

## **CULTURE WAR 1908 – 1928: “STEINER NEVER LET UP”**

The years 1908-1928 in the schema of Howe and Strauss was called an era of “Unraveling”.

“Living in a fool’s paradise and enjoying a high level of prosperity, the peoples of Europe in the years preceding the first World War seemed to have no inkling of the destructive forces which such a conflict would unleash. Steiner was perhaps one of the few whose penetrating mind could read the future and embrace the magnitude of the danger hanging over the old continent. He was fully aware of the changes it might bring in its wake. Desperately he tried to warn his contemporaries of the follies of nationalistic adventures.”<sup>1</sup>

Over 150 men and women had gathered to work on the building the first Goetheanum building – a totally wooden structure. “Both by example and specific instructions, Steiner taught his amateur carvers. He teased them merrily with anecdotes, encouraged their efforts, paid no heed to their weariness and in the evening gathered them into the workshop to hear one of his profound and inspiring lectures.”<sup>2</sup>

Steiner never let up on his lecture schedule throughout Europe even with war eminent: Vienna, Paris, Prague, Scandinavia and many German cities. The end of June, the Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary was assassinated but several weeks passed before the war burst into flames.

When it did break out the young people at the Goetheanum were still united in their diversity. Russian Poet Andrei Belyi wrote:

“The first reaction to the war: we must commit ourselves more emphatically to our common cause; all of us – Russians, Germans, Austrians, French, poles – we are all brothers in misfortune, we are all victims of criminal politics; our ‘politics’ was devotion to the common cause, determination to continue building. When Strauss the Bavarian was drafted and had to join the service as a medical aide, he noted down as many Russian words as possible so that he could help the wounded Russian prisoners. The motto that united us was ‘Love, solidarity, Responsibility.’ We

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<sup>1</sup> MEETING RUDOLF STEINER, Sonia Tomara Clark and Jeannette Eaton, *Journal for Anthroposophy*, Number 75, Fall 2005, Pg. 90

<sup>2</sup> IBID., Pg. 91

experienced our solidarity even more vividly during the days when panic broke out everywhere. The anticipation of an exodus, together with the Doctor, resembled something biblical. ...But, gradually calm returned: Swiss troops from all branches of the army were stationed in our vicinity, and when the border had been sealed with a mine barrier, the feeling of danger subsided. We continued carving on our building, aware that it could be destroyed at any moment by artillery shells.”<sup>33</sup>

Marie Steiner was The Doctor’s wife, secretary, confidante and companion on all his lecture tours. She was the one who maintained what could be described as his “usual” daily level of activity. She was the master of ceremonies for all meetings, scheduled all private visits, was custodian of all stenographs of talks.

“My impression: Steiner’s home is always open: its effect is like that of a cell in a commune where no one places any value on comfort; every minute is already scheduled; and there are tasks, tasks, tasks, tasks. Here is somebody editing, there admission tickets for a lecture are being distributed; here books are being handed out. There correspondence is answered, and in between, something is corrected or somebody receives help.”<sup>4</sup>

Frau Steiner arranged for what must have been the “endlessly clattering typewriters which the “the ladies of the office” used to put the words into form for publications. Stories about Fräulein Lehmann or Fräulein Hannah Mücke, workers in the library at the press, the *Philosophisch-Anthroposophischer Verlag*, are legend.

Steiner consulted individually with hundreds of people. “The number of consultation hours increased according to his capacity for absorption; the time it took to hold six consultations was used to hold twelve. If one went to Steiner’s ...there was a long line of waiting people. When one left, there was the same line, the car parked in front of the house, the suitcases packed, but Steiner sat and listened, and how he listened!”

“Our last meeting went like this: a long line of person s ahead of me and behind me, the car was waiting. Steiner was scheduled to return to Dornach from Stuttgart. He greeted me and led me into the room. We sat down by a small desk.

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<sup>33</sup> THE MAN, RUDOLF STEINER, Andrei Belyi, *Journal for Anthroposophy*, Number 75, Fall 2005, Pg. 72

<sup>4</sup> IBID, Pg. 44

Steiner was pale as death; it isn't easy to listen to such large numbers of people one after the other when each one comes with his most urgent problem. His answers were always concrete and to the point, but they only unfolded their full nature in the course of years. All of this also passed before my mind during our last meeting. He turned his over tired face with the good-natured eagle nose in my direction and said with a smile difficult to describe. "We do not have much time; try to say briefly everything you have on your mind." The conversation of twenty minutes lives within me as if it had lasted many hours, not because I would have been able to say everything but because he replied to everything beyond any words. The answer grew out of the facts of the following years of my life."<sup>5</sup>

This last conversation between Andrei Belyi and Rudolf Steiner occurred in 1923. Following this Belyi returned to Russia during an increasingly political climate which oppressed his literary activities. Belyi was an opponent of Communism and his works continued to be suppressed during the years of Communism. Only his death in 1934 saved him from persecution and arrest.

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<sup>5</sup> IBID., Pg. 36