



Folkestone Reparations Festival

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What follows documents a number of events that took place in Folkestone, England in late June. Though occurring in Folkestone, they had as their background the idea that now, 100 years on, humanity has a second chance – the theme in fact of a prior related Economics Conference gathering held at Vancouver Waldorf School, 24-26 March 2019.

“Folkestone’s Reparations Festival”? As if! But why not? Folkestone has deep history with the immediate aftermath of World War 1 and its ‘twin’, the Treaty of Versailles, which became and remains the pivotal event of modern history. It marks the moment when for the first time humanity could create society in its own image. But what a hash we made of it! A treaty (or set of treaties) that carved the world up along false lines, setting the stage for the chaos that has reigned ever since. But an impulse also that is now unravelling for want of a recalibration of humanity’s collective historical and moral compass.

More than any other town in England, Folkestone has an identity deeply connected to that event, being the point of departure for millions of soldiers to a war audible if not quite visible across the Channel. But it was also the venue for the subsequent reparations discussions at nearby Port Lympne. A few paragraphs cannot do justice to the complexity of this (still live) story, but a brief report may provide a useful glimpse.

Our ‘festival’ began with a performance of “An Improbable Conversation”, a 50-minute ‘playstallation’ in which Maynard Keynes hosts a meeting between Woodrow Wilson and Rudolf Steiner. Wilson reads out his 14 Points, to each of which Steiner gives a Riposte, being one of his 14 economics lectures distilled to the exact word count of Wilson’s Points, ranging from 16 to 129. At the end, Wilson reads Longfellow’s version of an 8th century poem to Haroun al Raschid, which closes with “...and tears fell upon the page he read.” (see ASGB Newsletter Summer 2018).

A very tentative essay in bringing Rudolf Steiner to the attention of a town that has twice voted heavily for Brexit, the performance took place in the local arts venue, known as the Quarterhouse. The audience was evenly balanced between members of an appreciative general public, and members of the Economics Conference of the Goetheanum, gathered in Folkestone for a fourth time for their annual worldwide meeting.

The Economics Conference meeting was based in the Grand Hotel, a quirky venue made famous by the residency there of Edward VII’s court. We deliberated on many topics, including the story of ‘Folkestone hero’ William Harvey’s discovery of the circulation of the blood and the potential analogy this provides for understanding the circulation of capital, such that it underpins human capacities rather than being siphoned off into financial markets.

We then spent two days touring the 14 medieval churches on nearby Romney Marsh. In each one we sang Pachelbel's *Alleluiah* and then recited Wilson's Points followed by Steiner's Ripostes. Because one church had been desecrated, a last-minute adjustment of itinerary led us to doing the last performance in the Octagon Room at Port Lympne Hotel where the Treaty of Paris had been signed in 1920 by Lloyd George and French president, Aristide Briande.

One colleague, from California, then stayed on for two further, related, events – a talk (by the writer) in the Town Hall on the anniversary day of the signing of the Treaty of Versailles, the main themes of which were the possibility of changing the meaning of the poppy towards forgiveness and the reconciliation of two folk souls – the English and the German. This was followed by a second talk in the town's 'Urban Room' on the idea of a European Confederation as an antidote to Folkestone's Brexitism and not infrequent expression of xenophobia.

The final event was the signing of a contract for an installation of 12 light posts – code-named 'Ring of Light' – to be placed in an area that could in due course become a new town plaza. In spirit, if not in name, a plaza of forgiveness.

All of these events seemed to give credence to the idea that there could be, indeed is, a Second Chance for the World, if even a few people were to seize the present moment, if only at first by marking it.

