution and new statutes not conforming to the previous ones that better suited their own quest for more authority (to interpret the motive for this most charitably: perhaps to arrest the declining fortunes of the society they head). Money issues were, of course, involved. At that point alert members of the Berkshire-Taconic region, especially older members who have long-standing connections with Dornach and with now deceased Vorstand members, began to see troubling parallels with what was going on politically in the world power center, the USA and in its "corporate culture",

They (the Vorstand, that thereafter functioned like one ego with apparently no restraining voices, like the corporate ego of a firm) began their campaign with a now notorious meeting designed for pre-arranged results, in the expectation of eliminating opposing voices (like a Bush town hall stop). They succeeded, after a fashion, by trading on the good will of many local members - some of whom were probably financially dependent on the administration - and more generally on deep and traditional respect for the institution of the Vorstand (a factor like the presidency of our country that still, to a disturbing extent, protects Bush, and *mutatis mutandis* the Vorstand, from accountability) to create what appears to doubters as a rubber-stamp assembly, and ultimately a rubber-stamp mentality world-wide, there hardly being much knowledge of, or interest in, this faraway matter. Yet that occurs in the age there should be keenly heightened individuality! What in fact they count on is unquestioning loyalty: "trust us" ("trust me"). As I read it, much of the case against them made by their critics is a lack of openness, of transparency, in their affairs. Yet we live in an era in which all pretense of secrecy, even for the First Class, has been blasted away by events and is even resented, in government or elsewhere.. Isn't it good that a few people everywhere really care about what constitutions mean? This should further democratize, not stultify, the Society. In the Internet Age anything of great general importance should not be rammed through but widely disseminated with pro and con arguments, in the manner of a referendum on a constitutional amendment.

Specifically, two things bother me: first, the attitude of members who "do not want to hear" about the constitution case. Why are they so short-tempered? Does it make them anxious that something *could* be amiss and it's easier not to know, so they take it out on a scapegoat? Secondly, there is a real disconnect between the published facts of the case as

sorted out and vetted by two outside, secular, neutral Swiss courts of law, on the one hand, and on the other the misrepresentation and outright reversal of the verdict in the pronouncements of the Vorstand. In the real world spin like that goes under the rubric of irrationality with all its resultant confusion. Beginning in earnest in WW I, disinformation has been raised to a fine art that can be called pre-emptive irrationality, and is now such a commonplace in all phases of life that it is hardly noticed -even by its perpetrators - or if noticed , hardly raises an eyebrow, that is, until its results begin to create havoc. It can be *that* subtle, but there is, nevertheless, one certain way to recognize it: it *creates divisiveness*.

In life - politics or spiritual societies alike - there is no avoiding consequences. If a wrong course is taken and stubbornly adhered to, the only resort is to dig in and blame others, even in the face of humiliating chastisements by courts of law. The imperative and opportunity to change course are resented and subverted as much as possible. The final and self-destructive step is to expel (in this case, clumsily) forty six "trouble-making critics" instead of meeting the supreme challenge to really listen to what they want, try to find common ground and ultimately to integrate them. Has humble self searching been tried? Has the first exercise of group eurythmy been tried (I and Thou, Thou and I, where "Thou" are actually committed anthroposophists and members, not strangers)? Has anyone in Dornach heard of conflict resolution, which is seen as sensible even in the tough business world? Or, in the American society has anyone heard of anger management? Does the adrenalin rush always have to trump the good of the whole? It grieves me that I have to say such things to fellow anthroposophists. No wonder the Society is static or even losing ground. May there not also be some trouble-making members on the Vorstand side - they have human failings too? After its loss of two civil court cases, its credibility and judgment, viewed objectively, do not inspire confidence. While criticism of the critics is also certainly possible, that is besides the point; it is the Vorstand that has the authority and its privileges and therefore also its responsibility ("the buck stops here"). The local public knows that and can hardly fail to regard the expulsion of so many members as a sign of chaos (again) inside the Anthroposophical Society. All this is undoubtedly much to the satisfaction of inveterate enemies of Anthroposophy like the Catholic Church, which has long since perfected the technique of excommunication to protect unchallengeable executive authority. (And it is losing ground in the modern world, too.) Would Rudolf Steiner, (or the Founding fathers), heralding an age with radical new social visions, have believed the Society (the country) could get into such a mess!.

The preceding paragraph is simply an attempt to inject some humanity into what has become for many members of the Society a black and white, not discussable situation, as in fundamentalist politics where even the humanity of the opponent is sometimes demonized or denied.. This mocks the perception that what happens on the earthly level reflects struggles going on in the spiritual world.. Personally I have been working since 1998 on The Book of Revelation to find an explanation of how the adversary powers divert attention from the presence of the etheric Christ: the most profound and burning issue right now. I certainly have no intention of discussing that here: I mention it only to indicate that I have thought deeply about the parallel situations noted. Also, I do appreciate the exquisitely delicate position the American leadership has been put in by the malfeasance and incompetence of this Vorstand (Bush: you are either for me or for the evil enemy). For that reason I did not intend this letter for publication but to call the attention of some leaders of the American society to an enigma that might not have occurred to them. I have no solution or suggestion except to say that covering up or ignoring problems on any level does not make them go away.

Despite my disappointment in the attitude of the present Vorstand I have decided not to quit the society at its present low point just as I did not in the 1950's in a similar crisis brought on by spiritual hubris on the part of even distinguished Vorstand members (regarding an arrangement made by Rudolf Steiner himself) who had to be disciplined by a civil court. But the enmities aroused by that affair did tremendous divisive damage to the Society at an

exactly favorable historical moment when a thriving, united Society might have begun to fulfill the promise of 1923. (I personally knew one Vorstand member who later bitterly regretted his part in this). That is what I mean by incompetent leadership: actually leaving an enterprise worse off than one found it. The same inability to learn from (recent!) history is all too tragically true of U.S. administrations. However, In the knowledge that everything changes constantly and something positive *could* emerge from disaster (since "God makes all things possible"), I stay where Karma has put me. Luckily, we have locally a very active and vibrant Christian Community Church to provide shelter, as well as an active branch with a number of members whose eyes are wide open..

Sincerely,

J. Leonard Benson

Prof. Emeritus of Ancient Art and Archaeology

University of Massachusetts, Amherst

(Dr.phil Universitaet-Basel, 1952)

Brief resume of anthroposophical career: 1949-1952 pupil of Dr. Otto Fraenkel (arguably the best proselytizer the society ever had); 1952 joined Society, Friedrich Hiebel sponsoring; 1956-68 (professional) colleague of Hagen Biesantz and member of his group in Athens, the first in Greece (mostly Germans with a few Greeks), longtime friend of Biesantz family; 1963-75 leader of Vernier group in Boston; 1975 founder and leader of Amherst group, founding member of Hartsbrook School; 1975,1983; visiting professor, University of Freiburg-i-B, member of local group; 1975-1985 Board member and lecturer of Rudolf Steiner Institute; 1998-ongoing: member of Board, Christian Community , Hillsdale, NY; member Berkshire-Taconic Branch; 2004 publication of *The Inner Nature of Color The Philosophy of the Four Elements* Steiner Books (an octogenarian's testimony to the fruitfulness of Rudolf Steiner's ideas on a life's work)