



Economic Life in Light of the Folk Souls

Rudolf Steiner's Commitment to World Peace

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This meeting was held at L'Aubier, Montézillon (Neuchâtel), Switzerland, 16–19 September 2010.

The Events of WWI in Light of Spiritual Science

One hundred years ago, from June 7–17, 1910, Rudolf Steiner went to Christiania (now Oslo) to deliver the “Mission of the Folk Souls” lectures.¹ He introduced them with an apology to people new to anthroposophy, regretting that he could not give background explanations due to the nature of the content that needed direct presentation. One month before, Theodore (“Teddy”) Roosevelt had also been in Oslo for his famous Nobel acceptance speech. The themes of this year’s Economics Conference meeting revolved around these and ensuing events, both inner and outer, which, when reviewed from today’s moment in history, shed light on the meaning of Central Europe, Switzerland’s mission and the roles of Great Britain and the United States of America. These subjects, in connection with last year’s theme of Rudolf Steiner’s concept of true price, left the 12 participants feeling that a moment of quickening might be at hand; in 2010, we are given yet another opportunity to bear the urgency of Steiner’s message of world peace in our hearts, minds and deeds.

This year’s event involved working with the 12th lesson of the First Class of the School of Spiritual Science and linking considerations concerning it to the outer context of WWI. We came to the realization that this lesson gives an inner experience of the spiritual realities working in outer historical circumstances and by developing a perception of and thus relationship to these realities, one can collaborate with the spiritual world on behalf of future events.

In this light, we examined the spiritual forces at work during the post WWI era and the related consequences that determined much of the world order we have today. From the West came Theodore Roosevelt’s highly-lauded Nobel acceptance speech² which proposed a three-step plan for achieving world peace through Treaties, World Courts and International Policing Organizations that use force if necessary. Roosevelt cited the United States Supreme Court and Constitution as models for avoiding hostility between the separate territories.

Marc Desaulles characterized Steiner’s “Mission of the Folk Souls” lectures as a response from spiritual realms to the message coming into the world through Roosevelt. In these lectures, Steiner explains that in order to understand a country, one must consider its folk soul, a collaboration of four beings – a folk spirit, a language spirit, a time spirit and a thinking spirit – who influence temperament, language, culture, thinking, and the relationship to land. He appealed to those present to recognize the reality that spiritual beings, not political constructs, guide countries and warned of the dangers of failure to acknowledge these realities in the world.

¹ Rudolf Steiner, *The Mission of Individual Folk Souls*, GA 121, June, 1910.

² Frederick W. Haberman, ed., *Nobel Lectures, Peace 1901-1925, Theodore Roosevelt Nobel Lecture 1910*, Elsevier Publishing Company, Amsterdam, 1972.

In a further attempt to oppose the Western nationalist impulse begun by Roosevelt, in July 1917, Steiner wrote a memorandum to the German people, explaining the circumstances of the war and exposing the lie of Germany's sole culpability. Woodrow Wilson, who was also awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, gave his speech on the Fourteen Points to the United States Congress on January 8, 1918, ostensibly to assure people of the moral cause of the war. With this speech, the concept of nation-state-economies took hold.

In his response to Wilson – the book concerning the *Threefold Social Order* in which he described his solution for world peace with an image of the social organism as three autonomous spheres – Steiner attempted yet again to stop the nationalistic impulse coming through Wilson. He printed 80,000 copies of his work for the Germans and Austrians, hoping to stave off the events to come.

Nevertheless, the Versailles Treaty exacted severe reparations from Germany and enacted the League of Nations. Steiner then said that the three spheres of social life had been conflated to fit arbitrary boundaries and it was therefore too late to realize the threefold social order. He appealed to the Swiss people.

Switzerland, Central Europe, England Post WWI and the Role of the Anthroposophical Society

Pointing to the story of William Tell, a myth about freedom and responsibility against the Habsburg dynasty of the Holy Roman Empire (a myth which is commonly shared by three countries that have not joined the European Union, namely Switzerland, Norway and Iceland), Marc illustrated the reality of beings working in the background of nations. Links were made between the European Union and the Roman impulse. We were told of Steiner's warning that we would have to fight to save anthroposophy.

Because of the protection of their mountains, the Swiss had escaped Romanism. Their sphere of rights being quite pure, Steiner revealed that they had only to construct their society based on their feeling for the inherent dignity that exists between human beings. By doing so, a completely new life of state could emerge and all the angels would be watching to see whether the necessary will existed to bring it about.

Meanwhile, from the West had come the British claim that Germany was responsible for the war. According to Christopher Houghton Budd, John Maynard Keynes – credited by Steiner as being the one person to be trusted because of his ability to combine imaginative reasoning with calculations³ – attempted to present events from a “continental-wide” point-of-view. He consistently went beyond British nationalism in his analyses. Most notably, in *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*⁴, he exposed the economic untruth of Germany's liability for war reparations and ultimately, what Houghton Budd referred to as the tendency toward perfidiousness on the part of the British. Additionally, one could say that Keynes' later International Clearing Union indicated a way of bringing practical worldwide effect to Steiner's economic ideas.

³ See 'Rudolf Steiner on Keynes', in *Rudolf Steiner, Economist*, New Economy Publications, Canterbury, 1996.

⁴ John Maynard Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, Macmillan, 1923.

Christopher cited several sources that have pervaded Western consciousness increasingly with assumptions of permanent cultural conflict and a state of terrorism. However, lest we think that only a dark, chaotic influence can be attributed to the West, he alluded to a being called Columbia, from Phillis Wheatley's poem to George Washington,⁵ whose dedication to "*freedom's cause her anxious breast alarms.*"⁶

Additionally, in contrast to geopolitical arrangements such as the European Union, Christopher described "a choir of cultures," (an image from his upcoming book *Finance at the Threshold*) as the outcome of enacting associative economics as the next step in the evolution of economics.

According to Christian Bosse in his introduction to themes on Central Europe, Steiner indicated that the task of Central Europe is to develop the "I" of humanity. Though difficult because of the turmoil of the past century, we considered Central Europe as a balancing force between western and eastern influences. But where is it today? Where are the German idealists? With the re-founding of the Anthroposophical Society in 1923/4, Rudolf Steiner protected the impulse of the German folk soul in a worldwide organization which became at the same time a vessel on earth for the New Mysteries.

The conference closed with a discussion of national currencies and their link to folk souls. Tied to last year's theme of true price, it was noted that because prices are always denoted in a national currency, one cannot understand the world as one economy or the threefold social order without considering the reality of spiritual beings in economic life. The General Anthroposophical Society, via its national societies, can be seen as the vessel on earth through which folk-souls meet. By extension, monies for spiritual research could flow to the Goetheanum from each national society in its respective currency (for example in Switzerland). Could this be a response to Van Leer's question at the Christmas Conference concerning funding the work of the Goetheanum?⁷ Is not an arrangement such as this a way of collaborating with the gods when heeding the urgency of Rudolf Steiner's appeal for world peace?

⁵ Phillis Wheatley, *To His Excellency, General Washington*, Pennsylvania Gazette, April, 1776.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Rudolf Steiner, *The Christmas Conference for the Foundation of the General Anthroposophical Society, 1923/24*, Anthroposophic Press, Hudson, NY, 1990, see pp. 252-3.