

The Biodynamic Movement stands for human rights, freedom of opinion, pluralism and cosmopolitanism and clearly distances itself from extremism and anti-human aspirations

Statement by Demeter e.V. Germany, the Biodynamic Federation - Demeter International e.V., the German Forschungsring e.V. for Biodynamic Agriculture and the Goetheanum - Section for Agriculture.

Announcement of a study.

The Biodynamic Movement was founded in 1924 after a series of lectures by Rudolf Steiner on agriculture and is today organised in Germany by Demeter e.V. and in many other parts of the world. Demeter is therefore the only organic farming association whose history dates back to before the Second World War and was also an important foundation for the rest of the organic agriculture movement. The principles developed by the biodynamic movement include the aim of a self-sustaining, individual and diverse farm organism, which still provides inspiration for the whole of organic agriculture today.

Beyond agriculture, Rudolf Steiner's extensive work contains discriminatory and thus, from today's point of view, unacceptable statements. As anthroposophist and actors of biodynamic agriculture, we want to critically engage with this and clearly distance ourselves from individual critics who are close to racist and ethnic ideas.

Positioning also requires transparency regarding one's own history. During the Nazi regime there were known connections between individuals involved with the early biodynamic movement, the Nazi regime and the nationalist movement. We do not have objective and contextualised knowledge about the exact nature of these connections and how strongly our predecessor organisations were involved.

In the following, we will take a differentiated look at three facts:

1. Statements on the subject of "race" in the work of Rudolf Steiner;
2. The role of representatives of the biodynamic movement during the Nazi era;
3. Positioning the biodynamic movement and its organisations today.

1. Statements on the subject of "race" in Rudolf Steiner's work

Although the extensive work of the founder of anthroposophy, Rudolf Steiner, contains a few statements which, from today's point of view, can clearly be classified as discriminatory, the entire work of Rudolf Steiner as a whole can by no means be classified as racist. This is the conclusion reached by a Dutch commission of enquiry¹. It states: "Assumptions that racism is inherent in anthroposophy... have proven to be categorically incorrect". Instead, anthroposophical philosophy focuses on the potential and development of each individual human being, freedom and social responsibility, and the possibility for each person to be a citizen of the world.

Steiner also opposed every form of extremism and from 1918 until his death in 1925 vehemently argued for the establishment of a free, pluralistic democracy with his idea of the "Threefold Structure of the Social Organism"². During these years he opposed the emergence of nationalist, racist, anti-Semitic and eugenic thinking. In a lecture in 1917, Steiner said: "And so we see that it is precisely in the 19th century that a throbbing of tribal and ethnic and racial connections is beginning, and that this throbbing is spoken of as idealistic, whereas in reality it is the beginning of a decline in people, in humanity"³. In one of his last lectures, in September 1924, he said: "This is something terrible, how people today are striving to use race and peoples and how they want to bury all potential for world citizenship"⁴.

2. The role of representatives of the biodynamic movement at the time of National Socialism

Because of its individualistic and liberal nature, anthroposophy was classified by the Nazi regime as incompatible with National Socialist ideas. The predecessor organisations of today's associations, the Reichsverband biodynamischer Landbau (Biodynamic Agriculture Association) and the Versuchsring für Biodynamische Wirtschaftsweise (Experimental Circle for Biodynamics), were banned, as were all other anthroposophical organisations. Nevertheless, biodynamic processes also had some followers among leading National Socialists, and elements of biodynamic agriculture were taken up in National Socialist concepts, such as "agriculture based on the law of life".

¹ Ted A. van Baarda (Hrsg.): Anthroposophie und die Rassismus-Vorwürfe. Der Bericht der Niederländischen Untersuchungskommission „Anthroposophie und die Frage der Rassen“. Frankfurt a. M., 5. Aufl. 2009.

² Rudolf Steiner: Die Kernpunkte der Sozialen Frage in den Lebensnotwendigkeiten der Gegenwart und Zukunft. Rudolf Steiner Verlag, Dornach. 5. Auflage. 2014.

³ Rudolf Steiner: Die spirituellen Hintergründe der äußeren Welt. Der Sturz der Geister der Finsternis. GA 177. Rudolf Steiner Verlag, Dornach. S. 204 ff. 7. Auflage. 2020.

⁴ Rudolf Steiner: Vorträge und Kurse über christlich-religiöses Wirken, V. Apokalypse und Priesterwirken. GA 346. Rudolf Steiner Verlag, Dornach, S. 206. 2001.

As has already become known through several studies, there were personalities in the biodynamic movement who were in regular contact with National Socialists up to the highest levels of the hierarchy, vegetable gardens in concentration camps were cultivated biodynamically, and on the front page of the Biodynamic journal "Demeter", the "Führer" was congratulated on his birthday. Whether this was done out of conviction, or to save the biodynamic agriculture movement in difficult times, is something we have never really been able to understand. If we look at the - incomplete - knowledge of the leaders of the biodynamic movement during the Nazi era, it is obvious that - as in most other social groups - there were those in the anthroposophical movement who resisted, like the doctor Ita Wegmann who saved the lives of fellow Jews and other persecuted people⁵. Others may have been trying to save what they had already established, but there may also have been those who were working out of their own conviction.

As knowledge of the biodynamic protagonists of the time and possible links with National Socialism is still very patchy, Demeter e.V., the Forschungsring e.V., the Biodynamic Federation - Demeter International e.V. and the Section for Agriculture at the Goetheanum are supporting research to investigate the question of whether and how individual representatives or organisations from the anthroposophical field of biodynamic agriculture/Demeter came into contact with the National Socialist regime. Our aim is to create transparency and to understand our historical responsibility. To this end a social-historical research project has been commissioned which, independently and in accordance with scientific standards, aims to clarify the question of what resistant activities, what form of opportunism there was within the ranks of the biodynamic movement, and whether there were biodynamic leaders who collaborated out of their own conviction and made themselves culpable through their actions.

The project will be carried out by an experienced interdisciplinary research team and will be accompanied by an advisory board of experts with relevant expertise. The results should be available by 2024 and published in a generally accessible form.

3. Positioning the biodynamic movement and its organisations today

Demeter e.V. and the Forschungsring e.V. in Germany, the Biodynamic Federation - Demeter International, the international umbrella organisation of biodynamic movements and Demeter associations, and the Anthroposophical Society as the legal entity of the Agricultural Section are all democratic and participatory organisations. Their statutes state that they are firmly opposed to racist, anti-democratic and xenophobic activities as well as other discriminatory and inhuman behaviour. They also oppose efforts to combine the organic food sector with extremist ideas.

The dignity of the human being and of nature is central to the mission of the biodynamic agriculture which is practised on all continents and includes people of many religions. This central idea is included in the mission statements of Demeter e.V. Germany and the Biodynamic Federation - Demeter International by clearly articulating their goal of working together in dignity, appreciation, tolerance and respect. The work of these organisations is based on the philosophical approach of anthroposophy, the source of biodynamics, to develop the individuality of the human being, and is reflected in the core values of the associations and

⁵ Peter Selg: Rudolf Steiner, Die Anthroposophie und der Rassismus-Vorwurf: Gesellschaft und Medizin im totalitären Zeitalter. S. 147ff. und S. 170ff. Verlag des Ita Wegmann Instituts. Arlesheim. 2020.

the Agricultural Section, which include not only sustainability but also freedom, equality, solidarity and wholeness.

In order to be able to achieve and live these values truthfully, we understand history as an archive of learning. We see the commissioned study as an important step to bring light on the history of our organisations and to learn from history for our future work.

Especially today, when right-wing extremists are trying to gain social acceptance through their commitment to nature conservation and organic farming, it is more important than ever for organic farming associations to clearly distinguish themselves from these groups.

*Demeter e.V.
Forschungsring e.V.
Biodynamic Federation – Demeter International e.V.
Goetheanum – Section for Agriculture*

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